

Speech by
THE PRESIDENT
H.E. PAUL KAGAME

AT THE STOCKHOLM
INTERNATIONAL FORUM 2004

Preventing Genocide
Threats and Responsibilities

January 26, 2004

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Speaking in my own name, and on behalf of the Government and people of Rwanda, I would first of all like to thank *Mr Göran Persson*, Prime Minister of Sweden, for giving me the privilege of being here with you today at this important and timely meeting of the Stockholm International Forum.

Previous meetings of the Forum have been bold and inspirational in their approach, addressing key issues that face our world in a critical but constructive manner.

They have encouraged us by offering us new insights and workable solutions.

I have every confidence that this last meeting of the series, which is forward looking, will be equally stimulating and productive.

The focus today on what we can do to protect the world we share from mass violence, comes at an opportune time for us in Rwanda.

In a few weeks, on April 7th, the people of Rwanda, and the friends of Rwanda, which include many people in this audience, will gather together to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the 1994 genocide.

They will do so in a spirit of remembrance and sorrow, but also, bearing in mind what we as a people have achieved since then, with a renewed sense of faith in the future.

On the threshold of such an important watershed, it is indeed the time to pause and reflect on the legacy of the last ten years.

Over the past decade, Rwanda has emerged from one of the darkest episodes of human history.

The brutality of the 1994 genocide cannot be erased by time; the pain and suffering continues and is certain to continue.

But we know that the recovery of the Rwandan people and nation depends upon our ability to move forward from tragedy towards peaceful development.

We have, therefore, sought ways of coming to terms with our past, and of creating new structures and relationships, upon which we can build a secure tomorrow for all the people of Rwanda.

We know, from personal experience, what it means when a nation allows genocide to take place.

And we also know what it means when the world fails to stop genocidal violence from claiming a million lives.

We, like you, do not want that to happen again, anywhere else in the world. And so the challenge we are here to discuss is this: how do we use our collective knowledge, wisdom, experience, goodwill and resources, to prevent genocide?

Let me, Distinguished Guests; share with you some of the lessons we have drawn out from our own recent history.

The crime of genocide destroys hope and trust, as well as lives, and dehumanizes people.

Reconciliation, we believe, is the key to durable peace. But reconciliation, the knitting-together of the social fabric of a nation in the wake of a bitter and violent conflict, does not, unfortunately, undo the enormous damage caused by the conflict.

In Rwanda, as elsewhere, truth, justice and forgiveness have been the core threads in bringing about reconciliation. Reconciliation will not come through forgetting the past, but in understanding why that past led to mass killings, and taking the measures, however painful and slow, which will make Never Again a reality.

Firstly, there must be every effort to promote a sense of security for all communities. In the context of fear, reconciliation is a meaningless proposition.

In Rwanda, although the forces of genocide were defeated in July 1994, the killings did not end.

Hundreds of survivors and witnesses have since died at the hands of men determined to wipe out all traces of their crimes.

The country is now at peace, and at peace with itself, and this is the foundation upon which we can build strong barriers against a return of the past.

Underpinning these issues are the very real economic and social problems, which continue to afflict the majority of the Rwandan people.

Survivors, many of them physically disabled by their injuries, and lacking the support of their families, are particularly affected.

Conditions of hardship propelled the genocide, and they can undermine people's capacity for change. The extremists who planned and executed the genocide-exploited people's fears, ignorance and economic distress to scapegoat a minority.

We must, as a result, strive to foster economic growth along with social progress, giving people the dignity, choices and confidence that poverty denies them.

The people of Rwanda have only to look back at their history for evidence that justice is imperative for future peace.

The political decision to commit genocide in 1994 was made possible by the tradition of impunity for crimes against Abatutsi, the targeted section of the population.

From this past emerged killers who did not see the act of genocide as a transgression of the laws of society and nature which would meet with due punishment. They saw it as the enactment of civic duty and knew that they would be rewarded.

Only through a process of making individuals accountable for their crimes can we hope to banish the poison of collective guilt and unite communities against violence. We cannot talk of reconciliation without justice in the context of Rwanda.

We have been creative in the search for alternatives to prosecutions so that concepts of justice permeate our society.

We have, in addition, sought to cultivate remorse, tolerance and understanding.

We have faced huge difficulties, but we have persisted because our history made it essential that we confront the issue of justice, as indeed we must do, with determination and courage.

It is said that in dark times, the eye begins to see. I believe that our meeting together here today is in itself an act of hope.

By harnessing our formidable energies and resources, and learning from each other, we can, indeed, begin to see, to understand and to act in order to prevent genocide.

We owe this to all the victims of genocide, to the survivors, to the children of today and of tomorrow.

In Rwanda we know only too well the reality of genocide. It is why we are passionate in our desire to play our part, in the collective commitment to make the tragedy of Rwanda the last genocide in the history of the twentieth century, the last genocide in human history.

It is why we have decided to establish a Genocide Prevention Centre in Murambi, in the province of Gikongoro, where 40,000 unarmed men, women and children were massacred on 21 April 1994.

Murambi will be one of Rwanda's national memorial sites, a place to reflect upon the causes, conduct and consequences of genocide, a centre for strategy and action against genocide. And it will be open to all scholars and other interested parties.

We welcome the participation of people from all over the world, so that we can work together towards the same goal: making our world into a sanctuary, the safe haven that eluded the victims of genocide.

Thank you.