

## **Address to the Nation by His Excellency Evariste Ndayishimiye on the occasion of the International Labor Day: May 1, 2021**

**Dear Compatriots,**

**Employees and Employers,**

1. Let me begin by giving thanks to the Almighty God who never fails to give us new blessings and who, today, has allowed us to wake up in peace and good health. Glory be to Him, He is worthy of praise.

2. In Burundi, we want to join the International Community in celebrating the International Labor Day, which is celebrated on May 1 of the year in many countries around the world.

3. It is a public holiday that we, the Burundians, we celebrate while giving thanks to the Almighty God who granted us the good health, the intelligence and the dynamism that enable us to carry out the activities planned on our agendas, the workers and their employers acting in solidarity, working together and in consultation, and to produce with our own hands what will make us live. Indeed, unlike us who eat what we produce ourselves, there are many places where people only eat food imported from outside.

4. Allow me first, on behalf of the Government of Burundi, the Government Concerned with the Well-Being of the People / the Laborious Government, to offer all workers my heartfelt wishes for this Labour Day. May this holiday be an opportunity for us to meditate on the importance of work in our life, and an opportunity to make decisions that would facilitate the creation of more jobs so that all those who are able to work have what to do, and that they can develop personally and develop their country.

5. For a real worker who has already understood that good things are the result of a job well done, today is not a celebration like any other. This is not a feast for those who are workers in name only, but it is a feast for workers concerned with meeting their professional obligations properly and making their work profitable.

If we were to ask the question: have we made profits this year or have we made losses? Or have we experienced economic stagnation?

Of course, I know that there are people who have made profits and those who have suffered losses.

But there are others who cannot say anything because no one can reap what he has not sown. These are lazy people; they have no right to speak in the workers' assembly.

6. I warmly thank the workers, regardless of their status, who have taken their jobs seriously during this year, and who have done it as if they were for their own benefit. I am grateful to the National Social Dialogue Committee, which brings together representatives of the Government, representatives of trade unions and representatives of employers, for the insight and wisdom with which they analyze and deal with conflicting files and for the solutions they provide to work-related disputes before the situation escalates.

7. I would like to express our deep gratitude to the Defence and Security Forces, the members of the joint security committees and all Burundian citizens who have already understood that keeping security allows people to think about sustainable and viable projects.

8. I would also like to thank the Burundians who have come together in production associations or cooperative companies including factories processing local products. They created jobs, paid taxes and contributed significantly to the development of the country.

9. In view of these benefits of work, we have seen fit to celebrate this holiday under the following theme, the same as the one chosen for the month of May 2021: "Let us get to work and form a common front to fight and overcome poverty".

10. This theme of the day invites every citizen to do something so that everyone without exception develops.

It also calls us to unite to carry out a common action in complementarity, to advance our development project, and urges us not to be distracted or be left behind when everyone needs to live well in this country, with all of us together.

11. We want to see a country that is prosperous in all areas. It is for this reason that I ask that no one lags behind. Let everyone initiate an activity that generates income and new resources that will enable them to support themselves. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the members of the trade unions who have understood that the financial resources they collect each month can contribute to their own economic and social development.

**Dear Compatriots,**

**Burundians,**

**Employees and Employers;**

12. When we celebrate Labor Day, there are workers who wish to know or remember the origin of this day. I am not going to come back to it because it has always been talked about every year on this occasion.

What you need to know is that to this day, employees and employers celebrate this day in memory of the day when workers saw their working conditions improved so that they would never again revolt as was the case at the beginning of this holiday, when they were fighting for their rights at work.

Fortunately, in our country, we have a good Labor Code that is perfectly harmonized with International Labor Law.

The working hours that they have been granted are the same as those in the Labor Code in Burundi and elsewhere in the world.

13. Certainly, most of the work-related questions that workers ask have been answered, including fatigue and work-related illness.

For us here at home, we celebrate this day to ensure that employers remain aware of the importance of their employees' lives.

But it is also an opportunity to raise awareness among employees that work is not just sitting in offices, but rather making efforts, getting tired and then asking for a well-deserved rest.

It is finally an opportunity to remind each other that everyone should demand a salary if and only if they have worked and produced something, when the fund has found its share.

14. We are used to this day being mainly an opportunity for workers to express their concerns about their work. As we know, here in our country, what worries workers most is not that they go to work without seeing their performance, but rather that their wages increase and their bonuses multiply, regardless of the conditions.

This is particularly noticeable among state officials. They do not look at all if the citizens, the beneficiaries of their work and their real employers, are happy with their performance; they only look if the salary has increased.

