

Her Excellency Mrs Jeannette Kagame
Remarks,
Re-thinking Mental Health
CHOGM Side Event,
Kigali, 22 June 2022

Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth,

Co-hosts of this event,

Honorable Dr Abdul Momen, Bangladesh Minister of Foreign Affairs, and

Honorable Vincent Biruta, Rwanda Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Honorable Dignitaries, Esteemed Advocates, Distinguished Guests,

Good evening.

Thank you all for joining us for this crucial event! The timing couldn't be more appropriate.

We are gathering under the reality, that as we speak, according to the WHO, one eighth of the people we know, one eighth of the people we love, is affected by mental health problems.

If you will allow me, **Esteemed Guests**, I would like to address the Elephant in the room, as none of you are estranged, to the health crisis that the world, is currently straining to overcome.

There are events that take a toll, on the mental well-being of entire populations.

Unfortunately, Rwandans are all-too-well placed, to know this. Our history is not only marred with the trauma of loss, and undeniably, of dehumanization – our history is also defined, by the monumental effort of overcoming, following unimaginable collective psychological, physical and emotional suffering.

Dear Guests,

The world has lost 6 million people to Covid-19. Millions of families have been ravaged, by premature death, and billions of people have suffered the covid-19's financial and social strains.

The bitterness of the Covid-19 wakeup call, may long remain,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

But the prevalence, and rapid increase of poor mental health among:

- our children,
- our neighbours,
- our friends,
- our fellow **Commonwealth Citizens,**

MUST be done with.

We must act, and this no later, than the day following yesterday.

It goes without saying, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, that mental health transcends the health domain. Poor mental health breaks down our communities, by disrupting the wellness of families, poisoning our socio-economic development. Presently, poor mental health costs the world economy an estimated 2.5 trillion USD every year.

This hemorrhage of resources, this costly human tragedy, makes one thing clear: **mental health is the bedrock upon which the welfare of our communities lies**. We cannot allow this foundation to crack, without us joining forces, to solder it.

Honourable Guests

Allow me to make the case, for substantial resource attribution, to the protection and support of mental health, from the lens of a country that has seen firsthand, its importance in survival.

Over the last decade, Rwanda has strived to implement homegrown solutions, BY our citizens, FOR our citizens, in Mental Health and beyond.

Imbuto Foundation, in collaboration with the Rwandan Ministry of Health and strong partners, recently launched, the *Baho Neza* Mental Health Program in Rwanda.

Baho Neza tends to the mental health of Rwandans, from a child's very first day on earth, by ensuring the holistic wellness of the mother. Committed to actualizing a bright future, *Baho Neza* defends the health of Rwandans throughout the life, and indeed, the birthing cycle.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The time is now!

- We **need and must**, invest more financial resources, in mental health research, prevention, skills training and treatment!
- We **need and must**, eradicate mental illness stigma, and develop a global culture of tolerance, and self-accountability!
- We **need and must**, deploy effective collaboration between mental health experts, from public and private sectors, from state and non-governmental agencies, across the Commonwealth, to build resilient structures of mental health support!

Thank you for being here, to define the way forward, in improving mental health in Commonwealth member states.

There is no health, without mental health.

There is no development, without mental health.

There is no brightness in our shared future, without mental health.

And, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, there is no Commonwealth without
Common Mental Health!

Good evening!