

- **Dr. James Curran, the Dean of Emory University's School of Public health,**
- **Dr. Susan Allen, Professor at the Emory University school of Medicine,**
- **Dear students and faculty,**
- **Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,**

Good afternoon,

I wish to begin by thanking the Emory University School of public health for hosting us today and Dean Curran for the warm welcome. I would also like to thank my Rwandan sister Susan, for inviting me here and for organizing this special event. Susan has been standing in solidarity with us for many years. In pursuing and bringing to justice some of those responsible for committing the 1994 genocide against the Tutsis, she bravely did what many would be afraid to do. Susan was being consistent with the call of a medical practitioner to fight and preserve anything that would threaten the sanctity of life.

As you all know, we are here to have a conversation about the courage and commitment Rwandans have shown over the last two decades, after the genocide against the Tutsis tore our nation apart. What our country experienced is beyond human comprehension.

Something went terribly wrong for families, doctors, the church and the state to abandon their responsibilities and lose all notions of sanity. For decades and decades the state taught people to hate, dehumanize and to kill. There are

known cases of people killing their own spouses or children because they were of a different ethnicity; there were doctors who injected patients with HIV infected blood; clergymen who taught their followers to kill and encouraged people to take refuge in churches when in fact, they were leading them to their deaths.

The 1994 genocide was the culmination; this is when we as Rwandans hit our lowest point.

We witnessed how bad leadership can deeply divide a society and condition its people to accept the unacceptable.

The genocide was committed in the name of majority of Rwandans, but the regime was merely using these people as tools to advance its poisonous ideology.

While the international community debated on what to call the 'situation' in Rwanda, 6 men, women and children were murdered every minute, of every hour, of every day for 100 days. It was an extermination exercise, a genocide committed by a section of Rwandans and the leadership of the time. This was the result:

- 1 million Tutsi and moderate Hutu men, women, and children massacred, this was 15% of the total population,
- Hundreds of thousands of women brutally raped and infected with HIV/AIDS,

- 50,000 widows and 75,000 orphans,
- 650,000 internally displaced people,
- 2 million refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo were used as human shields as the extremist Genocide regime tried to keep the killing spree going;
- 300,000 – 400,000 genocide survivors,
- The national coffers were emptied and the economy had collapsed,
- Over 120,000 genocide perpetrators filled our prisons,
- There was social mistrust and high levels of poverty.

I wonder if there is any university course one can take to prepare you to remedy such social, political and economic destruction.

Imagine, for a second, the difficulties involved in trying to elevate a society that has hit rock bottom. The journey it took to mend broken bones as well as broken spirits/souls was a tough one.

We were intent on rebuilding a new Rwanda; a different Rwanda from the one we had known. Not only did we have to mend the society, we had to cater for the families of both killers and victims to co-exist harmoniously in schools, at home, at work and mostly importantly at the country's leadership levels. This is a complex equation that needs to be constantly in balance.

Yes, we had options – we could have decided to go the natural path in which case, we surely would have self-destructed with rage. The other alternative,

which was highlighted by President Kagame during this year's 20th commemoration of the genocide, was these 3 choices: 'To *think big, to be accountable and to stay together.*' This formula is precisely what was required to overcome and to achieve the progress that I am going to share with you, in just a moment.

This chosen path shows the true resilience of the Rwandan people. We are often reminded that dignity is a right for all Rwandans, just like it is for every other person in the world. With great sacrifice, hard work, a real longing for change, and a transformational leadership we managed to reclaim our dignity.

We stabilized the country and introduced peace and security. We have unity and social cohesion; we have a vision and are working to address all the basic needs for our people. We have people centered governance that ensures all citizens are empowered.

Often times we draw on our rich cultural practices and our internal strengths to find solutions to problems.

For example, recently Rwandan women held a fundraising in honor of the brave men and women in uniform who liberated our country. The proceeds of this fundraiser will go towards caring for those members of our armed forces, who were seriously injured during the liberation struggle.

