

Address to the Nation by His Excellency Evariste Ndayishimiye on the eve of the International Women's Day: Gitega, 08th March 2021

Burundians,
Women living in Burundi and throughout the World,
Dear Friends of Burundi;

1. Allow me to start by giving thanks to Almighty God for keeping us and letting us live until today, on the eve of the day when we join our wives, our sisters, our mothers, aunts and grandmothers on the occasion of International Women's Day. Glory be to Him and May He be hailed for He is worthy of praise.

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2. On the 08th March of each year, Burundi joins the rest of the world to celebrate the International Women's Day, an opportunity for all countries of the world to jointly assess the stage taken in the implementation of the Action Plan and the Objectives that they set out to promote women's rights, because they had been discriminated for a very long time in decision-making bodies.

3. If this date was dedicated to women, it is not by chance, but rather because we value a woman's priceless value for the entire humanity.

This Day is not only about those in power in the country. It is more than ceremonial, but an opportunity for women to meditate on the role of women in the development of the family, the community and in the country, and to analyse together how they could contribute to it.

This day also provides an opportunity to call to order some men who do not value women and forget that, along with those women, they have a divine mission to perform, of who some often devalue the women and abuse them in families, in the community and in the whole country.

For this category of men, the 08th March is an occasion to remember the significant value of women. May this day serve to put an end to the physical or verbal violence some women are subject to in the families, that the heads of families no longer abuse their social position, and make a commitment to honor the dignity of their wives.

4. Fortunately, as I often say, in her nature and in the mission she received from the Creator, a woman is key for the development of the family. She is the bedrock of society, she is trustworthy and she is the source of fulfillment in her family. The 'Rundi' folkloric songs always celebrate the women for their moral greatness and exemplified them with the expression 'woman with a thousand arms'.

The woman is the pillar of peace thanks to her gifts of compassion and love towards her family. It is the woman who takes the lead when it comes to educating children for the benefit of the whole Nation.

5. If there are women who don't live up to their name, this is a chance for them to do some soul-searching. And overall, it is a good time for women to look back on their past to analyze the role they have played in the country.

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6. This year, we have chosen to celebrate the International Women's Day under the theme: "WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP, SOURCE OF INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT", translated into our language, UBUKERE BUTSI BW'ABAKENYEZI, SOKO RY 'ITERAMBERE KURI BOSE

It is a theme that we have chosen with the aim of inviting each woman, wherever she may be, to redouble her efforts in initiating and developing projects aimed at her personal fulfillment, the development of her life, family, community and the whole country.

In addition, this theme complements the theme for the month of March which is worded as follows "UMUKENYEZI NI UMWAMBIRO W'IHINDUKA DUKENEYE MURI RETA MVYEYI / RETA NKOZI" which means in English that "A woman is a catalyst for change driven by the Responsible and Laborious Government".

7. A Woman is truly a major player in all societies, their role is essential. God Himself did not see fit for a man to be alone. We can even certainly say that it is here that the Burundians found the origin of the Kirundi proverb, "Ubugirigiri bugira babiri" - to say that "Many hands make light work" and thus to underline the importance of complementarity.

To Husbands that we are, let us know that we cannot undertake anything successfully without the support of our wives. Let us know how invaluable their contributions are!

To Wives, your Husbands are your precious supports and it is in complementarity that your home will flourish. The Word of God also tells us that through the wisdom of the woman, "Her husband is recognized when he sits among the elders of the land." (Proverbs 31:23).

8. It is this woman of exceptional qualities that we desire in Burundi. A woman whose attitude and demeanor reflect the cultural values of Burundi.

It is for this reason that now is the time to examine ourselves so as not to set ourselves goals that we will not be able to achieve.

Indeed, there are still women who think that their bodies and their appearance are for sale. Some deceived men and reduced themselves down to sexual vagrants and go so far as to squander their family's property to the detriment of their family. This day is not dedicated to this kind of women, because, by their behavior, they are the source of many problems in society, destroy harmony in families, expose themselves to unwanted pregnancies, and even promote the spread of endemic diseases such as HIV-AIDS, Hepatitis B, etc.

