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African Union Commemorates the 28th Edition of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda

“Remember-Unite-Renew” – Kwibuka28

The African Union (AU), in collaboration with the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Rwanda to the AU, commemorated the 28th edition of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda at the AU Headquarters, on Thursday, 7th April 2022, in line with the AU Decisions. This statutory activity which was held on the theme, “Remember-Unite-Renew”, was a solemn occasion to remember the lives lost, show solidarity with the victims and survivors, unite, and renew efforts to ensure that such tragedy never happens again in Rwanda or elsewhere in Africa and beyond. The commemoration also provided an opportunity to learn about Rwanda’s story of national reconciliation, nation-building and inclusive development, among others.

In his opening address, H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, the Chairperson of the AU Commission, recalled that, “Twenty-eight years later, Rwanda has learnt to forgive, but has not forgotten... It took incredible fortitude to ensure reconciliation and reconstruction”. He added that Rwanda had taught Africa great lessons of transcendence and courage, an excellent example of dynamism and creativity. “I would like to pay a special tribute to the Rwandese people for their incomparable resilience and its leaders, particularly H.E. President Paul Kagame, for their admirable management of the post-genocide situation”, the Chairperson added.

H.E. Hope Tumukunde Gasatura, Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the AU and UNECA, emphasized that as Africa, “We must ensure that we are proactively engaging and educating our societies across our continent on values that will prevent these types of violence from recurring. We must bear responsibility for proactive legislative, institutional, and educational measures to ensure that the seeds of genocide – division, hatred, and discrimination – are not allowed to germinate anywhere in Africa”. She further reminded of the request of the AU Peace and Security Council to the Chairperson of the AU Commission to appoint an AU Special Envoy on Prevention of Genocide and Hate Crimes. She welcomed the ongoing discussions between the AU Commission and the UN Office to the AU, on the AU Virtual Human rights memorial project and recalled the Accra PRC Budget Retreat decision to undertake a phased approach to its construction. She also underlined the importance of African solidarity while encouraging all Member States to promote peace and protect lives “to ensure that ‘Never Again’ becomes a spirit of action – not just a platitude”. Emphasizing that fighting impunity is not only crucial for Rwanda but also the rest of Africa, the Rwandan Ambassador called on all AU Member States to establish legal frameworks that punish genocide perpetrators. She also entreated Member States to collaborate with Rwanda to arrest and prosecute fugitives. Paying tribute to the brave African heroes who decided not to abandon the victims in the face of the most unimaginable atrocities driven by the Pan-African spirit of solidarity, Ambassador Gasatura further recalled that “Rwanda’s rebirth is a reminder that as Africans, we can build lasting peace and prosperity, even from the most desperate of situations”.

Ambassador Molalign Asfaw, Chief of the Cabinet at the office of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, on behalf of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, expressed Ethiopia’s solidarity and shared humanity with the Government and People of Rwanda while honoring the memory of the victims and conveying deep empathy for the survivors of the genocide. He emphasized that the occasion “should remind us of our collective

responsibility to protect humanity from genocide and ensure that such horrific crimes will never revisit humanity”. He also highlighted the need for collective responsibility to redouble efforts towards achieving peace, reconciliation, justice, and the protection of human and peoples’ rights on the African Continent.

H.E. Alice Wairimu Nderitu, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide, in her statement exhorted the world to, “ honor every one of the victims, whose lives, hopes, dreams and aspirations were cut short by the senseless violence that built upon explicit calls to destroy an entire group, based on who they were”, while adding that, “Honoring also means accepting our responsibilities”. She urged Member States to address issues of hate speech and underlined the importance of early response to indicators of hate and discrimination in communities.

At noon, participants observed a minute of silence in memory of the victims, following a call to light candles as a sign of hope and to pay tribute to the victims of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

It must be noted that all the speakers saluted the resilience of the survivors and the resolve of Rwandans to unite and heal together and called for Africa and the world to combat hate speech and violent divisions in our societies. This was again re-echoed in a post-event joint press conference by the Commissioner for Political Affairs Peace and Security, H.E. Bankole Adeoye, and the Rwandan Ambassador, H.E. Hope T. Gasatura.

The event, which allowed for hybrid participation, both physically at the Nelson Mandela Hall and online via the Zoom digital platform, was attended by more than 500 people at the Mandela Hall, including the top leadership of the AU Commission, representatives of AU Member States and the diplomatic corps in Addis Ababa, the AU and the UN, other intergovernmental organizations, and various civil society institutions as well as AU Commission staff.

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