



**STATEMENT BY H. E. DR. NKOSAZANA DLAMINI ZUMA  
CHAIRPERSON OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

**ON THE OCCASION OF  
THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE RWANDAN GENOCIDE**

**AFRICAN UNION CONFERENCE CENTRE, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**11 APRIL 2014**

Your Excellency, Dr. Tedros Adhanom, Foreign Minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Your Excellency, Prof. Joseph Nsengimana, the Ambassador of the Republic of Rwanda

Excellencies, Chairperson of the Permanent Representatives Committee and of the Peace and Security Council

Commissioner for Political Affairs, Dr. Aisha L. Abdullahi

Excellencies, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of the Rwanda community

Distinguished religious leaders

Commissioners, Directors and AU Staff

Ladies and Gentlemen;

The commemoration of twenty years since the Rwanda Genocide is in remembrance of an event of great tragedy that will affect the people of Rwanda and all Africans for generations to come.

When we listen to the stories of survivors they are heart-breaking.

Within one hundred days, more than 800,000 men, women and children were abandoned to systematic and most callous of deaths, as long-time neighbours, colleagues and friends turned against one another. Over a quarter of million women and girls were raped, and many infected with HIV/AIDS.

At least 100,000 children were separated from their families or orphaned. Place of sanctuaries such as churches, military bases, hospitals and other public buildings were turned into slaughterhouses. The aftermath of this great tragedy on African soil was a wasteland and a shattered people.

Twenty years later, it is apt that the commemorations are held under the theme *Kwibuka: remember, unite, renew*.

As we gather today in solidarity with Rwandan people we **remember** those who lost their lives, and those who lost parents and grandparents, children and siblings, their spouses, aunts and uncles, friends and neighbours, often whole families, villages and neighbourhoods.

We must also **remember**, as we again pledge Never again what led up to these tragic events. The roots lay in the colonial history of divide and rule; the continuation of treating certain groups in society as the Other; the earlier attempts at ethnic cleansing; the discrimination and hate speech shortly before; the systematic planning to exterminate the Tsutis and anyone opposing this; the complicity (either by omission or commission) of the international community, including our own organisation and the failure by all of us to intervene as the massacres unfolded before our eyes.

It indeed became a case of the triumph of evil, as good men and women did nothing, until the liberation of Rwanda by the RPF, which put a stop to the slaughter – a long 100 days later.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

We remember, as President Kagame said so eloquently a few days ago at in Kigali:

*“Rwanda was supposed to be a failed state. We could have become a permanent U.N. protectorate, with little hope of ever recovering our nationhood.*

*We could have allowed the country to be physically divided, with groups deemed incompatible assigned to different corners.*

*We could have been engulfed in a never-ending civil war with endless streams of refugees and our children sick and uneducated.*

*But we did not end up like that. What prevented these alternative scenarios was the choices of the people of Rwanda.”*

Rwanda indeed made the choices to unite, to involve all its people – men and women, young and old, victim and perpetrator, Hutu, Tutsi and Twa - in the process of justice, reconciliation and healing, and to build a country that belongs to all.

This is not easy, but it had to be done. It is not a journey of two decades. The country, its leadership and people will have to continue with this journey, climb a hundred more hills, in memory of those who died, for the survivors and more importantly for future generations.

Rwanda, twenty years later, shows us the triumph of the human spirit, in the rebuilding of its health, and education systems, in reducing poverty, in its efforts to diversify its economy and in its fast economic growth of the past decade.

I don't believe this would have been possible or the country would have come this far, without the conscious choice made to do this by empowering women and girls. Rwanda today is a lodestar not only for Africa, but the world in terms of gender equality, even though they still need to do more.

Unless we remember the lessons of Rwanda, across the continent, in all countries we will not live up to our pledge of Never again. These lessons are embedded in our Pan African values of solidarity and unity, and in the African Union principle of non-indifference.

It is part of our strategic orientation for the future, to build inclusive, tolerant and democratic societies; to fight against impunity; to invest in our young people; to promote people's and human rights; to empower our women and fight gender-based violence; to

build accountable, democratic and developmental government and institutions; and ensure the human security of all Africa's people.

As we therefore reflect in the coming months on how to silence the guns by 2020, as we take forward the AU Human Rights Memorial Project and as we finalise our Agenda 2063, we must renew our determination, and make the choice: that Africa shall be peaceful; that we *will* integrate; that we *shall* be prosperous and that we will *never again* tolerate genocide on African soil.

We must also be honest with ourselves as the Peace and Security Council reflects this month on how to silence the guns by 2020. We must address the question whether we have a plan of what to do when such situations arise again. As I stand here, I am not confident that we have the capacity to respond immediately to prevent the killings before it starts, and to intervene quickly to stop mass atrocities and genocide.

Let me conclude with the words of the great Pan African, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela that he wrote in *Long walk to Freedom*:

*No one is born hating another person because of the colour of her skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.*

I thank you