9. We would like the Woman to be the pillar of peace and mutual understanding in the family and in the country. "She stretches out her hands to the poor, stretches out her arms to the unfortunate," says the Word of God (Prov 31:20).

God encourages you women to be peacemakers, to bring hope and harmony to this world.

However, there are some women who abuse their rights to legitimize wrongdoing that could sow discord and disorder in their homeland.

It is not to this category of woman that this Day is dedicated. This International Day of women, 08th March, is dedicated to the virtuous woman, who respects the values of Ubuntu, the woman who is aware of her value and of her "Ibanga", the dynamic and creative woman, a woman who knows how to restore the dignity to the one whose honor is scorned, a woman who is ready to defend the best interests of her homeland.

Indeed, when we say that a woman is "Umuzewanzu", it means that she is in charge of the home, that she holds the households' secret. If then it is her who breaks the family secret, how would she be useful for the society?

10. So let's assess together and see what the Burundian woman is. It was the Burundian musician Nkeshimana who, after observing Burundian women and analyzing their behavior, so aptly said "Abagore bari kune bari gutanu" (there are four or five categories of women).

For example, sometimes it is hard to understand how the a woman manages to coordinate and carry out her daily activities perfectly.

In fact, it is often the woman who has the greatest responsibilities in the home, while the man is often conspicuous by his absence at home. And it is the same lifestyle for educated women who work in other professions or in other functions, whether public or private. In addition to their activities, they retain responsibility for household chores including child rearing and household management even if the credit goes to the man while the husbands are enjoying in pubs.

Even those who are not farmers, they are very aware that they are in charge of the education of the child, but the time comes for dowry, it is the husband who receives it. But, surprisingly, the women never demonstrate jealousy on that.

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11. So this 08th March, we celebrate this Burundian woman of whom we are proud. However, it is also a favorable occasion for these women about whom the musician Nkeshimana talks, the women described as "Kinyenzimakwakwa" and "Karabadukakane", Kirundi expressions to designate women with depraved and unscrupulous morals, so that they self-assess and change their behavior.

They should also know that being equal to a man and measuring himself against him does not mean depriving her off her rights to be in charge of the household, because everyone must be respected in their social roles. And the fact that a woman is not the head of a household does not mean that she is or should be underestimated. It is very important to know that a woman is a person capable of assuming her responsibilities and not an object to manipulate.

12. Fortunately in Burundi, we have brave women leaders who have served the Nation and who have proven that they are capable of being successful where even men have failed. These are good references.

It is this bravery and wisdom that make women key players across the world and that they should be associated with decision-making bodies instead of being marginalized.

There are also other girls and women who do all their best for the good of their homeland, who make their native country respected throughout the world by their talents, which allows Burundi to have a beautiful image and a good name in the rest of the world.

13. On the eve of International Women's Day and without having to mention all these brave women by name, I would like to warmly thank some of the girls and women who have recently demonstrated their dynamism and determination, just to show all women that we notice the good work you do and we highly appreciate it.

I would like to congratulate from the bottom of my heart a young Burundian girl, Miss Sada Nahimana, world famous in court tennis. Despite her young age, 19, her talent is underpinned by hard work she does with extraordinary determination, and today she is ranked first in Court Tennis in Africa for the category of her age. May she find here my congratulations and encouragement.

I also congratulate Miss Mireille Kamariza, a world-renowned Burundian recognized for her research skills. She recently developed a device to quickly and easily diagnose Tuberculosis.

According to calculations made by specialists, this new technique will save thousands and thousands of patients who could be killed by this disease due to ignorance.

14. The number of brave women is even greater, we also recognize that there are widows who take care of orphans after the death of their husbands, but who do not indulge in debauchery to expose their children to begging.

They hold back and manage to educate their children into adulthood. They are also exceptionally dynamic women and demonstrate, by example, that being a widow cannot be mistaken to vulnerability.

15. From now on, I would like to ask all Burundians to break away from the old mentality of underestimating women in families. Women are naturally good managers.

First, as men, let us accept that they are our true representatives in the households, so that they are the true managers of our households. Do not hesitate to entrust them with the management of the family wealth, as this would set a good example that you will be leaving to your children. It is this sharing of responsibilities and this mutual trust that help build the family.

