

**Address of The First Lady of the Republic of
Rwanda Jeannette Kagame at the Congressional
Dinner IV for the Northwest States
Washington, D.C., U.S.A
5 February 2020**

**Honourable Members of Congress,
Valued Friends of Rwanda,
Ladies and Gentleman,**

Good Evening.

It is always an honour and a pleasure, to be with you, even more so today.

I am humbled by the opportunity to fellowship, learn from each other, and share experiences from my country.

I truly believe that exchanges and gatherings such as these, are fuel for hope and love – they are our bond of humanity, and give us the much needed impetus and perspective, to take on bigger, and more complex challenges, that each new year, is bound to bring.

Distinguished Guests,

On February 3, 1994, in this very city, the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta, addressed the National Prayer Breakfast.

In her address, she called upon the audience to recite the prayer of St. Francis – that, in sum, called on Christians and the people of God, to be instruments of peace. Mother Teresa, invoked the audience to pray for peace, joy and love.

Tragically, in that same year, far across the ocean, in my home country Rwanda, peace, love and joy, seemed to be alien concepts.

As turmoil, fear and anguish set in leading to the Genocide Against the Tutsi, only a few months later.

In retrospect, the prayer recited then, 26 years ago, strongly resonates across the ocean and inspired the leadership of the nation to take by divine commission the high road, that eventually led us to the reconciliation and unity, which is the hallmark of our country today.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We know all too well, that nothing grows, where there is divisionism and hatred.

In our case, we understood that to bring sustainable peace, we needed to allow room for repentance and forgiveness and forever close the window to vengeance.

To be more specific:

- We opted for transformative lessons learnt from our history, in all aspects of governance. Thinking critically around issues of security and dignity for all, helped us to deeply analyse, the options set before us, and carve out a clearly defined path, to a unified, peaceful and prosperous nation.
- We adopted, inclusive policies and structures, and created platforms - many of which were home-grown solutions, at all levels, to encourage community involvement, in nation building efforts.

- We promoted inclusive and intentional leadership, defined by three key pillars, which are **Unity, Accountability** and **Thinking Big** - These pillars have instilled in each of us: i) the sense of responsibility towards sustaining our collective gains;
ii) as well as the discipline needed to work towards our shared goal of realising the Rwanda we want.

Distinguished guests,

Overall, through repentance, forgiveness and a genuine value for unity, Rwandans walked a difficult path, leading us to where we stand today. The many sacrifices of every Rwandan, to have the necessary discussions, and take the needed steps, to transcend the pain caused by our horrific past, have paid off.

Today, the returns manifest themselves, in a growing economy, and in a society, in which the rights to a dignified life, are continuously fought for, in our pursuit of unshakable peace, and unity.

Continuously putting peace at the centre of our efforts,
we are devising fail proof strategies, to sustain our gains. We are making a habit of frequently pausing, to reflect on our journey, and challenging the next generation, to be innovative in carrying forward, our achievements thus far.

Dear Friends,

Allow me to conclude, by humbly echoing the call, made 26 years ago, upon this very platform, for each of us as Christians, to be peacemakers. It is through, the genuine pursuit of peace, that we can truly experience, the Glory, the Grace and the Love of God, both at national and personal levels.

I thank you for your kind attention.

With this, please join me in welcoming our dear Nelly Mukazayire, whose powerful story, will give you a vivid picture of the impact of our efforts on the ground.

Currently serving as the Chief Executive Officer of Rwanda Convention Bureau, Nelly is leading national efforts to promote Rwanda as the preferred destination for meetings, conferences and events.

Nelly has also served as the Deputy Chief of Staff in the Office of our President, and was a policy researcher in the economics department in the Office of the Prime Minister, prior to this.

Awarded as the best performer in economics by the University of Rwanda, she holds a Bachelor's of Science in International Economics, and a Masters in Economic Policy Management.

Welcome Nelly.