

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's Address  
at the  
National Prayer Breakfast Sister's Gathering**

**Washington, D.C., U.S.A**

**4 February 2019**

## **Dear Sisters**

Good Afternoon.

Every year, I look forward to this time where we gather to fellowship and learn from each other. I am honoured as always, to share with you the Rwandan journey, how far we have come and understanding that we have more ground to cover.

Let me take you down memory lane, the state of the country we came home to almost 25 years ago:

A shattered state with victims of mass rapes and HIV infected, widows, orphans, internally displaced refugees, over a million men, women, and children massacred and empty coffers.

### **In short, a hopeless and helpless state.**

With these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, we made important choices, a major one being 'staying together'.

When the leadership, steered us in this direction, it was a tough one to live by, and to be honest it hurt everyone to the core.

The leadership knew what it was asking and was fully aware of the magnitude of this sacrifice. Indeed, they knew that that our resilience as a people, and our will to live beyond survival would carry us long way. And still does to this day.

And even though, our stories are varied and transcend space and time, they however have a common thread.

They are all important bits of a much-needed heart to heart conversation that has steered us towards unity and a solidified common identity.

The pessimist, said that we were a nation waiting to fall apart for bottling up all these emotions. The optimist said that if we succeeded, we would be a miracle nation.

But we are just a people that have witnessed the darkest side of humanity, and are determined not to go back.

### **We are every bit intentional.**

Staying together, meant reconciliation but also meant restoring justice.

Since, there was no instruction manual anywhere in the world on how to recover after a genocide, we constructed one as we grew, inspired from our rich culture. This took constant dialogue, which slowly reignited the nation building flame.

It is almost 25 years now since the Genocide against the Tutsi, and we are still struggling to not belittle the survivor's grief but still uphold them to the same standards as any active citizen.

Their grit is like none other, and the Rwandan community continues to be their backbone especially in moments of weakness.

Also, we have the once sentenced mass murderer waiting for his twenty-fifth year, he will be coming home any day now.

We have done everything to prepare him to be able to cope with life after prison, and we have also done everything to prepare his neighbors and the family of his victims to help reintegrate him into society.

This reintegration is nothing foreign to us, we treated chaff and grain alike and molded it into a reformed society where everyone finds his or her rightful place.

There is a saying in my language, Kinyarwanda that goes; “God spends the day elsewhere, but always comes home to Rwanda to rest.” It is true, as a nation we have experienced first-hand God’s grace. We have seen love, tolerance, peace, and faith at work.

**Dear Sisters,**

On this panel you will hear from strong Rwandan women who will tell you more about the journey they have walked. And how servant leadership set the foundation for the reconstruction of our nation.

I thank you for your kind attention.