



ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT PAUL KAGAME

Inauguration of the Memorial in Honour of the Victims of the Genocide against the Tutsi

Paris, 2 June 2026

I would like to thank the survivor who has just spoken, Jeanne Uwimbabazi.

The events she described are very familiar to me in many ways.

It seems that in Rwanda, there was bound to be a cycle of thirty years in which such tragedies would take place. Because what she described, thirty years or so before that, we experienced another tragedy at which time I was four years old. My family and others become refugees in a neighbouring country.

I grew up in a refugee camp for over twenty years. So it happened in the 1960s, then it happened in 1994. Of course, what happened in 1994 has no comparison. I was talking about the story of the cycle that took place.

The events of the Genocide against the Tutsi are within living memory. And so the work of memory necessarily begins with the word of survivors.



Survivors are living memorials, not only by virtue of the visible scars of the body, but also the indelible wounds of the spirit, which they transmit to us through their testimony.

The memorial before us is powerful because it sets the truth in stone and protects it from the heartlessness of time, by instructing the living.

It is not a validation, because none is needed. But it will stand as a mark of respect for the dignity of Rwandans and our history.

However, to witness the inauguration of such a memorial, in a place of honour in this city of Paris, is anything but routine.

I want to thank the City of Paris, and its Mayor Emmanuel Grégoire, as well as the former Mayor Anne Hidalgo, for making this possible.

Confronting historical responsibilities requires real courage, because it generates fierce opposition by those with a case to answer. You need a strong sense of humanity to see it through.

President Macron, I want to commend you on both counts: courage and humanity.

Five years ago, you took a risk and came to Kigali following the release of two independent reports, one commissioned by your government, the other by Rwanda, but arriving at similar conclusions.



You acknowledged that France could have stopped the genocide, but did not. In response, I described your words as something more valuable than an apology: namely, the truth.

This door was first opened by President Nicolas Sarkozy, and I wish to commend him today. In a historic visit to Rwanda in 2010, President Sarkozy conceded serious mistakes by France, and said that it was not up to the task of stopping the genocide.

I also pay tribute to the dedicated French journalists, activists, and researchers, who never wavered in exposing the truth. Many are here today. Your efforts to make sure the story was told have saved countless lives, and conferred dignity on the victims.

The Genocide against the Tutsi was foreseeable, and in fact foreseen, and France was in a unique position to observe and to act. It took too long for France to come to terms with its role, causing additional pain. And on some points, we still have not found consensus.

I fully understand the feelings of those survivors and advocates, who remain dissatisfied with the official record.

But I believe that our common work has initiated a journey towards truth, which is irreversible.

And France was not alone in falling short, far from it. Many other countries did so as well, but none has gone as far as France in setting the record straight and accepting its part in the tragedy.



We also appreciate the notable efforts that have been made to try genocide perpetrators living in France and to criminalize genocide denial. That work must continue.

Settling scores only traps all of us in the past. We needed to walk free from the tangle of lies, and we have.

Then as now, France serves as a penholder for African affairs, at the United Nations, and in other forums. As a result, France will naturally be held to a higher standard, factually and morally, whenever the echoes of history intrude on current affairs on our continent.

I hope that France realizes the weight and meaning of that special responsibility. It is not easy, but it is vitally important, and this memorial symbolizes those higher expectations.

Rwanda emerged from the experience of genocide, and the international response to it, without illusions of any sort.

One certitude is that the main responsibility for the genocide is located within our own society, as Rwandans. Others contributed, but we cannot blame them more than we do ourselves.

That attitude has liberated us to look within ourselves and our traditions for the solutions needed to change our society for the better, for all Rwandans.

Rwanda's determination to overcome its tragic history, and ensure that it is never repeated, has never waned and never will. We are



deliberate about educating our young people to sustain and expand the progress we have made, however modest it may be.

Acts of intimidation and pressure, no matter how powerful the source, only give us more strength to stand firm.

Overcoming history requires political will, on all sides. In today's world, that is uncommon. I therefore would like to close by reiterating our appreciation and respect for President Macron's clarity and resolve.

The work we are doing together will give future generations the tools to build, and sustain, the peace and understanding which we seek.

That is the deeper significance of this moment.

I thank you for your kind attention.