

First Lady Jeannette Kagame's Address
at the
National Prayer Breakfast
Leadership Luncheon

Washington, D.C., U.S.A
8 February 2018

Honourable Guests,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon.

I am honoured to be with you, once again, to give thanks, share in our fellowship, strengthen friendships, and pray for our nations.

The National Prayer Breakfast is a wonderful opportunity to reflect and share on the journeys that we have travelled, and lessons they hold for us.

I am always compelled to share with friends, old and new, the journey I know best, and that is the story of my country, Rwanda. It is a story that happens far away from here, but holds truths that are familiar for every human being.

At the beginning of this year, an article in Vogue Magazine caught my eye. It was titled “Where to Travel in 2018, According to the Experts”, and Rwanda was one of two African countries featured.

In particular, these lines about Rwanda, struck a deep chord:

“Although most travelers head to Rwanda, to see the endangered mountain gorillas, it is the resilient spirit of the people, and the beauty of the landscapes, that make so many vow to return. In fact, this central African country, delivers an incredible amount of optimism and promise: two things that are too scarce in the world today.”

It was incredibly gratifying, to see other people view Rwanda in this way, the way we ourselves, see our country.

But let me tell you a little bit, about some of the steps we had to take, from Genocide and failed state in 1994, to a “2018 must-visit” destination according to travel experts.

One of the most important lessons we learned in Rwanda, is that after the guns fall silent, the real battle begins. And this was the struggle; to reconcile Rwandans – victims and perpetrators, rebuild a devastated social fabric, and restore shattered trust.

There were over one million loved ones to bury, homes to reconstruct, an economy to rebuild, orphans and widows to comfort.

In order to do this, we had to build national unity. But how does one get there, after such a tragedy?

Well, I can assure you, there was no instruction manual for this new process, and going back was not an option. So, armed with faith, and a clear goal, Rwandans got to work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The rebuilding of our nation did not happen overnight, as you can imagine, and it continues to this day.

In the wake of this calamity, we had to go beyond the human equation and from the good, the bad and the ugly, sift out a reconciled society guided by the "better angels of our nature.

To do so, we had to reopen old wounds, open up to one

another on a human level, but most importantly, open up to the possibility of living as ONE people in ONE nation.

Throughout this journey, the resilient women of Rwanda have, in many ways, held up the sky. Thrown into unfamiliar roles, in a world turned upside-down, they have worked hard alongside their brothers, fathers, and sons to pick up the pieces, and fashion a resilient nation, where everyone, no matter their background or history, has a place.

And the men of Rwanda have supported their sisters, wives, and daughters, understanding that we are in this together, and no one should be left behind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This snapshot of Rwanda's story, is the reason why recognition of our rise holds such value.

They recognise what we are living today, the results of almost two decades of hard work.

Tangible signs, that Rwandans are happier, and have high hopes for a better future, are everywhere. Sounds of

construction, busy markets, children playing on school grounds and neighbourhood streets, new restaurants, evenings of poetry and music, things that were only a distant dream twenty years ago, are now part of the Rwandan landscape.

We guard our progress dearly and do not take it for granted.

We thank our friends who have walked this path with us.

And we appreciate these life-affirming annual forums that bring us together to spread messages of hope, reassert our faith in humanity, and our power to impact positive change in our global communities.

May our hearts and minds, be guided by the Highest Power, as we continue to gain a deeper understanding into our life's purpose, and our duty and responsibility in securing a better future for all.

I thank you for your kind attention.