

The facts are stubborn, but so are we. We really have to be

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I begin by thanking you. On a day like this, when language fails, the first words that come, are words of gratitude.

To you, the friends by our side on this heavy day, including the different leaders present, we say thank you. Many of you have been with us all along, and we cherish you for contributing to the healing and re-building of Rwanda.

I also thank my fellow Rwandans, who joined hands to recreate this country. In 1994, there was no hope, only darkness. Today, light radiates from this place.

How did it happen?

Rwanda became a family, once again. The arms of our people, intertwined, constitute the pillars of our nation. We hold each other up. Our bodies and minds bear amputations and scars, but none of us is alone. Together, we have woven the tattered threads of our unity into a new tapestry.

Sisters became mothers. Neighbours became uncles. Strangers became friends. Our culture naturally creates new bonds of solidarity, which both console and renew.

Rwanda is a family. That is why we still exist, despite all we have gone through.

There is no way to fully comprehend the loneliness and anger of survivors. And yet, over and over again, we have asked them to make the sacrifices necessary to give our nation new life. Emotions had to be put in a box.

Someone once asked me why we keep burdening survivors with the responsibility for our healing. It was a painful question, but I realised the answer was obvious. Survivors are the only ones with something left to give : their forgiveness.

Our people have carried an immense weight with little or no complaint. This has made us better and more united than ever before.

At a memorial event some years ago, a girl brought us to tears with a poem. She said, "There is a saying that God spends the day elsewhere, but returns to sleep in Rwanda."

"Where was God on those dark nights of genocide?", she asked.

Looking at Rwanda today, it is clear that God has come back home to stay.

To survivors, I say thank you. Your resilience and bravery represent the triumph of the Rwandan character in its purest form.

Joining us today are families from other countries, whose husbands, fa-

thers, sisters, and aunts were claimed by the same deadly ideology.

The Belgian peacekeepers, murdered twenty-five years ago this morning.

Captain Mbaye Diagne from Senegal, who saved so many lives.

Tonia Locatelli, killed in 1992 for telling the truth of what was to come.

The only comfort we can offer is the commonality of sorrow, and the respect owed to those who had the courage to do the right thing.

Other people around the world also stood up and made a difference.

Ambassador Karel Kovanda from the Czech Republic joined colleagues from New Zealand and Nigeria to call for action to stop the Genocide, despite the indifference of more powerful states.

And my brother, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, as you have heard, knows where Rwanda is coming from, having served in an Ethiopian peacekeeping contingent after the Genocide, together with troops from elsewhere in Africa and beyond.

Thank you all for your presence.

Those among us who perpetrated the Genocide, or stood by passively, are also part of our nation. The willingness, in a number of cases, to tell the truth, pay the price, and re-join the community, is an important contribution.

The witness of perpetrators is irrefutable proof if any was still needed, that genocide happened.

Genocide hibernates as denial.

Both before the killing and after, there is a long chain of events which are interconnected. Revisionism is not merely demeaning, but profoundly dangerous.

The genocide did not begin on one specific day. It has a history.

Why were refugees Rwanda's biggest export, for decades? Why were the same people repeatedly targeted for persecution and massacre, from the late 1950s to the 1990s? Why were bodies dumped into rivers, to send them back up the Nile, where they supposedly came from? Why did some parents even kill their own children, who looked a certain way?

None of that started with a plane crash. So where did it come from?

Through it all, we had guardians of virtue, Abarinzi b'Igihango, and other righteous citizens. Our rebirth was seeded by their actions.

The young girl, portrayed in the play we just saw, who took it upon herself to care for a baby survivor despite the objections of her family. That is a true story and today both women are home and fine.

The Nyange students who refused to be separated into Hutu on one side, Tutsi on the other. It is clear that they never betrayed each other. Six were killed. Forty were wounded. All are heroes.

These are examples of the Rwandans who kept us from losing everything.

But most of us are neither survivors nor perpetrators. Three-quarters of Rwandans are under age thirty. Almost 60 percent were born after the Genocide.

Our children enjoy the innocence of peace. They know trauma and violence only from stories. Our aspirations rest in this new generation.

Mature trees can no longer be moulded, but seeds contain endless possibility. Rwanda's young people have everything needed to transform our country. They have the responsibility to take charge more and more

and participate fully in securing the Rwanda we want and deserve.

We are far better Rwandans than we were. But we can be even better still.

We are the last people in the world who should succumb to complacency. The suffering we have endured should be enough to keep our fighting spirit alive.

And here, let me say something that I hate to say, and that we shall, as much as we can, avoid. For those who think our country has not seen enough of a mess, and in defence of those children you saw, and others in this country, our nation — and by the way, we claim no special place, but we have a space to claim.

Those who think we have not seen enough of a mess, and want to mess with us, whether from here or from outside, I want to say : We will mess up with them big time. Big time.

So that's the fighting spirit, and it means what happened here will never happen again.

Our country cannot afford to live by twists of fate. We must be deliberate and decisive, guided by humility and the content of our hearts. Rwanda has to stay one step ahead. Otherwise, we are insignificant.

The facts are stubborn, but so are we. We really have to be.

Our nation has turned a corner. Fear and anger have been replaced by the energy and purpose that drives us forward, young and old.

Rwanda is a very good friend to its friends. We seek peace, we turn the page. But no adversary should underestimate what a formidable force Rwandans have become, as a result of our circumstances.

Nothing has the power to turn Rwandans against each other, ever

again. This history will not repeat. That is our firm commitment.

Nothing is required from those who wronged us, except an open mind. Every day we learn to forgive. But we do not want to forget. After all, before asking others to repent, we first have to forgive ourselves.

As for the dishonourable who remain impervious to regret, it is not our problem. It does not stop Rwanda from making progress, even for one moment. It becomes their problem.

The decimation of Rwanda was more absolute than any known weapon of mass destruction. Not only bodies were destroyed, but the very idea of Rwanda itself. That shows the ferocious power of human sentiments and designs.

Our prayer is for no other people to ever endure the same tribulations, especially our brothers and sisters in Africa.

Never accept it. Confront the apostles of division and hatred who masquerade as saviours and democrats. Our commonalities are always infinitely greater than our differences. No society is above any other, much less immune to fragility.

In the end, the only conclusion to draw from Rwanda's story is profound hope for our world. No community is beyond repair, and the dignity of a people is never fully extinguished.

Twenty-five years later, here we are. All of us. Wounded and heartbroken, yes. But unvanquished.

We Rwandans have granted ourselves a new beginning. We exist in a state of permanent commemoration, every day, in all that we do, in order to remain faithful to that choice.

I thank you and wish you strength and peace, all of you.