



STATEMENT

BY

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**Being an Opening Statement at the African Union, IPSS and Rwanda Embassy
Seminar on the “Prevention of the Ideology of Hate, Genocide and Hate Crimes in
Africa” at the Headquarters of the African Union,**

16th June 2022

Your Excellency, *Amb. Hope Tumukunde Gasatura, the Ambassador of Rwanda to the Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Permanent Representative to the African Union*

Excellences, Ambassadors and Distinguished Representatives of the various International Organizations;

Representatives of AU Member States,

Dr. Fana Gebresenbet, Interim Director of IPSS, Addis Ababa University,

Distinguished Participants from the Academia, Civil Society, and the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

I warmly welcome all of you to this symposium with members of the academia, civil society and the media. This symposium is part of the series of activities outlined to mark this year's commemoration of the 1994 Rwandan Genocide against the Tutsi, which had the theme: 'Remember, Unite, and Renew'. The symposium is however focused on the prevention of genocide ideologies, genocide denial and hate speech. I want to use this opportunity to specially thank our host, the Institute for Peace and Security Studies, Addis Ababa University for partnering with the African Union, and the Rwandan Embassy for this event. I also thank our international partners, especially representatives of the UN and other international organizations for always availing themselves of every opportunity to show support in this regard.

Let me also thank the participants for availing themselves of this opportunity to join the discourse on the issues of genocide and hate crimes in our societies. The inclusion of the academia, civil society and the media in the discourse about genocide ideologies and denialism underscores their important role in shaping ideologies in the society, and midwifing society's decision makers through capacity building in leadership and governance. Today's symposium promises to afford us the opportunity to further interrogate some of the underlying issues that enabled the unfortunate events of April 1994 in Rwanda, not with the aim of going back to them, but to ensure they are never allowed to happen again.

During the unfortunate Rwandan experience, over a million Tutsi were killed, while about 500,000 women and girls, excluding those who were killed in the process, were also raped and otherwise sexually violated. The scars of these atrocities continue to stare us in the face till date. Sadly, despite concerted effort at both international and continental levels through the development and adoption of several policy instruments and legal frameworks, most of our societies continue to grapple with diversity crisis, with conflicts and violence increasingly reflecting our ethnic and religious divides.

Thus, apart from commemorating the 28th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, this symposium will also provide us the platform to address emerging threats to stability and national cohesion in our respective societies. These threats are usually manifest through hate speech, hate crimes, ethnic and religious intolerance, and the propagation of genocidal ideologies. From past experiences, these are the very precursors to genocide, and the symptoms of a society on the slippery slope to anarchy. For this reason, it is important for us to expand the discourse beyond just governmental circles, to include the academia, civil society and the media.

In recent times, the use of media, particularly the social media, tends to compound diversity crisis in most of our societies. We are now being confronted with two competing goals of promoting and protecting peoples' right to information and free speech in their use of the internet on the one hand; and the need to prevent its deployment in the promotion and propagation of hate speech and genocide ideologies, on the other. We recall with sadness the events leading up to the Rwandan genocide, specifically deployment of the media in the propagation of hate speech and incitement of hate against the Tutsis. This is why it is important especially for all the media to avoid affording their platforms for the promotion of genocide and hate speech. While remaining steadfast in ensuring the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of expression, our duty as African Union is to also help the AU Member States and their citizens find a balance in the exercise of this right, and in doing so within acceptable legal limits.

Excellences, Distinguished participants

As part of its contribution to tackling the problem of genocide ideologies and how to address them, the outcome of this symposium is expected to dovetail into policy brief with recommendations on the way forward. One of the ways of ensuring in-depth policy recommendations is through a robust debate on the issues outlined in the program. I therefore invite participants in the audience to critically engage discussants on the issues, especially with a view to understanding the contexts, symptoms and exacerbating factors of genocide of genocide, and its promotion.

I am of the firm conviction that the outcome of this event is going to enrich our understanding of the issues involved, and better equip us to appropriately address the challenges.

I thank you for your attention, and I wish us a fruitful discussion.