

- **Your Excellency President Michel Martelly,**
- **First Lady Mrs. Sophia Martelly,**
- **Distinguished Members of Cabinet and Parliament,**
- **Senator Jim Inhofe,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good evening,

Tonight I am honored by Senator Inhofe's gracious invitation, to share with this audience, the Role of Prayer and the impact it has had on our success in Rwanda.

As leaders you may have heard about Rwanda in varying degrees. We are mostly known for 3Gs – Gorillas, Governance and Gender. Allow me to build on this knowledge, highlight key parts of our history, and the journey we have undertaken, over the last few years.

2014 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> commemoration since the horrific Genocide Against the Tutsi. What Rwanda went through in 1994, was the culmination of over 3 decades of systematic classification, dehumanization, persecution and extermination of a targeted group of people. When all was said and done, the Genocide did not

benefit a single Rwandan; neither the masterminds and perpetrators and certainly not the victims.

The net result was a complete collapse of family, church and state, as well as a society intoxicated with bitterness and mistrust. Families were torn apart; thousands of innocent people were brutally murdered, in so-called sacred places of worship; the state whose mandate it is to protect citizens, sponsored, planned and implemented the genocide.

The numbers are shocking:

- Hundreds of thousands of women were systematically raped,
- 300,000 – 400,000 people survived the genocide,
- 50,000 widows and 75,000 inconsolable orphans,
- 650,000 internally displaced persons,
- 2 million refugees fled to the Democratic Republic of Congo after the Genocide and held as hostages and used as shields, by the extremist Genocide regime, bent on finishing their work,

- 1 million Tutsi and moderate Hutu men, women, and children who were supposed to be part of our future and not our past, were massacred in 100 dark days.

Our faith was tested. There is a saying in Kinyarwanda that goes “Imana yirirwa ahandi, igataha mu Rwanda.” Loosely translated to mean “God spends the day elsewhere and returns home to rest in Rwanda”. In 1994, we lamented and often wondered where this God had gone.

We questioned 1 Corinthians 10:13, which teaches us that: “God does not give us more than we can bear”. What our nation endured, was an overwhelming cross to bear. We bear a responsibility is to reconcile people to God; we are called to reconcile people to each other.

What choices could we make to restore the humanity and sanity that had vanished? Would people ever trust one another?

To mend this brokenness, to restore confidence and credibility in our institutions, we had to carry out deep soul searching. The leadership often had to make tough, unpopular decisions.

We, however, understood, that it was in the best interest of our people and our country.

We swallowed the bitter pill to help us heal faster, as opposed to going for the band aid therapy.

Let me share some examples of necessary choices that were met with resistance:

- Gacaca was a value based court system, that promoted restorative rather than punitive justice, for both Genocide survivors and perpetrators;
- Restoration of property to families of genocide perpetrators, despite the urge to redistribute that property to survivors who were wronged and lost their families and property, due to the Genocide;
- 40,000 prisoners who committed genocide were released due to old age, under a compassionate plea;
- Laws were put in place to forbid revenge killings. Those who exacted revenge; knew the fate that awaited them and some took their own lives. Capital punishment was abolished, this was unusual for a nation emerging from genocide.

In my view, going beyond personal suffering prevented Rwanda from becoming a failed state. We opted instead to embark on a road to recovery.

As we began the journey towards nation building, we discovered that infrastructure could be fixed with enough resources and human capacity.

However, Ladies and Gentlemen, on the opposite end of the spectrum, healing hearts and building people's psyche is a generational undertaking.

We quickly realized that what unites us, is far greater than what divides us. We challenged ourselves to be a voice of unity and reconciliation. We are working towards a collective consciousness of who we are as one people. We have transcended peaceful co-existence to becoming a truly integrated and cohesive community.

To foster social cohesion, last year we embarked on a national process that we called "Ndi Umunyarwanda" or "I am Rwandan". The idea behind "Ndi Umunyarwanda" is to engage all Rwandans in a critical and truthful self-examination exercise, through open

conversation. It is about understanding and strengthening the Rwandan spirit, with our dignity taking center stage. It is an important step in creating trust after what Rwandans went through. Ndi Umunyarwanda is about Rwandan's taking responsibility for their destiny.

I am reminded of Dr. Ben Carson's remarks during the 2013 National Prayer Breakfast. In his speech Dr. Carson mentioned that we are getting too sensitive; and it is keeping people from expressing what they truly believe.

Ndi Umunyarwanda is such a platform where political correctness and sensitivities are secondary to speaking the truth, value-sharing, and understanding our history. Without social harmony, a nation cannot progress towards socio-economic transformation. This is what we are fighting for and we are determined to win. Rwandan unity is a source of energy for our development.

Last month, at the Rwanda Leaders Fellowship Prayer Breakfast, where the country's leaders gather periodically to pray for the nation, President Kagame encouraged leaders 'not to waste the tragedy'.

His statement was in reference to the Genocide against Tutsi. Although, we cannot erase our tragic past, Ndi Umunyarwanda is about turning this tragedy into triumph based on 4 pillars: history, testimony, truth and trust and healing through forgiveness.

In just 20 short years, Rwanda has done well on several fronts, such as:

- Gender parity with 64% female representation in parliament;
- Ease of doing business, with a ranking of 3<sup>rd</sup> easiest economy to do business in Sub-Saharan Africa. It takes 6 hours to register a business in Rwanda;
- Globally, Rwanda is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> for having the best prison rehabilitation programs. We respect of the rule of law, even behind bars.

This incredible rise from the ashes did not just happen by mistake. All credit goes to our citizens, who have engaged their hearts, heads and hands to work for and own the process of progress. Our success comes from the vision of an informed leadership, and certainly the hand of God.

Distinguished audience,

As I end my remarks tonight, I ask that we join hands in human solidarity. “May God grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can and the wisdom to know the difference”. This prayer, originally authored by an American Theologian, (Reinhold Neibuhr) speaks to God’s hand in Rwanda’s rebirth.

We stand by the belief that God granted us the serenity, the courage and the wisdom to lift ourselves from the depths of evil, to the optimism of a new dawn.

Thank you for your kind attention.