

9TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE RWANDA GENOCIDE

**Remarks by
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Addis Ababa, 7 April 2003**

His Excellency President Girma Woldegiorgis,
His Excellency Mr. Pascal Ngoga, Ambassador of Rwanda in Ethiopia,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished guests of Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This is one of the occasions each year when, like all the other speakers this afternoon, I least appreciate the responsibilities of my position. What can usefully be said?

The Rwanda genocide was a moment in history that reflected little good on the human species. There are few redeeming aspects of this terrible calamity.

It was of course most terrible for those who were slaughtered, often in the most brutal ways imaginable. These were the Tutsi people of Rwanda, 3/4 of whom were completely eradicated for the simple crime of being Tutsi-for WHO they were, not for anything they might have done-and for thousands of Hutu moderates who were murdered for the crime of refusing to join the extremists in their evil mission.

It was terrible for those who survived, who are condemned to live their lives bearing the physical and psychological scars of what they endured and what they witnessed.

And it was terrible for the reputation of the international community, for all those organizations and governments around the world-and I'm sorry to say that this very much includes organizations and countries in Africa-who consciously and deliberately abandoned Rwanda to its fate when they had the opportunity to intervene and save it. Ladies and gentlemen, the Organization of African Unity established not long ago the International panel of Eminent Personalities to investigate the genocide. The title of the Panel's report tells the entire story. They called it "Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide" and we know that no genocide in history could more easily have been prevented. But those who had the capacity to make a difference chose not to use it, and Rwanda and Africa is still paying the penalty for this cold-hearted abandonment.

I say "Africa" as a whole, for two reasons. First, genocide is the ultimate scourge of humanity, the greatest sin possible, and we must now accept it as part of Africa's legacy. Second, when the killers were allowed to escape into Zaire, it triggered a series of explosions that led directly to the wars that have ravaged central Africa during the past 7 years. We can therefore say that had the genocide been prevented, these wars, and their appalling consequences, might well have been entirely averted.

Is there any redemption that can be found in this dark chapter of our history? Some. There were heroes of the genocide- Hutu with the courage to try to save their Tutsi fellow citizens. There are the survivors who found the faith and grace to try to re-build not only their own lives but the lives of those who could not do so on their own. There are those few minor actors in the tragedy who have had the moral decency to acknowledge and apologize for their failures. And there are those Rwandans who are now committed to reconciliation among all their peoples and to the reconstruction of their country for the benefit of all their peoples.

Finally, there is the determination not to forget this great African and human tragedy. It is 9 years since the genocide. Beyond Rwandans themselves and a small number of friends of Rwanda, for most of the world the memory of the genocide continues to recede year by year.

This must not be allowed to happen. Luckily, a widespread international effort has been launched to make sure that this does not happen. I refer to an ever-growing campaign to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the genocide in a major way. This movement has mainly been the work of civil society activists around the world. But last month, I'm happy to say, the Executive Council of the Africa Union unanimously passed a resolution calling on all African governments, on African civil society organizations, and on the United Nations to formally recognize 7 April 2004 as the 10th anniversary and to commemorate the occasion in appropriate ways. I applaud this decision. The victims and survivors of the genocide must not be forgotten, nor must the principle of accountability be forgotten.

Next year at this time, I know we will re-gather in this hall to pay our respects on the 10th anniversary of the genocide. At that time, I know too that we will be part of a large, world-wide ceremony, from Johannesburg to Addis, from New York to Brussels, from Montreal to Sydney, all of us committing ourselves not to forget, and to ensuring that the world will never forget.

Thank you.
