

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE/ ATTORNEY GENERAL

CEREMONY ORGANISED BY ONE-UN RWANDA FOR THE 71st COMMEMORATION
OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS
THEME: YOUTH, STANDING UP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

December 10th 2019 - 7 pm, Serena Hotel / Kigali, Rwanda

UN Resident Coordinator,
UNDP Representative,
Honourable representatives of the diplomatic community,
Colleagues representatives from Government,
UN representatives,
Civil Society leaders,
Private sector representatives and other dignitaries;
Ladies and gentlemen.

Good evening.

It is my pleasure and honour to speak on this special occasion today for the celebration of International Human Rights Day; a day that marks the 71st anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

This important day which is celebrated in every part of the world, allows us to reflect on what has been achieved since the adoption of UDHR in 1948, and renew our commitments in the promotion of human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen;

The UDHR is a milestone document, which underpins all international human rights law and inspires us to continue to work to ensure all people can gain freedom, equality and dignity. It outlines the minimum requirements – in the form of basic rights – for a life lived with dignity. As of today, the UDHR is considered the ‘parent’ document to at least 18 human rights instruments including the 9 core instruments.

It is as relevant today as it was when it was adopted 71 years ago, even more so with the recent conflicts occurring in some parts of the world.

Distinguished delegates:

Rwanda acceded to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on 18th September 1962 upon its admission as a member of the United Nations.

However, just like any other human rights instrument; signature, ratification or accession by a state does not in itself have any impact on the people until concrete steps are made and clear actions are taken to breathe life into the instruments.

Case in point is , that in spite of Rwanda's Accession to the Declaration the genocide against Tutsi happened, cost of us over a million lives and sunk our country into near oblivion.

Post - genocide Rwanda, however, is committed to the importance of human rights in rebuilding the country. Consistent with the UDHR, various national laws recognising and protecting human rights have been adopted since 1994.

We are proud of where we are today and optimistic of the future ahead.

Today, all human rights enshrined under the UDHR are not only provided for in our national laws but also in our Constitution.

Rwanda has also put in place strong policy, legal and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of human rights. The National Commission for Human Rights for example, serves as the leading institution in charge of the promotion and protection of human rights. Its mandate was expanded to include the National Preventive Mechanism.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

For the last 25 years, Rwanda has fought to recover from the tragedy that was our past. Notwithstanding the crucial developments made in the field of human rights, more needs to be done to build the Rwanda we want. We are not perfect, nor do we claim to be, but as President Paul Kagame said, **“We have fought for human rights and freedom of our people much better and more than anyone. Where we have taken our country from and where it is, speaks for itself”**.

Distinguished guests:

This year, the celebration focuses on urging young people – from children to young adults – to tap their own power to change the world. Youth standing up for human rights isn't only the right thing to do, it is common sense.

Youth are leaders in the making today, leaders tomorrow and leadership mentors of the future. The 2019 theme therefore is about sustainability and continuity of the promotion and protection of human rights and for good governance.

Rwanda prioritises the involvement and empowerment of youth. Their space and voice have been enshrined in law and in policy.

Youth platforms have been created to institutionalise this space. These platforms assure youth of the information and capacity they need to understand, sustain and expand the human rights observance space. We work to ensure that the youth are fully involved today so they sustain tomorrow.

Youth have a present and a future to think about, to plan for, or to defend. Youth today have the networks and connections that transcend geographical boundaries which enables them to share experience and positively influence governance.

The Government of Rwanda is keenly aware of the role and potential of the youth not only to stand up for human rights but to do so from a position of information, engagement and ownership, not from a situation where youth and government suddenly find themselves at two opposing ends.

Government makes the necessary planning and investment to ensure that youth have meaningful participation in the development agenda of the country. The recently adopted National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) puts emphasis on youth in specific priority areas such as:

- Support and empowerment of youth to create **business** through **entrepreneurship and access to finance** to ensure digital literacy,
- **Prevention and fighting of drug abuse and trafficking.**
- Scaling up of efforts to raise awareness on reproductive health and family planning.
- To have appropriate education and skills and contribute opportunities to the labour industry.

Distinguished guests,

Before I conclude, allow me thank to the One-UN family for its invaluable support to the Government of Rwanda in many aspects of development and human rights. Government pledges its continued cooperation with the One-UN Rwanda.

Let me end by reminding us that, we all need to stand up more emphatically for the rights guaranteed under this important declaration, not just on the 71st anniversary, but every day, every year.

I thank you for your kind attention. Happy Human Rights Day!
