

## **STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS**

14<sup>th</sup> Umushyikirano

Kigali, 15 December 2016

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It is my honour to open this 14<sup>th</sup> Umushyikirano.

I want to welcome everyone participating in this important national dialogue, both here in Rwanda and around the world via live broadcast.

I also extend a warm welcome to our special guests and friends from abroad who have joined us, both to learn and to contribute.

As required by our Constitution, we hold this meeting every year in order to make government more accountable to citizens and more responsive to their needs.

It is my duty, and also my pleasure, to report to you that State of our Nation is strong and growing stronger.

We know this from our own experiences but it also measureable.

Over the past generation, Rwanda has been the fastest-growing country on the United Nations' index of human development, meaning that we are not only making progress, but doing so at a good pace.

We stand at a moment of transition. So it is a good moment to take stock of the various stages of our journey together thus far and look toward the road ahead.

The first phase, starting 22 years ago, was about security and national unity. A sense of safety and belonging was restored.

This was followed by a decade focused especially on strengthening our national institutions, which led to an even deeper feeling of security built on a sense of fairness, justice and trust.

There is a tomorrow, a future for you and for all of us together.

For the first time, this country sees every citizen as a full stakeholder, not as someone to be singled out, hunted down, categorised, and denied livelihood, or even life.

In independent, international polls, more than 95 per cent of Rwandans report the highest levels of trust in our police and military forces, among the highest rate in the world.

The importance of this fact cannot be overstated and we should never lose sight of that.

That brings us to the most recent period where we have been building the infrastructure needed to connect us to the global economy, while also getting Rwandans ready to work smartly in a more competitive environment.

This phase was necessary to lay the foundations of economic transformation. It costs a lot of money to be wealthy and we have invested heavily in the future we want.

As we have begun to see this year, the seeds are starting to bear fruit.

In fact, tourism is now our number one foreign exchange earner.

Rwanda, for example, has hosted major international gatherings, which resulted in important decisions that will improve our world as a whole.

This was possible for two reasons.

First, we now have the necessary facilities.

Second, and no less important, Rwanda is increasingly seen to embody some of the positive changes being pursued globally, for example on environmental protection.

Along the way, Rwandans were employed and thousands of visitors were able to see for themselves that there is something special about our country, which is a credit to all of us.

Yet we recognise that many Rwandans still feel that they are struggling to have the life they want.

But allow me to try to give some positive meaning to this feeling, in the wider context of our journey.

In 2001, four out of every ten Rwandans lived in extreme poverty, but today the figure is getting closer to one in ten. Moreover, Rwanda is the second easiest place in Africa to do business, according to the World Bank.

We used to struggle just to survive. Now we struggle to thrive and prosper.

I would like to thank all Rwandans for their patience and trust, especially because many of the investments we have made do not necessarily translate immediately into more jobs or lower prices.

The period ahead is therefore about building on all these gains, in order to achieve economic transformation. Not only more jobs, but better ones.

What these different chapters of our story show us, is how everything follows from what came before.

Wealth is built on major, long-term public investments, which depend on having trusted and effective institutions, which in turn cannot exist without safety and national unity.

As we move forward, we have to constantly sustain and renew what was done before, even as future generations take those achievements for granted because they see them as normal.

Looking at the arc of our journey, the difficulties encountered along the way serve a purpose because they bring us to something better. This is the source of our confidence in the future.

We have retaken our political space. It is no longer occupied by anything except the interests of Rwandans.

This principle is always worth fighting for, in order to be free to do what we believe is most suitable for our well-being. It also means that we have to actually deliver the results that our citizens expect.

The main barrier we face is internal. I am talking about complacency, the lure of taking the easy path, simply because it is more convenient right now, even if doing so is actually harmful.

It is better to face things the hard way and go straight to the heart of any problem.

An example, is something we have been talking about for a long time, the issue of relying on others to pay for things that benefit us.

It is really a question of dignity, our *agaciro*.

Therefore, among the decisions of this *Umushyikirano*, we should resolve to set a deadline, which should come sooner rather than later, after which Rwanda will no longer be waiting for what others hand out to us.

I wish to thank our partners and friends, and let's work with them in new and better ways, and also contribute our own ideas and resources.

We are at a point in our development where we can get this done if we really put our minds to the task.

Concrete and ambitious goals, such as this one, serve to keep pushing us to be our best. Our dignity, as we keep reminding ourselves, is not about wealth, but rather self-respect and believing that we can do it.

The motto of this country is Unity, Work, and Patriotism. As we head into an election year, we should talk more about the distinctive meaning of patriotism for Rwandans.

It means loving the country, and therefore each other.

As a result, we approach the task of selecting leaders and holding them accountable, with calm optimism, even if events elsewhere in the world suggest that the price of democracy is division. It is not.

Everything we have been through, and successfully addressed, proves that we have both the right and the ability to aim high.

That's what we should be discussing today and tomorrow.

I thank you and look forward to our discussions.