

**Florida Reception on the eve of  
the 2016 National Prayer  
Breakfast**

**Remarks by H.E. Mrs Jeannette  
Kagame**

**Washington, D.C., 3 February  
2016**

**Senator Bill Nelson and my Dear Sister Grace,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good evening.**

It is my great pleasure to be with you on the eve of the annual National Prayer Breakfast, which every year, links us together by the common thread of compassion, reconciliation and communal fellowship.

As Rwandans, given our terrible history, the journey of reconciliation resonates the most with us. This journey is necessary yet very delicate, for reconciliation is between individuals but forgiveness is ultimately between the individual and their God.

True reconciliation is an intentional process that requires time and space.

**Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,**

Today, Rwanda is known around the world for having lived through both ends of the spectrum of the best and worst qualities one can find in mankind.

As humans we are constantly wrestling to reconcile with our past especially when we have suffered the most horrible of violations to our trust and being.

To put this in context, just imagine:

- 1 million men, women, and children massacred in 100 days.
- 100,000 women raped
- 50,000 widows
- 75,000 inconsolable orphans and
- 650,000 internally displaced persons.

The result of this was a complete collapse of family, church and state, as well as a society intoxicated with bitterness and mistrust. Families were torn apart; and the state whose mandate was to protect citizens, sponsored, planned and implemented the genocide.

This daunting truth was a painful reminder of the compelling task ahead of us. One, that put a heavy burden on the victims as much as it did on the country. It required strength and clear-sightedness of a good leadership, the willingness of a people to trust in this leadership, and most importantly, God's grace, without which nothing could be possible.

With these, Rwanda set about its remarkable journey starting off by making three clear choices: Staying together; being accountable; and thinking big.

**Staying together:** This was a non-negotiable priority, we looked within ourselves for ways to teach and practice this important step. Be it from the immediate problem solver;

punishing revenge killings, to the longer-term solution of system and institution building. We achieved this, by creating a National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, and bringing about new programmes such as 'Ndi Umunyarwanda', which stands for 'I am Rwandan' and is conducted nationwide through forums, to help reconcile the members of our communities, by encouraging an open dialogue about our history.

**Being Accountable:** We knew that it would not be fair, nor realistic, to embark on a journey towards reconciliation without holding members of our society accountable for their actions. The community-based justice system of the Gacaca courts actually contributed to this, by asking people to confess their crimes in order to help the families of the victims receive at the minimum, closure. The leadership took to the same course and every so often, reeled themselves in, but more so, have remained accountable to the people who will not accept any less than they deserve. After all, our system of governance is consensual not confrontational.

**Thinking Big:** As our nation was elaborating the blueprint to a dignified future for all its children, we knew that we had to think 'big' and always strive to push harder, and go further, in everything we do. As such we have now lifted over a million people out of poverty, provided free universal education for our children, built a healthcare system that

works and we are currently the top country with women involved in leadership.

Simultaneously, every single Rwanda undertook this journey individually.

This was evident in the woman raped and now a mother. Her child is a constant reminder of her pain and suffering, yet everyday she has to reconcile with herself for the wellbeing of her child. She draws strength from the understanding that this action is bigger than her and is for the greater good.

This was also evident in the perpetrator who felt the devastation, and guilt, and thus gathered the strength to ask the families of those he hurt for forgiveness. He drew his strength from the understanding that this action is bigger than him and also for the greater good.

For us every single statistic tells a story impossible to imagine, and it is all these meshed together that make up the intricate state of Rwanda, a country thriving in spite of its suffering.

### **Esteemed guests,**

While our exceptional leadership has paved today's Rwanda to us- I urge you all, while we "fellowship" together to carry the burden of each other's wellbeing for the greater good of

our respective societies and the generation to come. Our task as citizens -- whether we are leaders in government or business or spreading the word -- is to seek out the truth that exists in an opposing view and to find the common ground that allows for us as a nation, as a people, to take real and meaningful action- to embrace our Agaciro (our dignity)

I am grateful to be with you all, joined together in common purpose, believing in something that is bigger than ourselves, and the ideals that lie at the heart of our nation's founding -- that as a people we are bound together.

Just as Matthew notes in Chapter 18: 20 *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them”*, Acknowledging this truth, I am confident that gatherings such as these will directly influence the trajectory of our history.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you a pleasant evening.