

Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, at a ceremony on the 16th Commemoration of the Rwanda Genocide, in the ECOSOC Chamber at the United Nations

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Thank you very much.

Ladies and gentlemen, excellencies, colleagues, distinguished guests, Madam Deputy Secretary-General, it is my honor to represent the United States on this solemn day of commemoration and resolve—and it is my particular honor to be here with brave men and women who survived the genocide unleashed 16 years ago.

There are sorrows that do not fade; there are hurts that are with us always. The faces of those who were murdered 16 years ago in a whirlwind of cruelty and malice will stay forever with those who loved them. More than 800,000 souls slain in a hundred days of hatred and horror—we still remember, we still mourn, and their blood still cries out from the trampled earth.

Our hearts are full of pain today, even after all these years; but our eyes are clear, and our will must be sure. We are drawn together by private anguish and common purpose—by a boundless grief for those who were lost, and by a shared determination to learn the stern lessons of failures past and put an end to genocide once and for all.

We believe there can be no progress without memory. We believe there can be no justice without remembrance. But we still believe in progress and justice. For the story of Rwanda is not just a tale of murder and despair. Rwanda is writing a new chapter today—despite its past, despite sorrows almost beyond the telling. From great anguish and vast hardship has come new hope.

We bear witness today not just to Rwanda's suffering but also to its renewal—to survivors who have rebuilt shattered homes and restored battered lives—to parents who have taken orphans into their arms and their hearts—to refugees who have

found the courage to go home and start anew—to soldiers who have laid down weapons and taken up tools that build—to men and women who have won fresh prosperity and brought new comfort to their neighbors and their region—to leaders and public servants who have strengthened the institutions that enshrine the rule of law and ward off the temptation of turmoil—to ordinary citizens who have searched their wounded souls and chosen healing over strife, forgiveness over grievance, and reconciliation over revenge. Just as genocide cannot happen without thousands of individual decisions to destroy, recovery happens only with thousands of individual decisions to create.

It is no accident that Rwanda, a small land that has known more than its share of sorrow, contributes more troops to international peacekeeping missions than all but five other nations on Earth. Rwandans can surely take particular pride in knowing – as you pointed out – that a Rwandan general serves as the overall force commander of UNAMID, the hybrid UN–African Union operation in Darfur and in knowing that nearly 3,500 Rwandan peacekeepers strive every day to bring new meaning and might to the words “Never again” by serving in Darfur. The United States remains a strong and committed partner for Rwanda as it seeks to honor lives that were so cruelly taken 16 years ago on its own soil by saving lives that still hang in the balance in other lands today.

On this occasion last year, marking 15 years since the start of Rwanda’s descent into the inferno of genocide, I bowed my head to acknowledge our faults and our inability to bring the victims back. I said then, “What we can do—both for the victims and for those whose daily lives are still marred by the aftereffects of the genocide—is to rededicate ourselves to our shared commitment to human rights and human dignity. We believe that in war, there are rules. We believe that even in the pursuit of power, there are limits. We believe that even in a violent world, there are rights. We must be voices for action, even if we are sometimes lonely ones.”

I believe that still, for now and forever. Ladies and gentlemen, we have both a duty to mourn and a duty to act. We have both a responsibility to remember and a responsibility to protect. Genocide is not unstoppable. Atrocities are not inevitable. They need not be part of the landscape of world politics—unless we let them be.

Thank you.