

Salutations

Acknowledgements to our hosts in Rwanda

HE. Augustin Iyamuremye The President of Senate of Rwanda, HE.

Donatille Mukabalisas Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies and the people of Rwanda

Rwanda is a most enlightening experience for my colleagues of the Guyanese delegation and myself. On their behalf and on my own, my grateful thanks for your most generous and family like reception.

We meet under the theme of GENDER, and this is after years of preparations for Beijing 1995 and after 27 years the Beijing UN conference on women , itself. That meeting had as its goal the promotion of women's involvement in the development of our societies and humanity.

The Theme, " **Gender equality and gender-sensitive Parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world**" is applicable to all of US. And I as Speaker of the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana and on behalf of my entire Parliament, wholly subscribe to this theme.

First, my country Guyana and the Caribbean Region with small populations is way removed from many of you. I thus would like to speak to our commitments and actions to the gender issue.

The Caribbean and Guyana have, for many decades, been in the forefront of women and gender issues and the promotion of gender equality at all levels in our society. Our record with respect to equality in and access to education is among the highest in the world. Also, We have not shied away from women leading our nations. There have been at least four female heads of governments of international repute. –

The Late, Dame Eugenia Charles, the Prime Minister of Dominica

The Rt Hon. Portia Simpson, Prime Minister of Jamaica

The Current two terms Prime Minister of Barbados, the Hon Mia Motley

And in my own Guyana, the Late Excellency Janet Jagan, President of Guyana. Who was an American born naturalized Guyanese.

Guyana had prided itself, as the only Caribbean country, having legislation which provided for gender quota for candidates in elections, but we are still playing catchup. I was pleasantly surprised last November when I was the guest of the HE, the Speaker, Saqr Gobash, of the Federal National Council of the UAE, that the UAE has reserved 50% of its Parliamentary seats for women. And here in Rwanda while 24 seats are set aside for women, the reality is that 61% of the seats are held by women.

Guyana 22 years ago had set in its laws that parties lists of candidates must have 1/3 of its candidates as females. This, while not legally compelling' as part of the Parliament, has been a guiding policy for parties electing and selecting their MPs. Currently 31%of the Parliament are females and almost 34% this are indigenous women. We have a system where the ministers are drawn from the Parliament and 30% of the Cabinet are women.

Secondly, while the world may look at the Caribbean and Guyana and say that this is an area of peace, that it's a paradise and an example for the world, we have had our challenges. In the post colonial 60 years we have seen

Ethnic Conflicts in my own country in the early 60s that saw 176 persons killed and over 1000 injured. We have had the assassination of a Minister and an undemocratic regime for over two decades.

In Haiti, recently a president was assassinated

In Grenada, there was political repression and two Coups

In Jamaica, in elections during the early 80s over 800 persons killed

In Trinidad and Tobago, the Parliament was stormed by persons with their own agenda, MPs killed and a coup attempted.

At least three countries have border disputes that can ignite into aggression.

So this Theme of " Gender equality and gender-sensitive Parliaments as drivers of change for a more resilient and peaceful world" is very apt for Guyana and the Caribbean. Least we forget the past, we will condemn ourselves to repeat it.

Guyana has implemented programmes for women's empowerment and leadership. In several tertiary education areas (for example social sciences, law and medicine) females dominate

Within this history and advances, Guyana will continue to promote -

The equal access of all of our children to education

More Women's participation in our workforce

More gender sensitive programmes and legislation

And more gender equality in our parliament and parliamentary processes

I am confident that we are on a trajectory set similarly by the UAE , Rwanda and as we just heard

South Korea

Thanks you.