16. Second, dear women, seek to earn the trust of your husbands by properly discharging your family duty. Respect your husbands, because in Burundian culture, the man is the head of the family. It is when you want to measure yourself against him and attempt to replace him at the head of the family that the dislocation of the family occurs, because, as our ancestors have said well, INKUBA ZIBIRI NTIZISANGIRA IGICU which means that "TWO LIGHTNINGS CANNOT NOT SHARE A SAME CLOUD", in other words, when there is bi-cephalism at the head of the household and there is no agreement, the dislocation of the household follows.

When in the family there is lack of mutual respect, the household ends up falling apart, and a household without a head of family is not respected in the community.

If you disrespect your husbands, you will be attracting those pretending to become husbands in your families and you will lose your household.

117. With regard to internal affairs in our country, the Government has set itself the duty of combating all forms of discrimination.

This means that all Burundians enjoy the same rights in terms of participation in decision-making bodies and in terms of representation at all levels of political power.

But because of the dark history of our country, today we are still restoring the rights of those who had been excluded, including women

If in Burundi we still say that this or that category of people must be represented at such and such a percentage, it is not a question of divisions, it is rather to rehabilitate those who had been marginalized without excluding those who had earlier excluded them.

You women need to be rest assured because today you are no longer marginalized when it comes to being appointed to positions of responsibility.

18. However, I would like to bring to the attention of all Burundians that banning divisions and exclusions means that when one has a national or other mandate, one is not mandated to represent the social group to which one belongs or one gender but to work for the good of all citizens. Let no one say to themselves that by accessing a position of responsibility it amounts to representing this or that category of people, because Burundi is a unitary Republic as per the Constitution.

On the other hand, those who elected you and elevated you to your post of responsibility are not necessarily from your gender, your ethnic group, your province or region of origin.

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19. Now is the time to give equal opportunities to all citizens, but you should know that we choose the more intrepid. Women who are elected to different political or administrative responsibilities should know that they do not represent only women, but rather the entire population. I therefore urge the women who are promoted to higher positions to adopt a behavior worthy of this trust so that no one is surprised that one day, in certain decision-making bodies, there are more women than men.

A Kirundi saying goes: "Umuryambwa aba umwe agatukisha umuryango" translated into English, "a dog eater shames the whole family". The Government of Burundi will not subject anyone to unfair treatment for the mere fact that she is a woman. Anyone who behaves unworthily will only bring stigma to herself.

However, dear Sisters, at this time when you are taking this historic turning point of inclusion in decision-making bodies, keep in mind that there is a corollary of challenges to overcome and that all eyes are on you.

I invite you to strive for excellence in your activities, to avoid being treated as second-class citizens, but rather be the vectors of integral and inclusive development, trustworthy women in the strict sense of the term.

20. It is not only from women leaders that we ask for more dynamism. Far from there! We wish each woman to be dynamic and creative in all here, endeavors, so as to become a reference person to be eligible for promotion whether in the Public Service, in organizations, within cooperatives, within political parties, in churches, etc.

21. Women cannot be the bedrock of integral and inclusive development unless they are supported in their households, in their daily activities, in their positions of responsibility and in the projects they are undertaking.

This is why I call on the husbands to support them, to encourage them and even lend them a hand, because the honor bestowed on a woman has positive effects on the family and the spouse.

22. I urge journalists, religious leaders, economic operators, and civil society organizations to assist them. May the achievements of successful women be recognized, encouraged and disclosed, and that they be trained into what they do not master. Indeed, knowledge is acquired and mastery comes with practice.

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23. We celebrate this holiday as our country has just held free and democratic elections. Analysis of the results shows that in all institutions women were sufficiently represented:

39% in the National Assembly, 41% in the Senate; while in the Government, out of 15 Ministers, 5 are women. Even in other areas of life, women are more than 30% represented.

24. The Government of Burundi has long understood that the role of girls and women is essential in the development of the country. It is within this framework that it implemented the National Gender Policy to promote general development, enlighten all sectors of the life of a nation, on what could be done so that the contribution of women in the development of families and the country is more noticeable.

Several projects have been carried out with the aim of integrating girls and women in Burundi.

