

STATEMENT BY HONOURABLE NYIRASAFARI ESPERANCE, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE OF RWANDA ALSO HEAD OF THE IPU GROUP.

***THE THEME OF THE 142ND ASSEMBLY VIRTUAL FORMAT
“OVERCOMING THE PANDEMIC TODAY AND BUILDING A BETTER
TOMORROW: THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS***

SALUTATIONS

Honourable Duarte PACHECO, President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),
Mr. Martin CHUNGONG, Secretary General IPU,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to join the 142nd Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly. The theme of the Assembly “Overcoming the Pandemic today and Building a Better tomorrow: The role of Parliaments.

I deliver greetings from Rwanda. As the global community struggles to deal with COVID-19 pandemic, Rwanda has not been spared. The first confirmed case was reported on March 14, 2020.

Rwanda has managed to bring the spike in the number of COVID-19 cases under control. The government has implemented a proactive intervention policy with a range of containment measures in response to the pandemic including temporary border closure, suspension of domestic travel, cancellation of public gatherings, institution of teleworking, closure of schools, places of worship and non-essential businesses, and mandatory wearing of face masks. Also, Social protective plan which included a door to door delivery of food to most needy households.

A gradual easing of lockdown measures has been ongoing, with businesses allowed to resume operations while adhering to health guidelines.

The pandemic has, like with all other countries, caused adverse impact on the economy. The government's Economic Recovery Plan in response to the pandemic is estimated at about 6.3 percent of GDP, whereby in June last year, government put into the economy a stimulus package of Rwf 100 billion. The Prime Minister informed Parliament in March 2021 that the package would be expanded to Rwf 350billion by year-end.

The Economic Recovery Fund (ERF) was to support affected businesses through subsidized loans from commercial banks and MFIs, and credit guarantees. It targets SMEs and hard-hit sectors such as the hospitality industry. Tax deferral and relief measures have also been put in place.

The 30-day maturity period for the public health insurance scheme premium was removed to expedite access to medical services and the salaries of top civil servants for the month of April was redirected to welfare programs. The "Manufacture and Build to Recover Program" adopted end-2020 provides for VAT exemptions on construction materials and tax credits. The revised FY20/21 budget accommodates additional COVID-19-related spending, including to support the hard-hit transport sector in the form of fuel subsidies, ERF loans, and tax relief.

On the vaccination front, at least 450,000 Rwandans including frontline workers and the elderly, have been vaccinated against the virus. Rwanda hopes that by end of 2022, at least 60 percent of the population would have received the jab.

As the executive has implemented the above highlighted economic interventions and other measures not detailed in this statement, Parliament had also played a crucial role. As part of its oversight role, Parliament has summoned the Prime Minister and relevant Government Ministries to review the country's preparedness. Other executive members have also appeared to brief the House on specific matters. It is important that Members of Parliament organized field visits countrywide and are kept updated so that they are able to explain these measures to the population.

In addition, the Auditor General of state finances will prepare a report for Parliament on all the taxpayer's money put into the fight against the pandemic. Parliament will play its role as stated in the Constitution of Rwanda.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to share with you some of the experiences, as Rwanda parliament, which we have picked from this pandemic, which would serve, as the theme of this gathering states, to make a better tomorrow.

Digitization of all Parliamentary Business: Rwanda's Parliament has adopted complete digitization of Parliamentary business. Despite the pandemic, Parliament did not stop its activities, instead we worked around them. All plenary and committee sessions are held online whereby parliamentarians work from home – only making physical meetings the exception. There is no way Parliament could hold physical meetings, and at the same time expect the voters not to; we have subjected ourselves to same standards because this virus doesn't choose who to infect. I encourage this Assembly to adopt this experience.

Strengthen multilateralism: the scientific community has given us the science, and it shows that as far as the COVID-19 virus is concerned, *NO ONE IS SAFE UNTIL ALL OF US ARE SAFE*. The global community needs to come together to ensure the vaccines are available to all. As Parliaments, we should make it our mission to have our countries come together to share all the knowhow to the benefit of the wider global community. The existence of the COVAX Facility that has enabled countries like Rwanda to receive vaccines, is a clear demonstration of how much countries can achieve when they work together. I believe more can, and needs to be done.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude my statement by emphasizing that, if anything, this pandemic has demonstrated that complacency is never a good thing. As Rwanda Parliament, and the country as whole, which we have witnessed in the past 27 years since the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the world community has to be ready to change and adapt.

Thank you for your attention.