

I'd like to thank Ambassador NDUHUNGIREHE for inviting me to today's reception. I feel honored to be able to address you as we celebrate the 28th Liberation Day and the 60th Independence Day of the Republic of Rwanda.

Rwanda was declared an autonomous republic in 1961 and gained its independence on July 1st 1962. That year marked the end of the struggle for freedom and dignity by the proud people of Rwanda. It also marked a new beginning, as Rwandans broke free from colonial rule and decided to be the captain of their own future.

This is not to say that the country faced no more challenges after 1962. In fact, the following decades proved to be full of turmoil. Ethnic tensions and political struggles went hand in hand, often resulting in violence against civilians. Tragic events eventually culminated in the genocide against the Tutsi of 1994.

The genocide destroyed the lives of countless Rwandans, including those of moderate Hutus and others who opposed the killings. It remains important to remember those who fell victim to the genocide 28 years ago. That is why our Director General Ms. Kitty van der Heijden participated in Kwibuka in The Hague on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April this year. By commemorating together we reflect on Rwanda's past, memories and pains. More importantly, we educate the youth who did not witness the genocide about what happened. The young generations must make sure that atrocities never take place again.

No generation can take peace for granted. The current events in Ukraine sadly underline that point, as do the increasing tensions in Eastern DRC. I am glad to know that Rwanda and its neighbours have committed to keeping channels of dialogue open and to work towards de-escalation of tensions in the Great Laker Region.

Today is a day of hope. Because today, it is 28 years ago since the forces of the Rwandan Patriotic Front put an end to the genocide. Since then, the Rwandan government and its people have done a tremendous job rebuilding their country. I am proud that the government of the Netherlands has assisted Rwanda in that process. Immediately after the genocide, Rwanda and the Netherlands became development partners. The Netherlands has been one of the major donors supporting the rebuilding of the justice sector in Rwanda. We took on this role because we believe justice and respect for human rights are essential in order to break the cycle of violence that has haunted Rwanda in the past.

This year, we find ourselves in between two chapters of our common history. Our countries' bilateral development cooperation will end at the end of this year. That is the chapter we are closing, in line with Rwanda's goal to become independent of foreign aid. Looking forward, both of our countries will focus on intensifying mutual trade and investments. The Netherlands is ready for that new chapter. Minister Liesje Schreinemacher presented her new strategy for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation in the Dutch parliament today. The strategy sets clear goals to enhance sustainable trade.

A few weeks ago, Minister Schreinemacher had a fruitful meeting with her Rwandan colleague Mr. Vincent Biruta. And from 13 to 18 July, a delegation of 9 members of the Dutch Parliament will visit Rwanda to reflect on our bilateral ties. These personal contacts underline that the historical bond that our countries have built in the past is strong. And it will serve as a basis to further develop a mutual beneficial trade relation in the future. Today, we celebrate that new chapter in our friendship.

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