25. This situation has made it possible to increase the number of girls in primary, secondary schools and university, which is part of the promotion of the well-being of girls and women because "Who learns 'enriches' himself and an educated person does not fall into just any trap.

26. In an attempt to fight against violence against girls and women, the Government has not folded its arms. By repressing any form of offense linked to this type of violence, a law on prevention, protection of victims and repression of gender-based violence was promulgated in September 2016.

Apart from that, the Government intervenes quickly to help the victims of this violence.

It is within this framework that 5 care centers for victims of gender-based violence have been opened in the provinces of Gitega, Cibitoke, Makamba, Muyinga and Rumonge, and provide victims of violence with all the assistance they require/need.

27. With regard to the development of the country, the Government can rightly confirm that in the Civil Services majority of women are incorruptible even if there are no rules without exception. Things have changed, the woman of the past is not similar to the woman of today. She now participates in the development of the country unlike the woman of the past who was exclusively devoted to housework. They have integrated the defense and security forces and they excel and are awarded in international competitions. They are found in several fields, technical, mechanical, political and social areas.

28. In order to support women's activities, the Government of Burundi has fought against discrimination against women by offering them work opportunities in all sectors. However, the Government has noticed that women constitute the major part of the population, and that, if their entrepreneurial initiatives were sufficiently supported, socio-economic development would quickly become a reality. This is why we have set up the Investment and Development Bank for Women at a lower interest rate.

29. On this occasion, we appeal to women in all provinces of the country to prepare accordingly, by developing clear and bankable projects to submit to this Bank to obtain funding and enhance it so that the funds invested by the Government does not keep unproductive, reduced to only paying the salaries for the staff

30. In the same vein, the Government of Burundi is committed to better managing public affairs so that citizens do share them equitably. The Government of Burundi calls on all Burundian citizens to remain vigilant and ensure respect for the common good, to work tirelessly to increase production, and thus to fight against poverty, in order to produce and generate income and therefore feed the National treasury. The Government will then be able to meet the needs of the citizens because it is obvious that the areas where the support of the Government is needed are still numerous.

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31. On the behalf of the Government, We are committed to taking the lead in continuing the fight against discrimination throughout the country. All citizens must have the same opportunities and be supported by the country. All those who once were victims of discrimination must feel that they now have equal opportunities with others in participating in decision-making relating to the life of the Nation.

It is so hard because this requires that the Laws relating to the Work in the Public Service be respected at a time when the resources available in the Public Treasury are still scarce.

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32. We cannot conclude these remarks without going over some advice to be given to women but also to men, on the occasion of this exceptional celebration:

❖ Firstly, remember that this Day is the culmination of a very long process, do not get distracted by the slogan that reads: "We had long been oppressed"! Do not open the door to those who underestimate you and exclude you because you are unable to take responsibility. You have to be careful because you will be judged by your abilities.

❖ "It's not right for a woman to be rebellious, she has to know that there is a head of the family and that she is the deputy head. She must therefore discuss all the projects that she wishes to carry out with her husband and in this way, she will avoid that there is a lack of respect in the family. Imagine bi-cephalism at the head of the country! It would be the same in the family.

❖ If you wish to be trustworthy in the country, behave well in your neighborhood and in the country at large. You should know that no one gets a position of responsibility due to her beauty, region, party, ethnic group or sex. We need to keep in mind that that competence is individual but not collective.

❖ "Secondly, I am speaking to you men. You are called to support your wives, by showing them that they are capable of properly organizing and managing the household and the

family wealth. Dialogue and consultation within the family allows children to grow up with good leadership ideas, which helps shape their brighter futures.

❖ Build your family together, think about family planning to better cope with the problem of the increasing demography. The State will not be able to take charge of all your children's future.

33. To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to all those who constantly support the Government of Burundi in the development of the country in general and the empowerment of women, in particular. Continue on the same path by increasing the financial resources for the implementation of projects already planned.

34. It is with these words that I end my address to the Nation on the occasion of the International Women's Day, while wishing a happy day to all Burundian and foreign women who live in Burundi. I wish you a good day which we will celebrate tomorrow. May God continue to help you successfully accomplish works and projects of bravery.

Long live women in households and in the country,
Long live Burundi and Burundians!
God bless you all!
Thank you!