

Mr. Federal Councilor Cassis,
Honorable Mr. Peterle,
Members of the Federal Parliament,
Heads of Federal Offices and Justice,
Excellences and Leaders in business and society,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is an honor to be here with you to celebrate The Federal Day of Thanksgiving, Repentance and Prayer and Thank you for inviting me to speak on the Theme **“Building Bridges for Freedom and Peace”**

Distinguished Guests,

Your presence here today reflects the extent of your belief in the power of fellowship and prayer as Jesus followers to transform individuals, communities and nations and that is what we are called for as leaders.

In the book of Luke 4:18-19 the bible says that:

The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted; To proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

From the scriptures above I wish to talk about 5 components that when put together build the bridge to freedom and peace:

1. **Preach Gospel to the poor:** Matthew 5:8-9 refers to poor of spirit, those who mourn, the geek etc. This component means spreading and knowing

the "Truth", confronting the reality/facts (the bible says in John 8:23 :You shall know the Truth and the truth shall set you free),

2. **Heal the Broken hearted:** there cannot be freedom and peace without healing and there cannot be healing without repentance and forgiveness. Once hearts are healed people/society moves to reconciliation and unity/cohesion which is the only way to get to sustainable transformation whether individually or as a community
3. **To proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind:** this entails being liberated from all that was holding you back, if it's your past or your background or the history of your country, embracing the good news of liberation and having a vision/ aspirations and hope for the future (recovery of sight)
4. **To set at Liberty those who are oppressed:** this is freedom - exercise of basic human rights which entails having a shelter, food, medical treatment, financial stability and most of all dignity as human beings as nations
5. **To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord:** the whole process of going through Truth, healing, liberation + common vision and freedom can only lead to sustainable peace if we embrace the Grace of God, empathy, love of our neighbors and nations for us to become Peacemakers (those who are in the doing not the talking, the change agents not change wishers, the history makers not tellers)

As a born again Christian, confronting the complex story of my life as a child from a father who survived the Genocide and a mother who was a Genocide Perpetrator I went through the journey of facing the truth, being broken and healed, reconciliation and being set free. Today I live in total freedom and abundant peace.

Ladies and Gentleman, allow me to recall some historical background regarding Rwandans context:

What many around the world witnessed, through newspapers and TV screens in 1994, was the result of decades of colonialism, and post-colonial leadership that entrenched ethnic division, hate and discrimination.

- One million, seventy four thousand, and seventeen people, brutally killed in one hundred days
- Hundreds of thousands of orphans, widows, widowers, disabled people
- Almost the entire surviving population internally displaced or refugees in Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, Tanzania
- Destroyed infrastructure: banks looted, schools and hospitals abandoned
- Collapsed state institutions

This is the apocalypse that met the RPF liberation movement that stopped the genocide. Rwandans felt abandoned during the genocide, and we were left alone to pick up the pieces.

If it wasn't by the sacrifices of men and women lead by H.E our President Paul Kagame, there would be no Rwanda today.

The new post-genocide government, had to rebuild everything from scratch, including the hearts and minds of a traumatized people.

The RPF led the creation of a Government of National Unity that became the corner-stone of the rebuilding process. It was underpinned by the principles of inclusion, fighting injustice, equal rights and opportunities for all Rwandans.

Being a child of a Genocide Perpetrator, my mother who is serving a life sentence in a Kigali prison for her role during the Genocide, I am a result of that defying policy of equal rights and opportunities to all Rwandans and a living testimony of the new Rwanda.

In a complex post-Genocide environment, Rwandans have built an upright nation, where the child of a Genocide perpetrator and the child of a Genocide survivor, have equal access to education, health care, jobs, leadership position.

However, as much as the country's politics sets the tone, the journey of healing and reconciliation requires a lot from every individual.

I was 12 years old when the Genocide happened. My two siblings and I lived with my father. During the whole period of Genocide, we had no idea where our mother was. My father knew but did not tell us because we were too young to understand and at our early age we thought our mother was dead.

The first time I learned about my mother was in 1996. I was in the 2nd year of secondary school, when one of my fellow students showed me a newspaper article, with a picture of my mother, my name and names of our relatives. The headline was: Famous Interahamwe Captured.

It was the worst day of my life. One day I was a survivor, child of a Tutsi father, who had lost his parents and relatives in the Genocide, and instantly I became the child of a Genocide Perpetrator!

I went through a series of difficult phases:

First came denial. I simply refused to believe it. I decided that my mother was dead.

But society wouldn't let me forget. I lost most of my friends who were genocide survivors. To them I was a liar and a traitor. I faced rejection from all sides and lost identity.

