

RWANDANS UNITED

FOR

A NEW ERA

***Excellencies;
Distinguished Guests;
My fellow Rwandans;***

On this solemn and momentous occasion, a day that has no parallel in our history, I welcome you all to a day of celebration, a season of hope in our country.

Here with us today are African leaders who have come from afar, to express their brotherhood and solidarity.

Let me ask you, fellow citizens, to join me in thanking them, and through them, all the African people, for being with us to witness this landmark achievement in our country:

We also have here friends of Rwanda who, at different times and in their various capacities, have contributed to the realization of what we celebrate today.

***Excellencies;
Ladies and Gentlemen;***

The Rwandan people have spoken loud and clear, by giving me and the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) the mandate to serve them for the next seven years.

The confidence and trust that you have bestowed on me, fellow Rwandans, is truly humbling, and let it be known to all the citizens from all provinces of this nation and beyond:

- In Gisenyi, Gitarama, and Gikongoro;
- In Kibuye, Kibungo, and Cyangugu;
- In Ruhengeri, Butare, and Byumba;
- In Umutara, Kigali Ngali,
and the City of Kigali.

Together, and with your support, I undertake the new leadership responsibility to face our nation's challenges, as we strive to build a country fit for us all.

At this juncture, we would like to acknowledge the support we have received from other political parties: Parti Social Démocrate (PSD), Parti Libéral (PL), Parti pour la Démocratie Centriste (PDC), Parti pour la Démocratie Idéale (PDI), Union Démocratique du Peuple Rwandais (UDPR), and Parti Socialiste Rwandais (PSR), whose alliance has brought nine years of uninterrupted progress in Rwanda's postcolonial history.

In this and many other aspects, let us all reaffirm and restate our faith in the indivisibility of our people, and the rights and freedoms of all Rwandans to have a government that they deserve and of their choice.

***Excellencies;
Ladies and Gentlemen;***

This day is profound in its meaning. It is the consolidation of the fundamental changes that have taken place in Rwanda since 1994. And the power to make this irreversible lies with you, the Rwandan people.

More than five centuries ago our fore bearers, the founding fathers of our country, began the process of building the nation of Rwanda.

In their wisdom and foresight, they built a lasting nation for all Rwandans, sharing one language and one culture. They always worked together to improve their lot, albeit with imperfections characteristic to all human civilizations and endeavours.

In the last one hundred years, this course of our society's, and indeed Africa's development, was disrupted by two separate but inherently linked influences: colonialism and post-colonial dictatorships. Both of these created, accentuated and institutionalised divisions and violence as a way of life in Rwanda, leading to countless numbers of refugees and culminating in the genocide of 1994, in which over one million innocent lives perished.

This legacy of a hundred years has left a constituency of a minority of Rwandans who would go to great lengths to destroy this country at any price for selfish reasons, sometimes acting on their own, and at

other times acting together with, or on behalf of some foreign benefactors.

It is this minority, once in leadership, that pretended to be acting on behalf of others and inspired, planned, organized and executed the genocide, thereby defaulting on the duty to defend and protect all citizens. This destructive political force is responsible for the many other ills that have afflicted our society for decades.

But against this minority is a much bigger constituency, the majority of Rwandans, forthright in their determination to unite and make our nation whole again. That is why we must celebrate that the passage of time has not washed away the spirit of Rwanda.

***Excellencies;
Ladies and Gentlemen;***

Genocide shook the very foundation of who we are as a people and a nation. It affected a broad spectrum of Rwandans: survivors, perpetrators, and, unmistakably, onlookers.

And today we remember the sacrifice that countless Rwandans had to pay to stop the genocide. We also acknowledge the hard work and determination of all those who have been involved in the task of rebuilding Rwanda over the last nine years.

In many ways, the landslide victory of August 25 is a consolidation of gains made from the tragic days of 1994 by the RPF and its partners in the Government of National Unity as well as a product of genuine fear of a return to the dark days.

But more importantly, this step, itself an achievement in the democratisation process, re-introduces us as the makers and writers of our history; a history that henceforth says never again to genocide, that seeks to do away with all its causes, and that puts self-determination in the forefront of all our endeavour.