There is another thing: those who receive little money want to see their salary equal to that of those who receive a lot of money, this is the current trend. Those with high

salaries in turn want to see bonuses increase in their favour to further widen the gap between them and those with low salaries.

If things go the way they want, we will find ourselves in a situation where the wage harmonisation programme could become a vicious circle.

You understand that the ongoing dialogue between the Government and the workers has to do with these questions: "When will our salaries be harmonised with others?" "When will our bonus and salary be increased?" My conviction is that these questions concern us all, which is why we must assess their progress together, in order to know when failure came in and to find an appropriate solution.

15. To maximise the chances of success, let's work together to understand some concepts: what is a "job", a "salary" or a "bonus", and what is a "real worker" that the country needs?

Every citizen should know that employment is an activity that a person agrees to do in good conscience and whose result is production. Normally, if no production results, no one wastes his time doing a job.

Likewise, when a worker sees no interest in a job, he or she has the right to quit, and to look for a better place.

For there to be mutual agreement between an employee and an employer, they establish an employment contract. The employer provides the job and brings in the capital while the employee brings in the technical skill and strength.

This is why the salary should be deducted from the profit, the employer and the employee, each receiving a share proportional to the contribution he made to the project. When you are not making a profit, together you put up with austerity.

And if you are not careful, you are not growing because you have not put aside the capital that can generate income and inflate the capital to generate much more.

You can see the value of the social dialogue between employee and employer. Both are co-owners of the company because they all live off the company, and it is the company that will support their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

They should therefore all check together that their business is progressing for their own good, since they are co-owners of it and live off it.

16. Now we have seen what wages are; you deserve a pay rise when you have had a surplus profit. If you have not earned anything you don't claim anything, unless you want to destroy the company.

If the company collapses, where will you, the employee, go? If you go home empty-handed and the company was your family's breadwinner, you should know that the children are looking you in the eye. Then you understand who the real worker is.

It is the one who brings in his or her expertise, makes it profitable to get a return on it, someone who makes sure to put his or her heart into it and uses all his or her potential so that together with his or her employer they can earn more and at the end have a salary that supports them.

17. So let's ask each other!

Since everyone is pleased to see his or her salary increase, have we made any gains during this year?

Let each one of us go and see in his or her department, and if he or she finds that he or she has made a profit, let him or her enter into discussions with the employer.

If, on the other hand, they find that they have not made a profit, they should discuss with their bosses what measures to take to avoid a repeat of the situation next year, because they might regret it and say: "I have made efforts in my business in vain, I am working at a loss."

Let us examine our consciences: has there been an ongoing dialogue between the employee and the employer, organised in a frank and sincere manner? Let every employer ask himself the question, give himself the answer, and resolve to change things.

As far as I am concerned, I will be very happy the day when I see employees and employers coming together to celebrate May Day by complimenting each other and praising their achievements by saying to each other: "You made me earn money" while the other says: "You gave me a salary".

Let there be a perfect understanding between the employee and the employer, so they will prosper and develop the country at the same time.

The employee should not be seen as "someone who has come to eat" and the employer should not be seen as "an ungrateful person". I am pleased that many workers are aware of their role at work.

18. I would like to come back to the subject of state officials, because they are the ones who complain the most; and who complain while looking to me as the Leader appointed by the people to show them the main directions of the national policy. What a state official should know is that he is a benefactor, a worker at the service of the people.

Anyone who does not understand this has not yet internalised the notion of the nation state. In French, we speak of "Services publics"; that is, a service rendered to the people.

You understand then that in public services there is no individual interest. The interest of a state official is to see the citizens happy, not to be paid a salary.

The 'salary' that he receives is not a counterpart for services rendered, strictly speaking, it is an incentive that he obtains because he has sacrificed himself for others at a time when he should have been working at home and developing himself.

You can understand then that the ongoing dialogue between the employer and the employee does not take the same format when it comes to the public services of the State, because all the civil servants of the State are employees at the service of the people, including myself.

How then does the dialogue between the State and state officials take place when we know that the latter are citizens among many others?

Civil servants' representatives should gather those under their responsibility and ask each other this question: "What have we done for the citizens to ask them to give us additional salary?"

And we, the civil servants, as citizen leaders, let us examine our conscience. That is why the current Government of Burundi has been named a hardworking Government. Indeed, by paying taxes, Burundian citizens do not pay them to be buried like the Biblical bad servant who received a talent to make it profitable and buried it thinking that it would germinate and generate interest.

The outcome of the money that citizens give is their development. We use it for their benefit, if they win, we all win.

That is why the fundamental principle of the development of our country is: "Development that comes from the citizen and returns to the citizen".