Next came facing the reality and acceptance. I eventually realized, that I could not run from reality forever. Everywhere I went, my mother's reputation preceded me.

Indeed no one can run from the truth forever! Be it individual or countries, you can try to attenuate the situation, call it different names, defend yourself but facts do not fade or disappear... sooner or later, one has to face them either as a victim then you embrace your history to build a brighter future or as an actor then you have to take responsibility and face consequences.

I decided to face the truth and started meeting my mother. It was tough and heart-breaking. I wanted to know the truth about what happened. At the same time, it was too much for me. There are things you never wish to hear from a parent, a mother.

It was only through our Rwanda's unique homegrown solution to Justice and Reconciliation: Gacaca that I could find the truth.

Even though heavily and unfairly criticized, mainly by non-Rwandans, Gacaca facilitated the healing process.

- Survivors got information about what happened to their relatives
- They learned where victims' bodies had been hidden and were able to rebury them in dignity
- Perpetrators were given a platform to repent, ask for forgiveness and serve sentences with healed hearts

One million, six hundred and seventy eight thousand, six hundred and seventy two Genocide suspects were tried in the Gacaca courts, which closed in 2012 after running for 10 years.

- And people like me, those related to perpetrators, and keen to know what exactly happened, finally found out the truth.

Gacaca helped me get the truth that I desperately needed to be able to reopen my heart to my mother. There is no way to repair what she had done, and I will never understand the reasons behind her actions. But at the very least, I wanted to see if she would regret and repent before I could forgive her.

I was able to unburden myself of guilt and disassociate myself from her crimes.

As a born again Christian who accepted Jesus as my Lord and saviour I experienced the power of forgiveness for healing and reconciliation. I forgave my mother and was able to visit her, take care of her with a healed heart and today I even take my children to visit her. At the end of the day a Mother is a mother and never irreplaceable. On the other hand she is accountable of her actions, she is serving her sentence with a healed heart and a peace of mind knowing that her children live in the country where : children will never be responsible or held accountable of the crimes of their fathers or mothers.

As my President, Paul Kagame said: “We cannot turn the clock back nor can we undo the harm caused, but we have the power to determine the future, and to ensure that what happened never happens again.”

Today I am not proud of my mother's actions but again I am not held by that shadow, I choose to leave it behind, set my own path, and live my story. I am liberated, free and at peace.

I consider myself privileged to live in a country committed to rights and justice for all, in policy and practice.

As a young girl of 14 I exercised my rights to see my mother. For the last 20 years till today I have never been prevented from seeing my mother, from taking care of her.

As a young woman, I have been able to study to advanced levels. I competed for positions in public service, and was evaluated based on merit. I worked for the Prime Minister, served as a Deputy Chief of Staff of a great statesman, President Paul Kagame, and today I am the CEO of Rwanda Convention Bureau, one of the key institutions contributing to my country's Economic transformation through foreign revenue generations from Business Events. This can only happen in a country that is committed to Human Rights without any discrimination.

Young Rwandans were once used to commit Genocide and destroy their own country. Today, the youth, 70% of our population, is active in rebuilding Rwanda.

We have decided to take responsibility for our well-being, our dignity, our future. As Rwandans we strongly believe that no one can know better what is good for us

and we are committed to take necessary actions, make necessary changes for a stable and prosperous Rwanda.

As we work to transform Rwanda, we are fully aware that the struggle against Genocide ideology, the struggle towards Economic Transformation and sustainable development is a continuous one, one that requires regional and international partnership and we say thank you to all of our friends, who have been by our side in the last 25 years, supporting us in our journey of development, as well as in the fight against genocide denial.

Distinguished guests,

Building bridges for freedom and peace requires transformation. The transformation that I am talking about, and that I believe we all aspire to, cannot take place without each of us reflecting inwards (internal critical analysis) to identify what needs to change, to be transformed. For us to truly uplift ourselves, overcome, get to freedom and peace, we need to take a look back and inspect ourselves, our communities and our countries as a whole. We have to unpack and understand what defines us then; what make us vulnerable or binds us and prevents us from attaining the transformation. Since for sustainable transformation to be achieved, we need reconciliation that goes beyond repentance and forgiveness by bringing cohesion, inclusive systems and structures.

Sustainable transformation, hence freedom and peace is reflected when individuals, communities and countries share a common vision; share a common responsibility to realize their vision; and hold each other accountable.

Allow me to conclude by appreciating efforts like this one that sets a platform for people to fellowship, share and pray, it is from gatherings like such that we share a common vision as humanity and as our Lord Jesus said it in Matthew 18:20
“where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them”

I thank the Federal Parliament of Switzerland for inviting me and thank you all for your attention.

May God bless you!