



ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT PAUL KAGAME

KWIBUKA 32

Kigali, 7 April 2026

Today, we gather again in remembrance.

To everyone present, and watching online, thank you for joining us, on this important day. We deeply appreciate the friends who join us every year, in person or in spirit, without fail.

Let me begin with the powerful and moving testimony that Théoneste has just delivered. These testimonies are not ordinary stories, they are rooted in real history and lived experience. Whether here in the country, or outside, especially outside, there are those who have often distorted this history of ours for different reasons. They have a real challenge on their hands if they expect people to change history and tell it differently.

What I would say, as Theoneste said, is that times do change, and times have changed. No one will ever die again the way Theoneste was describing it, or even the way he himself died, because it was a form of death. The fact that he is here is a form of resurrection. No one will ever die again in this way.

There are many reasons for this, but one is simple: you cannot kill a person twice. If you try, that person will stop you before you succeed. As we stand here today, while some outside may mock



or speak lightly about these matters, the truth is that this country will not die twice. Before anyone destroys Rwanda, Rwanda will defend itself.

Whether it is us adults, or our younger generation, no one will kill them twice. It will not happen. We will live the way people are supposed to live, the way everyone else lives. And inevitably we will not ask anyone for permission to live.

Some may interpret these words differently, but what I have said is exactly what I mean, and that is how it should be understood.

Kwibuka carries profound meaning for our nation. It is how we confront and overcome the divisions that nearly destroyed us.

This day empowers us all. We draw on the strength of survivors, who provide the reservoir of humanity that feeds our nation's soul.

To all survivors, know that you are not alone. We stand with you always. Everything we have achieved was only possible because all Rwandans decided to join hands in common purpose.

We honour the role played by every Rwandan in our country's rebirth.

The reality of the genocide is clear for all to see. The ringleaders were convicted in international courts with rigorous evidence.



The Gacaca process documented the course of the genocide, in every single village and neighbourhood in Rwanda. Over 50 million hand-written pages were produced during the ten years of Gacaca.

Right here where we are standing, a quarter of a million victims of the genocide are laid to rest.

And in 2018, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that called the Genocide against the Tutsi by its proper name, with the support of every member state but one.

The truth is undeniable.

And yet, we still find people sowing doubt and twisting the facts, up to today.

This is not just a matter of ignorance but something much deeper. It means that the risk of seeing history repeat itself is a constant danger, if we allow ourselves and our friends to become indifferent.

Genocide denial begins long before the genocide itself is committed.

There is a pattern of looking away from the warning signs or taking them lightly. Hate speech turns into hate acts, dismissed as expressions of popular discontent. Behaviour that should be immediately condemned is rationalized and minimized. The preparations are masked by narratives of popular grievance and fear. In the process, a moral equivalence is created between the targets of the genocide and the planners of it.



All of these elements were present in our own story.

There are some who pretend that the Genocide against the Tutsi was a spontaneous event. That is not true. It was carefully prepared, and carried out in plain sight.

Regrettably, some who spoke the truth at the time, and who were even eyewitnesses, later became peddlers of distortion, mainly for political reasons.

Militias were openly trained and indoctrinated in hate; weapons were imported in large quantities; and Rwandans who opposed it were threatened or killed.

Before 1994, communities were subjected to waves of smaller massacres, meant to normalize the killing, and also to measure the reaction of the wider world.

And with only a few heroic exceptions, the world was unconcerned until it was too late.

In the early 1960s, after countless Tutsi were killed or forced into exile, international voices, such as Bertrand Russell, to name just one, described it as systematic extermination.

The pattern continued in the 1980s and early 1990s, when Tutsi communities such as the Bagogwe in the northwest were targeted in organized attacks.



In 1993, a commission led by Jean Carbonare investigated these atrocities. After documenting mass graves and the involvement of state authorities, they concluded that a genocide was being prepared.

In the same year, UN Special Rapporteur Bacre Waly Ndiaye, warned that organized propaganda portraying the Tutsi as enemies was spreading openly, helping prepare the population for mass violence.

In January 1994, the commander of the United Nations mission in Rwanda sent a fax back to headquarters in New York with detailed intelligence that the Interahamwe were stockpiling weapons and compiling lists of Tutsi to be killed. He was then ordered to share the information with the very government which was preparing the genocide, and to take no further action.

And sadly, the reaction today is no different, here in our region and we can see it right before our eyes.

When the genocide began, the nature of the crime was immediately obvious. All Tutsi were targeted because of their identity. Nowhere was safe, including churches and schools.

That horrific reality only underscores the humanity and courage of the Rwandans who took risks to provide hiding places for their fellow citizens.

