

ICTR/MICT 20th Anniversary Commemoration of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda
Arusha, 10 April 2014

Welcome Address by Judge Vagn Joensen, President, UNICTR

Your Excellency the Minister of Justice of Rwanda, Distinguished Representatives from the Victims Associations, Mr. Prosecutor, Mr. Registrar, Excellencies, Colleagues, Invited Guests, Students and Teachers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good morning. I am deeply honoured to welcome you today to commemorate the victims of one of the world's greatest tragedies; the 1994 genocide in Rwanda that targeted the Tutsi could easily be considered the 100 darkest days in modern human history. The horrors that I have heard from victims testifying at the ICTR and at the 20th commemoration in Kigali earlier this week are unthinkable. Throughout the course of today, you will hear testimony from some of those who testified at the ICTR. Their stories speak of remarkable endurance and of a time when humanity failed itself. From April to July 1994, killings occurred at an unimaginable scale, with more than 800,000 lives taken, often in the most brutal of ways.

Today we commemorate all of the victims of the atrocities that took place throughout Rwanda in 1994 – overwhelmingly these victims were Tutsi, against whom the ICTR has stated as a fact of common knowledge beyond dispute that genocide was committed; but they were also Twa, moderate Hutu and others who stood in opposition to the genocidal campaign, all of whom suffered the same tragic fate as their Tutsi brothers and sisters. We are also here to console the survivors. Today we weep with a nation that suffered loss on a scale that threatened the annihilation of entire generations. But annihilation was not to be the fate of this nation. Twenty years later, Rwanda has arisen from the ashes and rebuilt in a way that many thought impossible. We stand in awe at the remarkable ability of Rwandans to move beyond those dark days and to look towards an ever-brighter future.

Following the genocide, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda was mandated with the formidable task of contributing to reconciliation by bringing to account those most responsible for the planning and execution of the atrocities that occurred in Rwanda in 1994. Today, twenty years later, with all but 9 of the 93 individuals who were indicted accounted for, the Tribunal has created a rich legacy. It has enriched the evolution of international criminal law, preserved for posterity a record of the atrocities committed, established beyond any doubt or possible denial – in judgment after judgment – that those atrocities constituted a genocide, and brought to justice many of those accused of planning and executing one of the most brutal and efficient killing campaigns the world has ever witnessed.

As UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon reminded us earlier this week when he spoke in Kigali on the occasion of the 20th commemoration of the genocide, “justice is indispensable for sustainable peace.” But as Rwandan President Paul Kagame said the same day, Rwanda has pursued justice the best it could, but that does not restore what was lost. It is clear that justice mechanisms for the atrocities committed must be only one part of the response. Although justice is necessary, it is not sufficient. Other work must be done to protect and prevent the crimes from occurring. Crucial to all of this is the inclusion of assistance, protection, security, prevention and the creation of a society that offers equal opportunities to individuals irrespective of ethnicity, beliefs and other backgrounds. Rwanda has been a leader in this respect, enshrining rights for women in its constitution and working to eliminate the divisions in society that perpetuated the downward spiral towards genocide.

There can be no question of the leaps that Rwanda has taken since those 100 dark days, or of the milestones that have been realised along the way – not the least of which is the achievement of Rwanda’s justice system, rebuilt from the ashes and now trying cases transferred by the ICTR

and several countries. The resilience of the Rwandan people has been astonishing to witness; committing to reconciliation and justice at the same time is no easy feat, but Rwanda has remained committed to trying to achieve both.

As we look to the future, I continue to be amazed by the way that many individual Rwandans have taken responsibility for their roles in the genocide, and equally amazed by the way that so many of the survivors have learned to forgive. It is an example of the purest sort – and one that the rest of the region, continent, and world must try to follow if we are ever to truly have sustainable peace. . While crises continue to afflict many parts of the globe, we hope that the difference between the world 20 years ago and today, is that we have all learned something from the Rwandan example.

The UN Secretary-General now has a Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide. The current special adviser is the ICTR's former Registrar, Mr. Adama Dieng. He has already taken action based upon what he learned in his time at the ICTR and these actions have saved lives. The UN continues to revise its response to situations that may spill into disaster – the Secretary-General has given clear instructions to peacekeepers and others in the field not to wait for instructions from afar to respond when they see people at risk of atrocity crimes. And the responsibility to protect doctrine makes it clear that the international community should no longer fail to react in these situations as it did with such tragic consequences in 1994.

Although so painfully many of their mothers and sisters, fathers and brothers, neighbours and friends are lost forever, I hope that the Rwandan people will be able to take some small measure of solace in knowing that the world mourns with Rwanda this week, and that we are taking this time to reflect and to recommit ourselves to finding ways to take action in the face of unfolding tragedies . Thank you.