Fellow citizens, we must understand that in any contest there are winners and losers. But we all belong to this country and it is early enough for losers to join us in the noble task of building of our nation.

It is only when we join forces that we can rediscover our strength which has enabled us to face the immense and numerous challenges of the past. In hard times we have always sought to fulfil our promises and our aspirations.

As refugees for decades, denied our right to return by the regimes of the day, we had to find our way back home. Similarly, we have been relentless in bringing back home many of our citizens who have been held hostage by genocidaires in jungles of this region.

In 1994, when the international community failed in its responsibility, we refused to be a failed state. Rather, we undertook our duty to rebuild and restore hope to our country.

In the aftermath of genocide, the so-called experts on Rwanda erroneously preached separate homelands for different sections of our society. But we established a Government of National Unity to build on the achievements of earlier periods in our history, when Rwanda was one and united.

When anarchy was perceived to be the logical sequence to the calamity that had befallen our country, we resisted the impulse to revenge and established the institutions of justice. We introduced the Gacaca courts, a traditional community court system, designed to deliver justice and bring out the truth, in so doing enhance the reconciliation of our people. No form of the so-called international standards of justice could satisfactorily address this unique situation.

Through decentralization, grassroots elections and the constitution making process, we endeavoured to build a new democratic dispensation.

Although we inherited a shattered economy, we have managed to register decent levels of growth in our economy, and we continue to work towards more generation of wealth and prosperity.

We have made significant progress in the struggle against corruption and we have built institutions and mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability.

Above all, we believe that we have delivered on the critical obligation of any serious government, namely, the safety and security of all Rwandans, and now we are at peace with ourselves and our neighbours.

***Excellencies;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;***

These aggregate steps, individually and taken together, constitute the essence of today's occasion. It is this modest performance that our people considered as their own and endorsed willingly, confirming their desire for unity, democracy, and development.

This is a central challenge of our generation, a challenge to modernise, to strive for progressive ideas and tangible results, to tear down barriers and build bridges to a brighter future.

***Excellencies;
Fellow citizens;***

This election was about consolidating the achievements of the past nine years. And we commend the friends of Rwanda for the invaluable support, without which the reconstruction of our country would have been even more difficult.

But more importantly, the election was an invitation to all of us to make right choices about our common future and to shape our destiny.

However, today we cannot afford to be complacent. We have built the foundation; now is the time to redouble our efforts so as to fulfil our pledges in the next seven years and beyond.

It is imperative that we deepen and broaden our experience of democratic reform, of constitutionalism, and orderly transfer of power.

We shall institutionalise fairness and justice for all our citizens, empower women and the youth, and the disadvantaged of our society for they are all the pillars of the new democratic order.

We are determined to invest in quality education and skills training, so that all our citizens become stakeholders in an increasingly knowledge and technology based economy; an economy whose growth will increasingly be private sector driven.

By combating HIV/AIDS, TB, Malaria and other preventable diseases through preventive and curative healthcare that is accessible and affordable to all our citizens, we shall create the opportunity for all-round and sustainable development.

Let us continue our efforts to stabilize the macro-economic environment, invest in infrastructure, agribusiness, tourism, and information technology. Only this way can we gradually and steadily shift the goal posts from just poverty reduction to income, job and wealth creation that is widely shared.

To create wealth, we have to popularise the culture of saving, innovation and entrepreneurship. We need to ensure more efficient utilization of land, and raise the productivity of the individual Rwandan, firms as well as the sum total of our national endowment.

We must continue working for greater partnership in our region in order to consolidate and make our markets work; foster trade and investment and struggle to enable Africans have a stake in the global market for the benefit of all our citizens.

Ours should be a society that promotes and rewards corruption-free behaviour and practice, while deterring and penalizing the scourge of this worldwide epidemic.

Let us continue the ceaseless quest to protect our environment, and ensure the safety and security for all our citizens, because our children, and indeed all posterity, need to live meaningful, purposeful, and productive lives.

And for this to be attained, there has to be a strategic compact between all stakeholders: public and private sectors as well as civil society.

We must consolidate the institutional capacity as a backbone of all round development and align the core functions of the state to our national development needs.

Above all, we will endeavour to develop and modernise our culture because that is the fabric around which our nation is woven.