The reaction of the international community was to evacuate foreigners, and withdraw most peacekeepers. At ETO Kicukiro,



when the peacekeepers withdrew, thousands of desperate Tutsi were left to die. Such scenes were repeated across the country.

If these forces had instead been supported to protect Rwandans, the killers could have been deterred and many people would still be alive. The lives saved by the United Nations peacekeepers who were allowed to remain makes clear how much more could have been done with political will.

Even as the killings accelerated, the language used to describe what was happening itself became a matter of calculation. Genocide is defined in international law precisely to create an obligation to act. To witness such a crime and deliberately refuse to use the term is, in effect, genocide denial, perhaps even a form of aiding and abetting.

The technology existed to disrupt the radio broadcasts that directed the killings. The planes capable of jamming those signals were available. Officials even calculated the hourly cost of the mission. In the end, the operation was deemed to be too expensive, and potentially also a violation of Rwanda's sovereignty. In their minds, those lives were worth nothing.

For Rwandans, the lesson was brutal and it has not been forgotten. If our lives do not happen to align with someone else's interests, they are not worth saving.



And so it had to be the Rwandan Patriotic Army that led the Campaign against Genocide and ended it. Our deepest source of grief was always that we could not arrive earlier.

This is a simple truth of history which many today still have reservations about acknowledging, for reasons we will never understand.

The culture and character of today's Rwanda Defence Force was forged in those dramatic moments. It guides the conduct of our forces who serve abroad in peacebuilding missions, earning universal respect.

Indeed, no sanction or insult from outside can ever tarnish the honour and integrity of Rwanda's defence and security forces, who are among the finest that can be found anywhere.

I look forward to raising this matter of sanctions at the highest level to understand the basis for such an injustice.

Rwandans understand the cost of tolerating extremism, and our central security principle is to put the protection of civilians first.

After the genocide, Rwandans chose to rebuild our country together. With that, came a promise to never let the politics of genocide take root ever again.

Genocide cannot happen here again. It won't.



Even with the noise you hear in the region, of people meeting in Europe and Kinshasa, bringing the son of Habyarimana and relatives from wherever and gathering. All that is just noise that cannot amount to anything that will happen here again. It cannot happen.

And I am saying this not just as a person. I am saying it because I know every Rwandan, young and old, is as determined in saying so as I am saying now to you.

Along the way, Rwandans faced constant criticism, and many attempts to twist our history. But the power we will always have is to use our minds to see the truth, and our voices to speak up when something is not right. You can never silence us in whatever form.

We must be clear about the dangers that remain.

When the genocidal government collapsed in July 1994, the soldiers and militias fled across the border into DRC, forcing millions of civilians along with them. Inside the camps, they reorganized into what is now known as FDLR, and launched a sustained cross-border insurgency against Rwanda, claiming tens of thousands more lives.

This was the period known as the Abacengezi insurgency, and the western border was only fully secured by the end of the 1990s, through the combined efforts of our army and the brave residents of those areas.



And since then, our defensive measures have been aimed at ensuring that such attacks can never again be made across our borders.

This is not a problem that should be left to Rwanda alone. Doing so only rewards those behind the threats, while Rwanda is penalized for standing up for itself.

Imagine a farmer whose field catches fire.

At first, the flames are small. A few neighbours think it does not concern them. Others say the wind will change, and the fire will die out on its own. So they watch and wait. But the wind does not change.

Meanwhile, a pyromaniac is secretly adding fuel to the fire. So the fire spreads from one field to another, and then into the forest and the towns, and beyond.

Only then do people run with buckets of water and call for the establishment of a fire department.

Africans, more than most, should understand the danger of moral passivity, in the face of hatred and violent extremism. We must be reminded by all this history. Today, our continent accounts for the majority of the world's active conflicts. In 1994, Africa's collective institutions also failed to respond.



I say this because the call for African sovereignty, legitimate and necessary as it is, must also mean that African institutions act decisively when Africans are at risk.

Bad actors must not be allowed to hide behind the principle of sovereignty to evade responsibility for abuses or deny citizens their rights.

We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. Genocide ideology is still spreading in our region. Left unchecked, it has the power to take us all backwards again.

There are those who claim that Rwanda exaggerates these concerns or that we have ulterior motives. This is not only false, it exposes the deep cynicism that led to the tragedy we commemorate today.

What sustains Rwanda today is the unity of Rwandans, and the conviction that like all people, we have the right to live in safety and dignity, and at peace with all our neighbours.

What we ask, is for partners to join with us to fight extremism rather than punishing Rwanda for defending itself.

We owe future generations of Rwandans more than survival. They deserve to inherit a secure, united, and bold country, and an integrated and confident Africa.

We invite you to stand with us in remembrance, and also in action.