

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



Statement by

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On the occasion of the 28th commemoration of the
Genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in Rwanda (Kwibuka28)

The Hague, 7th April 2022

Mrs. Saskia Bruines, *Deputy Mayor of The Hague*

Mrs. Kitty van der Heijden, *Director General for International Cooperation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;*

Mrs Christine Safari, *President of IBUKA-Netherlands ;*

Excellencies Ambassadors, Heads of Mission and International Organizations, members of the diplomatic corps;

Dear survivors of the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi,

Dear compatriots and friends of Rwanda; ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning! Once again, this fateful day of 7th of April, which has a particular resonance in the hearts and minds of Rwandans, has arrived. Today, we are commemorating for the 28th time the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in Rwanda, and this year's commemoration is special in the Netherlands and in many countries, as it is the first physical commemoration since 2019, after which restrictions were imposed worldwide to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online commemorations, events and meetings were indeed necessary over the past two years to fight such a deadly pandemic but if there are events that were the most affected by social distancing, it's mourning events and genocide commemorations. Indeed, every month of April, the horrors of the past come back to haunt genocide survivors who need, more than ever, the physical presence of their relatives, friends, neighbours and the national community as a whole to comfort them.

I therefore wish to express my gratitude to you all, *excellencies, ladies and gentlemen*, for finding time on your busy schedule to be with us today for this 28th commemoration of the 1994 genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi. Today is Thursday, so was 7th April 1994 when genocide started. Since that date, more than a million children, women and men, from a population of around 7.5 million, were brutally massacred in a hundred days for the only "sin" of being born as per God's wish.

From April to July 1994, around 10,000 people, from a new-born to a bedridden elder, were killed every day in all corners of the country, mainly with machetes and clubs, just because they were Tutsi. Neighbours killed neighbours, friends killed friends, relatives killed relatives, teachers killed students and students killed teachers, doctors killed patients and

patients killed doctors. I pay tribute to Immaculée Mukamuhirwa, who testified earlier on in the video, and to all genocide survivors for their courage, sacrifice and resilience.

Was it a spontaneous and barbaric act in a remote African society, which history and culture were, after all, unknown to many countries in the world? Was it a crime of collective madness or a crime of survival instinct, as some tried to describe this tragedy? No, it was none of that! The genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi in 1994 was a crime that was well thought and already committed at a smaller scale in the 1960s; it was a crime that was meticulously planned, organised and executed by the regime in power in 1994, using its army, its militia and, for the large majority of crimes, the civilian population.

As a matter of facts, genocide was triggered by a premeditated terrorist act committed by an ethnic supremacist regime eager to exterminate all Tutsi of Rwanda. Indeed, on 6th April 1994 in the evening, General Juvénal Habyarimana, the then President of Rwanda, was killed as his plane was approaching the Kigali airport for landing. According to the final ruling of the French Supreme court, released only two months ago and concluding 24 years of investigation, the plane was shot down from the military barracks of Habyarimana's own army, giving the awaited signal for the final solution. Nonetheless, this crime was preventable, as documented in many reports of the United Nations (UN), the Organization of the African Unity (OAU) and several NGOs. It was enabled by the failure, the indifference and even the complicity of some of the decision-making countries in the international community.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

The theme of the genocide commemoration is, like every year, threefold: “*Remember, Unite, Renew*”, which is in line with the Rwandan spirit and culture.

We remember our family members, our friends, our neighbours and fellow citizens killed during the genocide. We also remember the ordeal and sacrifice of survivors who, some of which were raped, maimed and left with incurable diseases. We remember the righteous among our nation who, although they were not members of the targeted group, acted heroically to save lives at the expense of their own. And we remember fallen soldiers of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) who paid the ultimate price during the struggle to stop the genocide.

We unite because Rwandans have always been one people with a single history, a single culture, a single language and share the same beliefs, which is not the case in many African societies. Unfortunately, that Rwandan unity was destroyed by the colonial power and divisive regimes that followed, which transformed social classes into artificial ethnic groups, while putting in place an institutional persecution of the Tutsi over three decades. We unite once again because we chose to stay together.

We renew, first through genocide survivors who rebuilt themselves physically and mentally after such a terrible tragedy and who participated in our national effort to rebuild and transform our country. We renew by giving justice to the victims while achieving reconciliation, hence through a “*restorative justice*”, in order to build a united and sustainable society. And we renew by rebuilding our country, transforming our economy and attracting investors, while taking care of the most vulnerable and protecting our planet.

*Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;
Mrs. van der Heijden;*

The Government of Rwanda renews its gratitude to the Kingdom of the Netherlands for its unwavering support since 1994. A friend in need is a friend indeed, and in the aftermath of the genocide, the Government of the Netherlands was at the forefront in supporting Rwanda in one the most critical areas after such tragedy: the justice sector. It is precisely when victims were crying out for accountability that most professionals of justice had been killed or had fled the country and that most infrastructures of justice and their equipment were destroyed or stolen.

The Dutch cooperation in that regard was quite comprehensive and decisive. Courtrooms and correctional services were rebuilt, equipped and modernized; judges, prosecutors and lawyers were trained, including here in the Netherlands, and a number of genocide suspects who had fled to this country were investigated, arrested, prosecuted or extradited. I can confidently say that the Kingdom of the Netherlands is one of the countries in Europe that have done the most in holding genocide suspects accountable. As we celebrated, last year in June 2021, the 25th anniversary of the Dutch-Rwandan cooperation in the justice sector, allow me to once again convey our satisfaction for the achievements registered in that regard.

My only hope is that the remaining genocide fugitives who still live and are currently investigated in the Netherlands will soon be brought to book. This is critical because most genocide suspects who fled abroad, including in this country, are fuelling genocide ideology with impunity since 1994 and are even engaging in subversive activities, supporting armed groups operating in the neighbouring countries, with a view to “*finishing the job*”, as they once claimed.

I take this opportunity to commend all countries that held accountable genocide fugitives, through prosecution or extradition, as well as those that supported Rwanda in its quest for justice and full recognition of the genocide against the Tutsi, be it at the African Union, the United Nations and in order international organizations. I hope that the support for accountability will continue in the years to come.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

In April 2020, the United Nations General Assembly, while reaffirming the date of 7th April as the “*International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda*”, condemned without reservation any denial of the genocide and urged member States to develop educational programmes that will inculcate in future generations the lessons of that genocide in order to help preventing future genocides. Nonetheless, twenty-eight years after this crime, survivors and Rwandans in general are still facing the scourge of genocide denial, which is in fact the last stage of the crime of genocide itself, as explained by Professor Gregory Stanton, a renowned American researcher in genocide studies.

Under the disguise of freedom of speech and academic liberty to revisit history, genocide fugitives, their relatives and friends, as well as scholars are denying, minimizing or justifying with impunity the genocide against the Tutsi. This is why the Government of Rwanda has always called the international community to consider including programmes about the genocide against the Tutsi in the schools’ curricula, in both high school and higher education. Indeed, as genocide is the most important crime in the history of humanity, as only few crimes so far were established or recognized as genocide since the 1948 Genocide convention, why would young citizens of the world deprived from learning about all genocides in an equal manner?

In the same vein, we invite all countries to consider enacting effective and implementable laws that criminalize genocide denial and minimization, on the model of what many governments have done for the Holocaust denial. So far, Belgium and France are the only countries that adopted laws criminalizing the denial of the genocide against the Tutsi, and we hope that more countries will do the same. The reason of that request is simple: denying an established and recognized genocide is not in any way exercising freedom of speech, which is consecrated in the Rwandan constitution; it is rather an attempt to blame and torment the victims while absolving the perpetrators. It’s the last stage of the crime of genocide.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen;

Despite our commitment, it is sad to note that history repeats itself. We proclaimed throughout the world “*Never Again*” after the Holocaust but how many genocides, crimes against humanity and other mass atrocities were committed on several continents since World War II until today? In the face of evil, we should reinforce our political will to shatter the great conspiracy of silence and to break down the walls of indifference and inaction. We should also reflect on the functioning and efficiency of international organizations that we tasked to deal with international peace and security, especially the UN Security Council, and propose corrective measures in their composition and methods of work.

On Rwanda's side, as a lesson learned from the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, our country became committed to peacekeeping and to the protection of civilians around the world. In that regard, our country is regularly ranked among the top five UN troops and police contributing countries globally, not to mention that our forces are also deployed in Mozambique and Central African Republic on a bilateral basis to fight terrorism and armed groups.

Rwanda also endorsed the UN principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and as a matter of facts, our country co-chaired with the Netherlands for more than a decade the Group of Friends of the R2P in New York. Similarly, Rwanda is a promoter of the Kigali Principles for the Protection of Civilians, adopted in Kigali in May 2015. Those principles are made of concrete commitments by the United Nations and by troops and police contributing countries to protect civilians more effectively.

To conclude my remarks, *excellencies, ladies and gentlemen*, I wish to call on all of us to remember, unite and renew, but most of all to continue reflecting on lessons learned from the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, especially in this troubled world of armed conflicts and related mass atrocities. As we are gathered here in The Hague, "*The City of Peace and Justice*", we should speak up and act, as diplomats, government's officials and citizens of the world, against hate, xenophobia, racism, antisemitism and all other evils that could lead to genocide.

I thank you for your kind attention.