

- **Honorable Ministers,**
- **Representatives of international organizations,**
- **Keynote speakers,**
- **Dear children,**
- **Distinguished delegates,**
- **People living with HIV and AIDS,**

Good afternoon,

It is clear, from the recommendations presented by Dr. Sabin and Aline, that the last 72 hours were well spent. By exchanging experiences and evidence, we are better able to continue the collective struggle against the scourge of HIV and AIDS.

We are delighted to have hosted this year's international HIV research and pediatric conference, and it is an honor for me to share a few reflections with you today.

I want to appreciate the daunting task researchers have. Occasional sudden breakthroughs cannot mask the fact that your work is, by nature, painstaking and slow. Yet perseverance is the only sure way forward. Even though we have not mastered the virus and its mutations, we have indeed made important progress in

treating it and preventing its transmission. Working together, scientists and public health institutions have saved millions of lives, and given new hope to millions more.

I will spare you too many statistics, as I am sure you probably know the numbers better than me. Allow me to share a little bit about the journey we have taken to respond to HIV and the important points it has brought into focus:

- Our continent has been the most affected by HIV, representing more than 90% of the worldwide HIV burden,
- The high HIV rates are aggravated by conflict, socio-economic inequality, as well as gender vulnerability, sexual violence, and forced migration,
- We in Africa need to get the science right, which means a clear focus on research and development, but also to integrate scientific results into our national health systems,
- Funding levels for treatment programs have decreased, which calls for more innovative ways to sustain the gains we have made.

The good news is that we have learned valuable lessons about the nature of HIV infection. Even more important, is that we put these discoveries to use, to save lives.

But let's also take a moment to recall that our work speaks to a larger context. The challenge of HIV, forces all of us to stretch the boundaries of our abilities and our imaginations, beyond what we even thought possible. This is a good thing by any measure, and it is a spirit that we can also bring to bear on the many other urgent problems that confront us as a global community.

One of the important things we have seen, is that HIV cannot be managed effectively with a broken health system. Therefore, the pandemic has shown us the broader importance of making **our health systems** work. Healthcare deals directly with human life in its most fragile moments, and it simply has to function. Investments in HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, have afforded us the opportunity to improve our health system more generally, compounding the return on the investments that have been made.

One of the approaches that we found essential here in Rwanda is community engagement and empowerment. We have 45,000 Community Health Workers nation-wide, who work on a volunteer basis to educate the community about HIV prevention and general health issues. A familiar and trusted presence at the local level, they help manage cases and help improve access to services and information for underserved populations.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As you may know, Rwanda emerged from genocide 20 years ago. This left the nation in total collapse. There were thousands of injuries to treat, and rape and HIV had been used as weapons of war. Yet our health system, like other public institutions, had ceased to exist. This left us with no clear template for charting a way forward.

Much like a scientist or a researcher in a lab, our leadership explored a number of possibilities to try and stitch together the torn national fabric. Through hard work, a common vision, and a commitment to national unity and reconciliation, our nation has moved from an emergency phase to a period of stabilization. Now, we are working to consolidate our gains, and further expand our horizons and ambitions for the well-being of our people.

We started out using unconventional ways; truly experimenting with what we thought might deliver results for Rwandans. We set a bold vision, with measurable development targets, which leaders at all levels of government are responsible for meeting.

Every year performance is evaluated against those targets. There are consequences if the targets are not met. This keeps leaders accountable and improves outcomes for citizens.

In other words, our policies and implementation are informed by evidence.

While we can be proud of the gains that have been made, challenges still remain. Otherwise, you would not have needed to spend the last three days here. These challenges, in the fight against HIV and AIDS, should not be our **stop-over** but should rather our **step-over**.

Gatherings like these demonstrate the kind of international solidarity required to make progress in fighting this pandemic. I believe HIV and AIDS have brought the world together, to solve a problem, as no other global health issue has ever done. This shows how, even in terrible tragedy, the seeds of renewal and progress are always there to be found, if we choose to look for them.

Distinguished delegates, as I end my remarks,

I wish to urge those responsible for implementation, to take the knowledge from these brilliant minds and use it to make a difference. Every step, every breakthrough represents a renewal of hope for people living with HIV, and a chance for them to live with the dignity they deserve. I salute their bravery and strength.

Our children both challenge and inspire us to work even harder towards the next discovery. Little ones — we have heard your voices, and we will give our all, to make sure yours is an HIV free generation.

I now declare the 2014 International HIV research conference closed.

Thank you.