

**Her Excellency Mrs Jeannette Kagame
Remarks,**

**Commonwealth Violence Against
Women and Girls Side event,**

Kigali, 24 June 2022

Your Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall,

Your Excellency, President of Sierra Leone,

Your Excellency UN Deputy Secretary General,

Commonwealth Secretary General,

Dear Sisters, Excellencies, First Ladies,

Distinguished Guests,,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

It is with much pleasure, that I once more welcome you all to Kigali!

Today's topic steers well away from the colorful, vibrant, exciting buzz of our Commonwealth Business forums, and might lack the fun of our culture and art sessions - **as it should.**

Yet **Distinguished Guests**, we must explore optimism, for here today, we have the privilege of prime position, prime opportunity, and prime incentive, to effect real and tangible change, to a problem that is as old as mankind.

The elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls, or Gender-Based Violence, falls under the 5th Sustainable Development Goal for Commonwealth Nations to attain by 2030.

And yet, as imminent as 2030 stands, according to our current rate of progress in battling the social pathology, Violence Against Women and Girls is poised to outlive us, and perhaps our children.

Before I re-instate the theme of this gathering, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, I wish to ask one simple question, upon which I urge you all to reflect, instantly or in time, audibly or silently.

Honourable Guests, Homewatchers, allow your hearts to ponder this query:

How many more women and girls should be sacrificed at the stakes, for the world to have its fill, of rapes and teen pregnancies, of domestic abuse and harassment?

To those who oppose our sense of loud urgency and impatience: I would wish to know the number of additional casualties needed, before it is deemed to be **too much**.

Dear **Commonwealth Friends**, who are the women and girls, who could possibly deserve such punishment?

Who should the world volunteer as its victims?

Who, I ask, will we bear to see violated in this manner, who will we allow to die?

- Will it be women in South West Asia, whose tolerance of violence is somehow expected, even in the face of excruciating acid burns, and social alienation as a result of sexual assault?
- Will it be the female child refugee, who, already traumatized by war, will with each act of abuse, grow less and less vocal; less visible until, one day, she diminishes into oblivion?

- Or should we, perhaps, tolerate, that the western working woman, in Europe or elsewhere, for all her financial power, relative to her peers in the Global South, suffer vicious sexual harassment in her workplace?

Or perhaps, **Dear Guests**, for the sake of tradition, the world should opt once more to see the African Girlchild victimised?

Familiar as she is with the frontlines of humanitarian crises, should she be thrown into the abyss of despair, as the world postpones the perfect day to finally say “NO MORE”?

I believe that today, is the perfect day to say no more. **For yet another day, may be a day too late!**

No more apathy.

No more victim-blaming.

No more gaslighting.

No more violence against the gender that, though bearing life, must constantly fear for their own.

This, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, is why I am so honoured, and frankly, so thankful, to be part of this event, in the presence of women and allies that have had the bravery, the integrity and the sturdy moral core, to call for an end, before the world was even willing to acknowledge the beginning, of modern Violence against Women and Girls.

Your Royal Highness the Duchess of Cornwall,

Your dedication to this cause has seen no bounds. I cannot touch upon the solutions that will be discussed today, without paying tribute to the undeniable sensitivity which you, **Your Royal Highness**, have shown this fight.

You understand that beyond the chilling statistics of rape and abuse around the world; before the socio-economic impact of GBV, but past its horrifying banality, right there in the middle, at the crux of the matter, is the story of survivors.

You are aware, that at the core of Genderbased Violence, is the power to discourage a victim from speaking out, locking them into a silence that protects and sustains the cycle of abuse.

You are conscious, **Your Royal Highness**, of the importance of involving storytellers in this fight, of compelling the Arts and Creative industry, to embrace the raw and real tales, of the ones who are imprisoned in their silence, and in their pain.

The toolkit that the Commonwealth Secretariat, alongside the NO MORE Foundation, has created to combat gender inequality, is a powerful stride that engages all industries, in sectors both private and public, to defend the welfare of women in, and outside of the workplace.

This toolkit, which confronts the architecture of modern gender based violence, will equip every one of us to navigate through our careers, our private and social lives, free of the threat of abuse.

But **Ladies and Gentlemen**, the Commonwealth Gender Equality toolkit is not only a document. It is the materialisation of an ideology, a mode of life, that must be adopted to ensure that both genders thrive equally, side by side, in their pursuit of progress and sustainable development.

I am eager, and I believe so is everyone present, to hear,

- **Your Royal Highness,**
- **Commonwealth Secretary General,**
- **NO MORE Foundation,**

about the further projects and initiatives you have in store for our 54-legged race to 2030.

- I thank you especially, **Commonwealth Secretariat and NO MORE Foundation** for defending the pertinence of events such as these, and gathering us all here, to ensure that our women and girls are, at last, granted, the protection and validation they so desperately need and deserve.
- To everyone present today, everyone watching, here in Rwanda or abroad;

- To every individual whose heart has ached for people, who were punished for their gender, with violence;
- To every soul that has applied spirit and muscle to the eradication of this injustice,

To you, I say:

- Thank you for your engagement,
- Thank you for your commitment,
- Thank you for your humanity.

You are building the bridge to a world free of gender-based-violence, inch by inch, and pebble by pebble.

May the safety and serenity of future generations, across genders, and across seas, salute your efforts.

Thank you all for having me today, **Commonwealth Friends!** I do hope that our country shows you warmth, hospitality and kindness, that mirrors our joy and our honour, in hosting you here.

Murakoze.