

**First Lady Mrs Jeannette Kagame's remarks**

**at**

**Global Hope Coalition Joint Action Meeting**

**'Women, Children and the Trauma of Extremism'**

**New York, 18 September 2017**

**Excellencies First Ladies,  
Madame Irina Bokova, Director General of  
UNESCO,  
Senior Government Officials and Representatives  
of Civil Society Organisations,  
Nobel Peace Prize 2015 Laureate Ms. Wided  
Bouchamaoui,  
Distinguished representatives from the Experts  
Committee of the Global Hope Coalition,  
Honourable speakers,  
Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Good morning,**

It is my great pleasure to be here with you today, at this high-level panel discussion on ‘Women, Children and the Trauma of Extremism’, as held in the margins of this 72<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations.

Allow me to start by thanking UNESCO for this invitation to speak on a topic that affects the world as a whole, and by extending best wishes of future successful breakthroughs to the Global Hope

Coalition, as they add their voices to this crucial fight against extremism.

It was just a few months ago, that some of us present in this room, met during the 4<sup>th</sup> World Forum On Intercultural Dialogue in Baku, to discuss how to “Counter Violent Extremism through Girls’ Education”.

I humbly believe our world is in desperate need of giving the right attention to this question of extremism, so together we can find thorough, and sensible solutions, to this issue, as demonstrated by the different acts of violence we continue to witness, near and far from our homes.

Extremism poses a multi-layered threat to the communities of the world, as it operates under the disguise of different socio-cultural motivations, leaving us with the huge responsibility to fight an evil force, that continues to display an ever-changing face.

Indeed, all of us in this room have witnessed how a single idea would develop into grotesque formation of ideologies, that terrorize societies, and sometimes entire regions, as their extreme violence disproportionately affects the most powerless, and vulnerable holders of our communities' future – women and children.

Which other best time to add our voice to this important issue when the whole world has convened in New York for the General Assembly of the United Nations to assess and recommit to the global goals.

### **Distinguished Guests,**

Allow me to share my story, the story of my people, the story of a country that was once terrorized, traumatized 23 years ago.

From over 1 million of lives lost; thousands of women raped and deliberately infected with HIV; to thousands of widows and orphans; thousands internally displaced, while 2 million people were used as shields, by the extremist Genocidal regime,

and coerced into fleeing with them to a neighbouring country; to over one thousand children born from rape.

The impact of those figures is never easy to comprehend, but this is the reality that our nation faced in the aftermath of the genocide.

I am saying this because I owe it to the many survivors who will only open up about what they went through, to those they consider close.

The awaited end of the genocide, led to the stark realisation that the country was in a vacuum. So much was lost, and much more would be needed to rebuild.

The irony was that those who were given so much to handle and lost everything, were the ones expected to give the most of themselves.

This post-1994 era also saw a strong and defiant survival instinct contribute to the healing of our nation, at a time that the new state had to provide

answers to our many socio-political and economic priorities.

Our nation also saw programmes initiated by organisations made by survivors of violent extremism, seeking to provide socio-economic support to other survivors. Such organisations include AVEGA, which was created by widows of the Genocide; and AERG, the association of student survivors, whose alumni have now formed families of their own, and became leaders in their communities.

In 1996, the Unity Club, of which I am the Chairperson, was also founded, bringing together female members of the government, along with the wives of government officials, to promote social cohesion and the sustainable development of our country.

I wish that you fully grasp the impact on the mental health of our women and youth, after surviving such forms of violence:

- The severe number of rapes, and other forms of humiliation, that were carried out during the genocide, burdened many of them with an even more degrading and painful experience, as these rapes sometimes resulted in physical disabilities, and in pregnancies, forcing the victims to carry the child of the perpetrator.
- For the children born from rape, the trauma of the genocide is something they continue to experience through feelings of shame, and alienation from members of their community.
- For many of the women, youth and children, surviving the genocide meant facing a life without their loved ones. Many were now left to fend for themselves and others; and too many children had to become heads of their households. The sudden shift of responsibility and roles became an added burden to their already destroyed homes.
- And until today, survivors continue to experience the trauma of witnessing mass deaths around them, as they saw unspeakable cruelty and

violence inflicted by people they knew and sometimes, cared for.

Confronted with all of this, one cannot help but ask a few questions:

Why is it that some governments show more difficulty than others in providing true security to all its citizens, including its minority groups?

Why is it that an increasing number of young people are willingly leaving their lives behind, to join extremist groups in other parts of the world?

Why is it that religious or racial intolerance can so easily be protected under freedom of speech, although we all know too well that extremism is born out of intolerance?

Where is/was the global community that has pledged “never again”, and which mechanism can be put in place to quickly identify the warning signs,



and put a stop to rising extremist thoughts before they harm our people?

**Esteemed audience,**

The traumas I have talked about come to light often times during the months of commemoration, held every year in Rwanda.

In the aftermath of the Genocide, we had to take an honest look at the causes of the violent extremism we had just lived through, in order to devise sound strategies, to help us all regain dignity and strength, and make 'Never Again' a reality.

**Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to reiterate that we can no longer afford to wait to take a strong stand against extremism, for it can be compared to a lethal disease spreading fast across borders, and harming our communities.

My country Rwanda lived through great pain and loss, so I urge you all to consider our past, as a warning of the kind of destruction that takes place when we allow extremism to grow.

As expressed by President Paul Kagame:

*“We cannot turn the clock back nor can we undo the harm caused, but we have the power to determine the future and to ensure that what happened never happens again.”*

So together, let us embrace this power that lies within all of us, and join hands to put an end to violent extremism.

I thank you all for your kind attention.