

**First Lady Mrs. Jeannette Kagame's
Remarks
at the National Prayer Breakfast – 25th edition
themed: “Transformative leadership: Appreciating
Today – Shaping Tomorrow”**

organized by

Rwanda Leaders Fellowship

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**Senior Government Officials,
Executive Director of the World Food Programme,
Chairman of the Rwanda Leaders Fellowship,
Distinguished Representatives of civil society, private
sector and faith-based organizations,
Esteemed Friends of Rwanda,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good morning.

Allow me to begin by wishing you all a happy and blessed New Year 2020. I wish an especially warm welcome to those of you visiting Rwanda.

I am honored to be joining you today, for the 25th National Prayer Breakfast, as we gather in fellowship, to renew our hope and refuel our love for our nation, its people, and our God.

This year's National Prayer Breakfast is primarily one of thanksgiving:

- To look back and appreciate the journey we have been on, reflecting on the aftermath of what we have been through as a nation.
- To harness a culture of gratitude, first and foremost to God, and then to those He has used to revive our nation.

- To model best practices and internalize the godly values that have brought us this far, and then, to pass them onto the next generation.

As I was reflecting upon the theme of this prayer breakfast, “appreciating today while shaping tomorrow”, I recalled the words of the Psalmist recorded in the Bible, in the book of Psalms, Chapter 40: Verse 5.

“O Lord my God, you have performed many wonders for us.

Your plans for us are too numerous to list.

You have no equal.

If I tried to recite all your wonderful deeds, I would never come to the end of them.”

Every time we give thanks or show gratitude, we are lifted to a higher form of self, and we attract even more blessings than we had before.

Giving thanks to God for who He is, for what He has done and for what He represents in our lives, is intrinsically linked with praising Him. And praising Him is the highest form of Worship.

Our destinies are shaped for the future, by our thanksgiving and praise, today. In fact, it is written that God inhabits our praises.

I thus cannot over-emphasize the importance of saying “Thank you” and showing gratitude!

The sheer magic of uttering that simple phrase, ‘thank you’ to a family member, a colleague, a friend, a stranger! It does not cost a cent, but its value is worth millions. If you cannot demonstrate gratitude to man, it is rare that you will be able to demonstrate gratitude to God.

Indeed, as we pause to reflect upon our own journey as Rwandans, we are forever grateful – first and foremost – to God, for thus far He has brought us; and we are thankful to the men and women, who God used to liberate our country. We challenge the next generation to sustain these gains and carry forward the achievements of the last two decades.

We remind them, most solemnly, to wear gratitude as a badge of honor for without it, life is void and meaningless.

Looking back at our history over the past two decades, we must also acknowledge the importance of keeping **HOPE** alive. This four-letter word was always at the tip of our tongues.

It spurred us on and gave us reason to fight for a better future.

Living without hope, is like living without gratitude. It is almost synonymous with denying the ability of God to lift us out of our present situations.

Indeed in 1994, the world wrote us off as a failed state.

At the time, very few believed that one day, let alone 26 years later, Rwanda would become a high-end tourist destination, and that we would attract the kind of investments and partnerships we see today, among so many other positive milestones.

Twenty-six years after the Genocide against the Tutsi, we continue – by the Grace of God - to rebuild our nation stone by stone, while creating bridges with valuable friends of Rwanda, such as yourselves, who believed – then and continue to believe – today – in us, and in the transformative leadership, with which we have been blessed.

Brothers and Sisters,

We must not only show gratitude when things go our way; we must also learn to thank God for the challenges we encounter. We learn and grow from them every day.

As a country, we relate with where we were 25 years ago, and we do not take for granted that it was very possible for us as a people

and a nation, to get stuck in a cycle of conflict, poverty, and self-destruction.

Similarly, on the global stage, there are daunting challenges:

In ‘The state of the world's children’ 2019 report: Growing well in a changing world. Children, food and nutrition”¹ by UNICEF, difficult questions are posed:

- “How is it that in the 21st century, we still have 149 million children under 5 with stunting and almost 50 million with wasting?
- How is it possible that overweight and obesity in children and young people are continuing to rise, and are increasingly among the poor?
- And why are healthy diets becoming more expensive while unhealthy, non-nutritious diets are becoming cheaper?

Furthermore, according to the 2019 **‘The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World’**.²

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/media/63016/file/SOWC-2019.pdf>

² <https://www.unicef.org/media/55926/file/SOFI-2019-in-brief.pdf>

“In the past three years, the number of people who suffer from hunger has slowly increased, with more than 820 million people in the world still hungry today.”

“Another disturbing fact is that about 2 billion people in the world experience moderate or severe food insecurity. The lack of regular access to nutritious and sufficient food that these people experience puts them at greater risk of malnutrition and poor health.”

In the Bible, Jesus calls us to feed everyone, so how do we explain that we still witness such unbelievable disparities?

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I firmly believe that, while remaining grateful, we must build on the gains of the past years, and maintain the positive trajectory, we have carved out over the years.

To the question, “how did we do it?”, a quick summary would be: “We set goals and projections, placed our faith in God, and got to work. Every year, we took a respite to say “Thank you God” as we are doing today, and He blessed us the more, as I am sure He will continue to do.

God would use visionary leaders of Rwanda to lead all its people back to the land of milk & honey as they once imagined it – a land of unity & reconciliation, inclusive economic growth, peace & security, an unconventional democracy where there is power sharing, and the winner does not take it all - and most importantly, a land where the genocide ideology is tirelessly fought.

Indeed, He empowered our leadership to achieve these goals, through wisdom, courage and determination.

May we never cease to express our gratitude for all He has done for us.

Distinguished Audience,

Does this mean that tomorrow will be easy, and with fewer challenges? Not at all! But, by appreciating today, we are telling God that we trust Him for tomorrow. That we know that He is with us, and that He will prepare a table before us, even in the presence of our enemies.

We all know that setbacks in life are inevitable, but because we have demonstrated appreciation for today, we will find courage and faith to overcome the setbacks of tomorrow.

As we pass on the torch to our youth to light the path towards 2050, let us remind them that our hopes and dreams for our nation have never inclined to a **“stop”** sign. The journey continues for them to be more selfless and to work hard on achieving even bigger goals than we did for the benefit of our country, now more than ever before.

As the Kinyarwanda saying goes, **“utamanya iy’ava, ntamenya iy’ajya,”** which means; “Unless you know from whence you have come, you cannot know where you are going.”

With a thankful heart, move with caution, and remember to:

- look back and appreciate the journey you have made.
- harness a culture of gratitude, not only to God, but also to all those who have helped you along the way.
- model best practices and internalize the godly values that have helped to bring you this far.

To God be all the Glory and Honor. To Him alone, we dedicate our beloved country, Rwanda.

Grateful for your kind attention and wish you God’s blessings!