From a very low base, and everything being a priority, we uplifted ourselves and now:

- Primary school enrolment stands at 96% and we have achieved universal primary education; in the 1990s it was at 40%;
- Public school is free from grades 1 to 12;
- Over the last 5 years, about 15,000 classrooms have been constructed mostly by our armed forces and also ordinary Rwandans, to make room for more students to receive an education;
- Between 1963 and 1993 only around 2,500 students graduated from the only university we had in Rwanda. Between 1994 and 2014 we had 84,000 students graduating from 38 higher learning institutions. This is 30 times the amount of graduates we had just 2 decades ago;
- The One Laptop Per Child program is targeted to reach each primary school in Rwanda by 2017;
- HIV prevalence has been maintained at 3% for the last 10 years;
- 89% of patients suffering from malaria have prompt access and are able to correctly use, affordable and appropriate treatment;
- Malaria incidence declined by 74%, between 2005 and 2012;
- Community Based Health Insurance is at 73% as of 2013 – 2014;
- We have 45,000 community health workers who support the ministry of health to manage health care at community level;
- Community health workers have eased the burden on our healthcare system and are instrumental in carrying out maternal death audits. Maternal death audits investigate the circumstances surrounding a woman's death during childbirth and recommend practical solutions

for preventing future fatalities. This has contributed to a reduction in maternal mortality;

- 64% of our legislators are women (the highest in the world); we have 40% women in cabinet and in the judiciary; and a constitutional requirement to have 30% women in decision making positions;
- Our economy has been growing at average of 8%;
- 1 million Rwanda were lifted out of poverty in just 5 years;
- 4,000 kilometers are connected with fiber optic cables; we are looking forward to leveraging this technology for our future growth;
- We are ranked the 3<sup>rd</sup> easiest economy to do business in Sub-Saharan Africa. It takes 6 hours to register a business in Rwanda;
- Capital punishment was abolished, which was unusual for a nation emerging from genocide;
- Our army has earned the respect of the international community for being an exemplary force and participating in peacekeeping missions in Africa and beyond;
- 95% of our citizens are satisfied with their personal security;
- 96% of our citizens stated that preserving national dignity has been one of the top achievements of the last decade.

We certainly have challenges we still need to tackle. In 1994, poverty levels were at 77%, currently we are at 45%. This is still not enough; we want to take it down further to 30% in the next few years and eventually to 0. Our own resources finance 60% of our budget, up from a mere 15% 14 years ago.

We are still managing the effects of a genocide legacy, mostly related to the process of unifying and reconciling all Rwandans. Our institutions are undergoing constant reforms, to consolidate the good progress we have made.

Since the government cannot do everything, civil society plays an important role in supporting the government. Allow me for a moment, to share some of the work I am personally involved in, which contributes to the national agenda. Imbuto Foundation is a nonprofit organization, which I along with others established to mostly nurture Rwanda's youth.

Imbuto means *seed* in our language and the philosophy behind our Foundation, is to nurture and provide all the necessary support for our beneficiaries to stand tall and be successful.

We provide various platforms for youth to develop critical skills and the right mindset to solve the challenges our country faces; we encourage them to keep learning, innovating and improving themselves.

We do this through motivating girls to do well in school, curbing school drop-outs, promoting equal access to secondary education for boys and girls, providing the best start at life for infants through best practices in early childhood development, promoting a reading culture among the youth. We also work on preventing diseases such as HIV and malaria through campaigns and we educate adolescents on sexuality and reproductive health.

As I end my remarks, I want to say that Rwanda, just like Emory University is working hard to 'stand by what is good'.

We are working towards attaining a vision that is good for Rwandans and we allow for no obstacle to derail us on our way there. But before standing by what is good, we have to work and sometimes fight, to create it.

It is my hope that we can aspire to a world where we are all attentive and mindful of the social injustices that occur around us. In this information age, with all the energy your professors expend to teach you to be critical thinkers, I challenge you to take time to ask, analyze, understand, and look for the truth about what happens outside your world.

With that, I believe that together can we dream of a world that is more just, more humane and make it a better home for all of us.

Thank you for listening to Rwanda's story and for joining us on our journey.