

- **Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,**
- **Silvana Koch-Melhrin, Founder and Chair of the Women in Parliament global forum,**
- **President of the Rwandan Senate,**
- **Speakers of Parliament,**
- **Honorable Ministers,**
- **Senators and Members of Parliament,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good evening,

We are so used to being taken out by men, but it feels good, rather refreshing to have a ladies night out. I thank the *Women In Parliament* global forum, for choosing Rwanda to host its 2014 summer summit.

By virtue of your positions, it feels as though the millions you represent were actually in the room with us. Tonight, I promise to spare you the statistics because I know how difficult they can be to digest with dinner. I will simply share a few thoughts on the

forum's theme: *how the spirit of women in Parliaments can advance societies.*

We thank you for coming together to share ideas and inspiration, on how you can be better enablers, of an equal and just world. Nous vous remercions de vous être réunies afin d'échanger des idées et vous inspirer mutuellement, sur le moyen de devenir de meilleurs catalyseurs en vue d'un monde juste et équitable.

Rwanda is pleased and honored to welcome such a force, especially at this significant time in our journey – 20 years since the liberation of our country, from the genocidal regime.

As we come out of the 100 days of mourning, we salute the women who shouldered an immense burden during this most tragic time of our history, enduring horrors that would shake any human being to the core.

In these next few days, the national mood will be punctuated by a sense of gratitude, to the Rwandan sons and daughters who stopped the genocide against the Tutsi. We hold our liberation

process and those that led it, in high regard, we are conscious of the price they had to pay. Their sacrifice is warm in our veins.

As the world watched on television, these brave men and women stopped to look fear in the face and fought evil with purpose and passion. They refused to close their eyes and hearts to the worst form of human cruelty, a people can face.

We would be remiss if we did not pay tribute to our defense forces as we celebrate the 20th liberation. These valiant men and women in uniform continue to be part and parcel of Rwanda's development. They have truly surpassed our expectations by not only protecting civilians, but also providing practical solutions to daily problems.

For instance: they introduced the annual 'Army Week' initiative. They build schools, homes for survivors of the genocide, health centers and they provide medical care for communities. They have participated in peacekeeping missions in Africa and beyond, where they help women make energy-saving stoves to limit their visits to

the bushes in search of firewood, risking rape and death. They have held the Rwandan flag high.

Our National Police has also played a pivotal role in the campaign to end violence against women and girls in Rwanda, and hosts the Africa Centre for Security Organs to end Violence against women and girls, mobilizing an unprecedented 32 African countries against this pandemic.

Since we have only a few men in the room, let me hope they will not take offense at what I am about to say. In the last few centuries, under the exclusive leadership of men we have seen 2 world wars; several genocides; the rise of terrorism; a world dictated by the scramble for scarce resources, and the advancement of strategic interests at the expense of human dignity. I am only stating facts, no emotions.

Ladies and gentlemen:

While we are not going to pretend that women can fix all the problems, I believe we can make a difference, at this tipping point.

Some would argue that people only respond to economic incentives and force. As women we dream of a world where soft power: aspects such as values, culture, innovation can be compatible with the responsible quest for global influence and wealth creation.

True, the world has evolved and demands that we aspire for more and better. The age we live in requires more of our skills and energy. Martin Luther King said and I quote '*there is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time*'. Ladies, this is our time. For a second, can you imagine what the world would miss out on, if they had ignored and excluded such a powerful group?

We enjoyed the confident and bold expressions from Sophia, Natacha and Angel, along with our graceful traditional dancers. I cannot forget Sandrine and Carole, our MCs. These young women are the face of Rwandan women all over this country. Women who work very hard and are in fact the ones delivering key targets, such as the Millennium Development Goals, on behalf of Rwanda. They need to be encouraged to do even better.

I also want to acknowledge women leaders at national and community level. They have been instrumental in Rwanda's rebirth and reconstruction and some of them are in the room tonight. This was all made possible, thanks to a visionary leadership that recognized our rightful space.

As legislators representing millions of constituents, I wish to leave you with a few challenges:

- Will you be remembered as the generation of global women leaders that used its power to reach out to the often forgotten?
- Are you ready to protect and sustain the gains women have made?
- And if I may borrow from Angel, will you be a legend?

As I close my remarks, I would like to thank you for associating with Rwanda, especially at this time. This global sisterhood means a lot to us. Thank you for your kind attention and I wish you a memorable stay in Rwanda.