

**REMARKS BY MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND ATTORNEY GENERAL ON THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)**

Kigali, 10 December 2018

- UN Resident Coordinator & UNDP Resident Representative;
- Honourable Representatives of the Diplomatic Community;
- Colleagues representatives from Government;
- Private sector representatives;
- Members of Civil Society;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good evening.

On behalf of the Government of Rwanda, allow me to first express our sincere thanks to One-UN Rwanda for inviting us to be part of this event to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which coincides with the commemoration of International Human Rights Day.

We gather here to join the family of nations in celebrating the collective achievements of the past seven decades since the adoption of UDHR on 10 December 1948. It is also an opportune moment to reflect on where we, collectively, fell short and renew our commitments. This day is as relevant today as it was 70 years ago.

It remind us all that the adoption of the UDHR was preceded by tragedies that exacted a devastating toll on human rights. In the three decades preceding the adoption of the UDHR, the World had known two world wars, a great depression and the Holocaust.

The adoption of the UDHR, was a demonstration of a commitment to prevent similar tragedy from happening again.

To give effect to the UDHR, which was initially seen as an aspirational document, other instruments with binding force were adopted. Today, the UDHR is as parent document to at least 18 human rights instruments including nine core ones.

In the context of Rwanda, all human rights enshrined under the UDHR are provided for under the Constitution. Chapter 4 of the 2015 Constitution is dedicated to human rights and freedoms. In the spirit of Article 29 (1) of the UDHR, the Constitution of Rwanda also recognizes duties of the state and citizens.

Rwanda is also party to 8 of the 9 core human rights instruments; including The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

To institutionalise the promotion and protection of human rights Rwanda has put in place a policy and legal framework. The National Commission for Human Rights was established in 1999 and constitutionally mandated to promote human rights. Recently, its mandate was expanded to include the National Preventive Mechanism.

The Constitution mandates the Judiciary to protect human rights and freedoms. Various government initiatives continue to be implemented with a view to giving effect to protection, preservation and promotion of human rights.

When we take stock of the 70 years we are celebrating today, we see a world in large parts of which the rights enshrined under the UDHR are violated or threatened despite its adoption and support by UN member states. Millions of lives have been or are under threat from war and civil insurrection.

Around us we see indignity, inequality, illiteracy, hunger, injustice, corruption, religious, ethnic and nationalist bigotry, mass proliferation of illicit small and big arms. In this chunk of our world violent means of conflict resolution are still a choice made with relative ease.

We also see another world, richer by far, where the indignity of poverty, hunger, aid dependence, and illiteracy are no longer issues and by coincidence, violent means of conflict resolution ceased to exist and they have built very strong institutions that withstand shocks.

From this latter world, we see effort, at times determined, at times half-hearted to stand up to serious violations of human rights. We also see aid flows to the former world and alongside the aid, unilateral lessons and lectures to the former world on just about everything regarding they should live.

The disparity between these two increasingly visible worlds has a history that we need not go into tonight, and we can't wish it away, much as we wish we could, but it is a disparity that needs to be reduced and eliminated altogether if the DHR is to start to have universal relevance. And the role of every actor is more than ever before imperative.

In the case of Rwanda, the four decades that followed the adoption of the UDHR were characterized by ethnic polarisation, discrimination, exclusion and extremism in that order, and culminated in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi. There was a government in office, the colonial State was never too far and the world was watching.

Much of this travesty was happening when Rwanda acceded to the UDHR IN 1962 and continued until 1994. The world said Never Again again and Rwandans learnt that we are responsible for protecting our rights.

Today Rwanda remains optimistic of the importance and relevance of the UDHR and its sister treaties in the protection of human rights.

Like many countries which have made good use of it the UDHR needs to be provided with a face and a life by institutionalising it through domestically enforceable law.

The UDHR inspired a number of laws since 1994 including, as earlier stated, the Bill of Rights in our Constitution. The human rights standards recognized under the Declaration were and remain inspirational in the whole process of rendering justice in the country.

For the past two and half decades Rwanda has been trying to recover from a situation where a state policy of ethic bigotry was driven to its most extreme and resulted in the Genocide against the Tutsi. The wounds are still raw. The memory of the genocide still lives with and among us.

