

STATEMENT BY

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AMBASSADOR AND PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE REPUBLIC OF MALAWI TO THE UNITED NATIONS
ON BEHALF OF THE AFRICAN UNION**

ON THE OCCASION OF THE SIXTEENTH COMMEMORATION OF THE RWANDA GENOCIDE

**UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK
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[Check against delivery]

**Your Excellency, Secretary-General,
Your Excellency, Permanent Representative of Rwanda
to the United Nations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the African Union.

The last century witnessed unprecedented acts of genocide in recent human history. The Rwanda genocide was only the most recent of these acts of human barbarism, and without a doubt Africa's worst. Yet memorializing the genocide in Rwanda should never be taken for granted.

Sixteen years ago, almost a million Africans who had placed their faith in the international community, and, in particular, the United Nations, perished in a killing spree spread over only a matter of a hundred days. The people of Rwanda suffered a loss and a tragedy whose magnitude defies human imagination.

We are gathered here today to remember this event, pay homage to the thousands of innocent people who were massacred in this hundred-day frenzy, and to demonstrate our everlasting solidarity with the government and the people of Rwanda, in particular, relatives of the victims of the genocide.

Sixteen years after this event, there are still those who ask: why must we commemorate? Isn't it already ancient history? Didn't it take place in a faraway place, in faraway Africa? Indeed, there are also those who insist on asking: wasn't it just another case of Africans killing Africans? And anyway, what does it have to do with us?

We must commemorate the Rwanda genocide because, first and foremost, we have a responsibility to remember. As the 2000 Report of the International Panel of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and the Surrounding Events, established by the then Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1998, concluded: "the Rwanda genocide was not only preventable, but it must also never be forgotten".

The panel was established to find answers to a number of questions, chief among these: How was it possible, at the close of the twentieth century, for the Rwanda genocide to take place at the time it did, and what lessons could Africa and the international community at large learn from this tragedy?

The establishment of this panel demonstrated the African continent's resolve to act in concert with the international community to ensure that such crimes should never again be committed with impunity and yet escape punishment. As we commemorate this tragic moment in Rwanda's and Africa's history today, we must take the opportunity to renew this collective resolve.

For, at bottom, the Rwanda genocide was not just another ugly event in human history. All commentators agree that what happened in that country over those dark one hundred days from April to July 1994 constituted one of the purest manifestations of genocide in our time, meeting all the criteria set out in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, the first such instrument to be adopted in the history of mankind.

The fact that this tragedy ever happened at all, despite the adoption of that instrument almost half a century earlier, serves to emphasize the great responsibility that is ours to live up to: we must never allow horrors that unfolded in Rwanda in 1994 to be repeated, be it in Rwanda, or elsewhere in Africa or in any other part of the world.

But as we reflect on what happened in 1994, we must also use this moment to focus renewed attention on the ongoing challenge of eliminating the conditions which foster political, ethnic and civil conflict in our societies. We must do so by committing our governments to support the efforts of the African Union in strengthening its mechanisms for conflict prevention and management through the institutions and procedures that our continental body has established over the past several years.

Finally, we must use this occasion to salute the people of Rwanda for all the efforts they have deployed to advance the cause of justice, reconciliation and nation-building. We must also congratulate the Rwandan Government for having done so much to make possible the new way of life, which the people of Rwanda so clearly cherish.

We commend the exemplary leadership of President Paul Kagame and his Government for the achievements they have made in the last sixteen years to rebuild the country, and nurture a sense of national pride and unity among the people of Rwanda. We also commend the efforts made by the International Criminal Court for Rwanda in bringing the perpetrators of the genocide to justice.

I thank you for your attention.