

**First U.S. Rwandan Diaspora
Women's Convention**

**Remarks by H.E. Mrs
Jeannette Kagame**

**Washington, D.C., 19 March
2016**

**Excellencies Ambassadors,
Presidents of the National and Regional US
Rwandan Diaspora,
Esteemed Friends of Rwanda,
Fellow Rwandans,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Mwiriwe.

It is my great pleasure to be with you, and to address this very first US Rwandan Diaspora Women Convention.

This could not have come at any more opportune time than now, while some of us are still fired up from a three-day Leadership Retreat, commonly known as Umwiherero, that took place in Rwanda this last week. Without going into much detail, there is no better representation that symbolizes our collective engagement in Country building, than Umwiherero. It brings leaders from all different levels of government, and Civil Society together, to plan and implement a programme, that will benefit all Rwandans. This also serves as a reminder that

leaders should be held accountable, afterall, bese ni intumwa za rubanda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a home-grown initiative uniquely Rwandan, that has ushered our nation in a global spotlight, as one of the best performers in social and economic arena, both in Africa and beyond.

Nizeye ko umwuka mwiza tubazaniye uza kwagura ibitekerezo byanyu, no kongera kubyo uyu mubonano uza kugeraho.

Your presence here today, attests to the powerhouse that can be created, between Rwandans living abroad and those at home, and I believe that when women organize around a common purpose, their combined energies have a big effect, on the realization of their aspirations.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

This convention will address topics specific to the roles of the Rwandan woman and her

responsibilities, toward her community. It is my sincere hope, that the exchanges of the day will ignite a flame in each and everyone present in this room; so that you feel challenged to engage more with Rwanda, and in the process, help you understand better what makes us who we are, as a people.

Fellow Rwandans,

Ni uruhare rwacu gutoza abato bacu, bakamenya amateka, bakamenya uko u Rwanda rwahoze, aho rwanyuze naho ruri ubu, bagasobanukirwa ubutwali n'ubupfura aribwo umwambaro w'umutima ugaragarira mu myifatire, n'imigirire by'intangarugero by'abanyarwanda, maze tukazabaha umurage basobanukiwe.

Ibi nitubigeraho, ndizera neza ko nta kabuza urubyiruko rwacu ruzasobanukirwa, kandi rukamenya kwifata neza mu mahanga abacumbikiye. Ibi bikazabafasha kandi kuba abantu bihagazeho, bazi icyo bashaka.

Ubu ndifuza kubagezaho inama z'umuhanzi
Sipiriyani Rugamba:

IKIVI

“Urumve shami nashibutse...

Uzase nanjye, urenzeho

Unsumbye

Ndabigusabye

Usoze ibyanjye kandi uterure ibyawwe,

Mwana wanjye

Jya utuganya utwaza.”

NTUMPEHO

“Umuco mwiza wakureze,

Ntugatume udindira.

Mu by'abandi jya utoranya ibyiza,

Ibifutanye ujugunye.

Niba urabukwa iby'ahandi

Ugata n'urwo wambaye,

Ntumpeho.”

UMUCO WACU

“Uwanga umuco wamubyaye

Asa n'ishami ryihakana aho ryatoshye.

Umwana mwiza ni umwe uvuga

Ivuko ryiza ryamubyaye,

Agahora arisingiza.”

Those of us who grew up abroad, know all too well, the challenges of starting a new life, in a host country. We all had to constantly juggle between the necessity to hold on to our heritage, and the imperatives to adapt to new cultures, and traditions.

It behooves all of us who know what life is like in Rwanda; who remember the tales and legends of the land of '*amata n'ubuki*'; who take delight in the music, and the dances that accompany the different moments of our lives, to share this knowledge with the ones who, for one reason or another, did not benefit from this wealth of knowledge.

Young men and women,

Rwanda is now synonymous with a land of opportunity for everyone, regardless of where they came from. Once they can translate the needs and realities of our country, they find it increasingly easier to adapt, and contribute to its overall development.

I believe that the cultural setting of the United States is favourable to developing a critical mind, so

I challenge you to engage with Rwanda with an open mind; but also evolve from a virtual perspective, to discover in person, what your land has in store for you.

The goal being, that you steer away from the kind of stereotypical views, that leads people to view America as a place in which everyone is either a movie star, or related to one. And on the other hand, leads those living in the West, to think that Africa is not only a country, but also one filled with wild animals, roaming free in our backyards.

I trust that once you develop this new mindset, you will be able to understand our society better, and will accordingly engage in worthwhile initiatives, that will improve the lives of your people, in our communities.

Esteemed guests,

Let our children know that they do come from generations of trendsetters, who embraced gender parity earlier on, because they simply could not deny that men and women are equal, and that

everyone has something to contribute, towards the rebuilding of our nation.

My fellow ‘Banyarwandakazi’,

The narrative of women empowerment in Rwanda is all too real, and has a global resonance, and significance. People cite gender equality in Rwanda, as an example to emulate. We should all derive great pride, from this major accomplishment that enhances our own standing in the world, and also be thankful for our capable and exemplary leadership, that truly understands, and acts upon the universal truth that “Women rights are Human rights”.

Dear sisters, we have much to contribute to Rwanda and to the world we live in.

When the world was collapsing around them, women were among the important groups in Rwanda that carried the heaviest burdens, and may have seen the worst of it all. Some became widows, other orphans, too many became victims of rape and other atrocities. And yet, they picked up the pieces and

started to mend the torn fabric of their society. They fixed, reconciled, held their head high, and lived again.

So to honour the sacrifices our women made, let us maintain, and sustain, the level playing field we have been accorded in Rwanda, kuko ntabwo tugomba kwirara! We should be able to seize these opportunities to make sure that this way of life is a norm for our daughters, and granddaughters.

After all, a candle dims no light, by lighting another candle.

Our goal is to create a society in which our boys and girls, will be able to thrive, to prosper, and to become the ground-breakers they were meant to be, without ever considering gender, as a limitation to achieving greatness.

We all know the figures, we have exceeded the constitutional requirement of 30% of women in public decision-making positions, since Rwanda now boasts 64% of female legislative representation, the

highest in the world. In the same vein, women also make 40% of our Cabinet.

Dear friends,

Those statistics are not given to impress. It's rather to impress upon all of us here, that we have a mission and responsibility, to nurture the gains we scored, through hardship and sacrifice. We are truly riding on able shoulders of men and women, who have secured a safe home we are proud of, aho umugore ari umutima w'urugo.

In addition, by having been exposed to different cultures, you are given the great opportunity to combine the best of 'all' worlds, and build from it, to create the right environment for you, and your families to thrive.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

The Rwanda we have today is a mosaic, made of people coming from all corners of this world, bringing with them a diversity of experiences, which

merged together to create the nation we all call 'home'.

Yes, our history is one that is painful beyond words, and although our scars will never disappear, we must continue to work tirelessly so that all of us contribute to the building of a new nation, worthy of its name, for it will treat all its children equally.

A nation that sees all its children as its own; the ones who never left home, those who came back in different circumstances, and those who despite the physical distance, remain close to her heart.

Because indeed, no matter how long one has been away from Rwanda, he or she will always be the son or the daughter of this land, and as such, always welcome home.

I thank you all for your kind attention, and wish you fruitful discussions.