



Remarks

by

H.E. Mr. John W. Ashe

President of the 68th Session of the United Nations

General Assembly

Launch of “Kwibuka20”

**On the occasion of the twentieth commemoration
of the Rwanda genocide**

New York

27 February 2014

H.E Eugene-Richard Gasana, Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the UN,
Excellencies,
Secretary-General,
Ms. Immaculee Ilibagiza,
Mr. Gerald Kaplan,
Mr. Stephen Smith,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great respect and humility that I join with you here today to commemorate the 20th anniversary of one of the great human sorrows of our time: the Rwandan Genocide. The 100 days of unspeakable cruelty that took place in 1994 and the failure of the international community to respond to the cries of the many victims of this tragedy still haunts today.

By gathering for this special event, we are here to give life and meaning to the word “Kwibuka,” or remembering. We honour the memory of those who were needlessly and mercilessly killed solely because of their identity; we support those who survived this tragedy and still suffer from its effects; and we share in the grief of those who still miss and mourn for their lost loved ones.

To the survivors who are here today, for whom this commemoration has such personal meaning and significance, I pay you my personal respect. And to you, Ms. Immaculee Ilibagiza, we look forward to hearing your heroic story of survival, as well as also your message of forgiveness and redemption.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we commemorate this 20th anniversary, we also take this opportunity to shine a light on the failure of the international community in responding to the horrific mass murder

that unfolded before them, and we reaffirm our commitment that such gross violations of human dignity must never take place again.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), which was established by the United Nations General Assembly twenty years ago, was one attempt to rectify this failure and to ensure that there would be no impunity for the perpetrators of such atrocities. I encourage the international community to maintain steadfast support for the tribunal so that Rwanda's progress toward peace and reconciliation can be sustained; I thank the government of Rwanda for steps it has taken to uphold international standards; and I urge support for the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals as the ICTR draws to completion.

Since 2004, the General Assembly has adopted an annual resolution that responds to the situation of the survivors of the genocide, particularly to vulnerable groups. Last December, recognising the numerous difficulties faced by the survivors, the Assembly reiterated its call to Member States and the UN system to continue to support these efforts, noting that orphans, widows and victims of sexual violence are particularly in need of support.

The government of Rwanda has been responsive to the pressing needs of the victims; prioritizing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the eradication of poverty; and effectively implementing reforms in the justice sector. These efforts illustrate how sustainable development, the rule of law and peaceful and stable societies are all mutually reinforcing.

Per the General Assembly's request, the United Nations system has worked and continues to work alongside the people of Rwanda: providing technical and financial support in the areas of justice, crime reduction and prevention of gender based violence; offering training and capacity building programmes to promote the economic empowerment of widows and supporting efforts to raise awareness about the mental health problems of child survivors.

Helping survivors to reconstruct their shattered lives and mending the social fabric of Rwandan society has been a task of momentous proportions. Twenty years after the tragedy, many challenges remain and the country still needs strong support from the international community to assist victims in areas such as housing, healthcare, welfare or education.

Yet at the same time, we can easily affirm that the unspeakable cruelty of the Rwandan genocide can only be matched by the courage and resilience of its people. In the aftermath of the tragedy of 1994, the people of Rwanda have come together to ensure that their country is a place of safety, security, dignity, respect and possibility. We can look to the accomplishments and achievements of the Rwandan people over the past twenty years with respect and admiration. Their commitment to rebuilding their country and restoring people's well-being speaks to an indomitable spirit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme for today's event and the Kwibuka 20 Commemoration is "Remember, Unite, Renew," which is a reminder that as we remember, we must also look forward with hope and promise for the future. Through remembering, we not only honour the past, but we are able to learn, grow and pass on important lessons to our children. By uniting, each individual and sector of society can contribute to creating a more harmonious world. And through renewal, we take faith that a period of great darkness is followed by the daylight of a more hopeful tomorrow.

As we commemorate this day and honour those who perished, let us each take today's message to heart: remember, unite, renew.

Thank you.