***Excellencies;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;***

That is the Rwanda we have been working for, and that was the choice of the majority on August 25th 2003. It is our choice of today and tomorrow.

To this just and legitimate choice, we seek the understanding and support of our friends and partners in the international community. Let them appreciate that if we advocate for our right to own our processes, this is not intended to offend.

The divisions that have characterised our society and the genocide that was the inevitable and sad consequence are not in dispute. It is inconceivable that anybody would trivialise these horrendous crimes by making the absurd charge that we derive political capital from divisions, genocide, and fear, as some misguided self-styled experts on Rwanda have suggested.

The fear of divisions and genocide in our society is real and legitimate. To overcome it, we must eradicate the causes and effects of divisions. There are abundant examples in recent world history where the fear of evil has rallied citizens of diverse nations behind leaders who embody the collective will of their people.

At this juncture, it is fitting that I pay tribute to the Rwandan people who rose to the occasion, contributed resources, served as election

volunteers, turned up in large numbers to exercise their democratic right, and voted overwhelmingly to give us this mandate.

Some quarters have implied that our political process in general, and our elections in particular, were imperfect. Paradoxically, while humans endlessly strive to make their condition perfect, the history of human development to date, without exception, is a litany of imperfections.

One could easily ask if there is any politically correct situation. And if there is, who is the judge and what is the yardstick? Are the so-called international standards a one-size-fits-all remedy for all societies in all times?

We in Rwanda recognise that solutions to our problems are first and foremost our responsibility, that they are certainly less than perfect, and that the task of nation building is perpetually an ongoing process. We need space and time to deal with our imperfections, as the rest of the world has always grappled, and still grapples with their own imperfections.

Clearly, if you attempt to be the one to deal with our imperfections, there is a risk of introducing to us your own imperfections. And in any case, who deals with your own imperfections?

***Excellencies;
Fellow citizens;***

Today we witness the final and definitive passing of the old era and the beginning of a new phase of our struggle whose form and content is already tangible.

It is a new era of partnership with our neighbours, and with the rest of Africa, through the African Union, and the regional arrangements to claim the 21st Century as our own.

And it is an era of Africa's determination to seek its rightful role in the international community, by first fulfilling its obligations to the African people through the rule of law and democratic governance,

prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts; and sustainable development.

Through NEPAD we are addressing the fundamental constraints that have kept Africa marginalized for too long, thanks to the initiators of our continent's vision of transformation, some of whom are with us today.

By being our own monitors through the Peer Review Mechanism, we develop the capacity to be truly independent in determining our destinies.

We expect mutual respect from all our partners and we proclaim the fact that we are all interdependent and ultimately vulnerable in a world of Poverty and Inequality, Globalisation, HIV/AIDS, Narcotics, Terrorism, Environmental degradation, to mention but a few.

Africans, in partnership with the rest of the world, must seek to reform the international system that has concentrated too much power in the hands of a few rich nations, often to the detriment of poorer nations.

Transparency and accountability are prerequisites to peace, stability and development, not only in the national arena, but also in the international realms.

My fellow citizens,

Rwanda's place is firmly rooted here in the heart of Africa.

On your behalf I would like to thank our African brothers and sisters who welcomed us to their countries when we were made stateless by bad regimes, educated many of us, and offered their solidarity and support to our struggle for emancipation and reconstruction.

Excellencies, convey to our fellow citizens in the four corners of our beloved continent the message that we are a grateful people and a thankful nation.

Africa's future is Rwanda's future; Rwanda's progress is Africa's progress.

While there is every reason to celebrate this important step, Rwanda's and Africa's current situation compels us to appreciate that the moment of true democracy and sustainable development is yet to come.

Only when Rwanda, and the whole of Africa, is united, peaceful, secure, stable and prosperous can we say that victory is ours forever.

My fellow citizens,

With your mandate comes the courage, strength, and determination to face our present and future with hope. And on your shoulders and mine stand the historic mission to reach the promise of prosperity in unity and democracy.

This is a call to service, not privilege. It is an enduring call that many other patriots have answered, sometimes just in their hearts or with their blood.

On the long and difficult journey whose one other milestone we are celebrating today, let us march together, united as one.

And may God bless us all.

I thank you.