Standing up to genocide ideology and denial remains one key challenge we deal with many times for many reasons including the argument, used time after time, that the law and policies against genocide ideology and denial actually amount, or are too close for comfort, to violation of the right to freedom of expression.

Rwanda has forged unity and the rule of law from a ethnically fractured nation that we were 24 short years ago. Our intent is to build a political culture where the criteria for political engagement, association and representation will be issues, not narrow identity, as the key priority.

We have come this far together; Rwandans and the international community. The journey ahead is still long but that is only a reason to redouble commitment.

An event like this should remind us of the price of complacency and make us all, irrespective of nationality or function, commit ourselves to standing up to those who seek to spread ethnic hatred, genocide ideology, genocide denial and revisionism so they know the world stands together against them, and will outlast them.

We are grateful to countries which have cooperated with domestic and International Justice to bring genocide suspects to account. We call upon those which, politically or legally, are not yet able to do so, to find the courage to do so or they will go down in history as having provided safe haven to genocide fugitives.

For the last 24 years, Rwanda has addressed issues of UDHR rights as much as time, circumstances and resources could permit.

Rwandans continue to enjoy their rights to voice, dignity, choice, participation, association, holding Government accountable, and freedom from want.

The Government works around the clock, with all partners, to address the impediments to enjoyment of these rights that are inherent in the socio-economic situation we find ourselves in, which must change for the better if the people are to meaningfully exercise and enjoy these rights.

Today, every Rwandan child of school age can freely access education up to 12 years, there is no discrimination in admission. Most Rwandans have access to health insurance. Women are no longer a special group seeking equal rights. It is the state which is called upon to answer and address when and how, in the first place, women became less equal, in rights, than men! Children, persons with disabilities and historically marginalised people are recognized and given their due space. Poverty rates continue to fall. All 11 registered political parties are represented in the Lower House of Parliament and the percentage of women is still higher. The country's Parliament is inclusive.

The recent Rwanda Governance Score Card (RGS 2018), shows that respect for human rights, compliance with obligations under core international human rights instruments, media freedom, rule of law, democratic rights and freedoms and security and safety are all doing well, although there is always ground to cover.

At the international level, most international indices show that Rwanda is making strides in safety and security, in competitiveness, in being a good destination for conferences and events.

We continue to be relatively well-ranked in fighting corruption, reliability of police services, and independence of the judiciary.

Beyond our borders, Rwanda has made her modest contribution in protecting people whose rights were/are imperilled by war and conflict.

We continue to believe, and I hope it is not in dispute, that the indignity inherent in poverty, illiteracy, disease, inequality, ethnic bigotry, injustice, lack of decent shelter and cyclic hunger not only militates against the enjoyment of all other rights, it also makes people vulnerable and puts them permanently at the mercy of the elements.

By trying to address them we believe we are removing the worst impediment to meaningful voice, choice, participation, association and accountability. The Government of Rwanda deeply appreciates the profound support of all its partners without whom we would not be where we are.

Allow me to reiterate the Government of Rwanda's strong commitment and readiness to continue collaborating with all stakeholders to advance the cause of human rights.

Regarding the State reporting processes (UPR and treaty bodies) the Government of Rwanda reiterates its commitment to keep the processes open and inclusive to all stakeholders and partners.

In the same way, we encourage all partners who do shadow/parallel reports to share them in advance so we work together to deliver on those recommendations, or agree to keep the engagement going, to avoid the secretive practices that characterised previous sessions. I am happy to report that Government and the majority of Partners have already agreed to work this way.

However, if some feel more comfortable to act secretly all the way to Geneva, still they should feel free to do so. We will understand it in the context of the rights of the minority.

I will end by expressing special thanks to the One-UN Rwanda for your invaluable support to the Government of Rwanda in many aspects particularly in the area of human rights. Government pledges its continued support and collaboration with you as we strive to make the protection and promotion of human rights a priority for all.

Our thanks to all partners and friends in our journey to development. We do not take your partnership and friendship for granted.

With these remarks, ladies and gentlemen, may I once again wish us all wonderful celebrations of the International Human Rights Day and joyous 70th anniversary of the UDHR.

Thank you!