The dialogue with State Officials is therefore about giving answers to the questions that citizens have put to the Government, including the following: Have citizens' lives improved? Have they made any gains?

To prove whether they have made a profit, they give a lot of taxes. When you see the state coffers full of revenue, you deduce that we have made a profit. That is exactly the right time to ask for an extra bonus.

So today, each in his or her own field, the state official should ask himself or herself: "Did I serve the citizens properly to deserve a higher salary?"

If you find that what you have done has not generated profits in such a way that the Government goes into debt to pay your salary, then make a decision to redouble your efforts to relieve the burden of debt from the shoulders of the citizens.

19. What I would like to ask here is that no one calls for a salary increase when they are well aware that even the public debt that the Government has incurred in recent years to pay civil servants has not yet been paid.

You will say, are we working at a loss even though we show up to work?

It is difficult to answer this question because there are many people among the state officials, let's say the employees of the citizens, who have not yet meditated on the country, who have not yet understood how the state's finances are growing, how they are managed and how they work.

Today you can find a state official who wants a higher salary when he sees people stealing or embezzling public funds and does not denounce them.

Sometimes the official himself is involved in the embezzlement but asks for a higher salary.

There are others who let goods that should normally be taxed go through fraudulent channels and still claim a salary at the end of the month. Where does he think this salary comes from, if not from there?

There are still others who refuse to take the lead and help citizens or local organisations in their activities, and then want to be paid at the time when those who should be contributing to the state coffers go bankrupt. Where will this salary come from then?

Others who were in charge of developing techniques and technologies to enable companies and citizens to produce a lot and pay taxes spend their time sitting in offices doing nothing but want to collect the salary while they do nothing for the country to have revenues and pay salaries.

To clear themselves of all these failures, they ask the state to solicit external aid so that they can be paid.

Normally, it is the vulnerable persons who benefit from assistance; are we then going to endorse the fact that state officials are considered vulnerable? Personally, I don't see it that way; I don't even believe it. That is why I am ashamed to beg.

20. If in Burundi we have been distracted, let us first admit it, and resolve to get back to work. When we become aware of the need to serve the country in accordance with the will of the people who have delegated us, we will ask for help to increase our capital instead of asking for assistance. This is my wish.

21. In my opinion, anyone who is absent from work should be absent from eating as well. I repeat, whoever is absent from work, let him not be paid either.

Whoever knows that he has nothing to show for his achievements during the month, let him not go and get paid. Such a person embodies unproductiveness, for he has not made the intelligence and strength that God has given him profitable. How can you collect this remuneration if you are lazy?

Let us make the citizens happy and they will smile and the outcome of this smile will make us live.

## **Burundians**

### **Employees, Employers;**

22. When we look back at the past, we can see the achievements that made us successful and what we missed. We have missed a lot; we have lost a lot of time because of the stupidity of many of us, which made us lose peace.

Today, we are breathing a sigh of relief because there is peace and security in our country. We know that we do not have to fear for our lives.

It is therefore the right time to accelerate and speed up for lost time.

There are many projects that could not be realized during this lost time, and they are waiting for us.

Modern agriculture and animal husbandry were not our concern, we were happy to have food, but seeking to have a surplus was not our concern. There were even anachronistic sayings to justify our inaction, for example this one: "You have to live in the present moment because tomorrow is not yours".

As for the processing of local natural raw materials, we didn't even think about it because it would take a long time to get the result. It was also feared that such an investment would require a lot of capital, whereas this capital is built up from other work done.

We didn't care about developing tourist attractions and tourist facilities.

All these projects could help us create wealth we needed, and it is always a job ahead of us.

No one cared about their fellow man throughout the country, so many state officials have not yet understood what it means to contribute to the development of the citizens, even today.

If you were to ask the officials of a particular ministry, "Since you are responsible for serving the population of the whole country, if you were taken to this or that commune, would you be able to show what you have achieved for them? Think about it and answer to yourself, knowing that the annual budget of any Ministry is meant to serve the population of the whole country.

Given that you have received your remuneration, could you show what you have done for them, commune by commune?

Let's understand this, and this is the work ahead of us. If tomorrow you are asked to go and work in a remote area of Burundi, you should not procrastinate because you have accepted to work for the whole country and everywhere in the country, and you are paid for it.

23. You hear that we are lucky, for we still have work to do. What remains is to get up and do it.

The others have finished. They have built roads, schools, hydroelectric plants, tourist attractions and facilities, telecommunication infrastructures, factories and industries, nothing is left for them? As for us, all these projects are waiting for us. Let's roll up our sleeves and work.

24. That is why, before concluding, I would like to give you some advice.

➤ I will start with young people and women because they are numerous in the country:

As I just said, young people and women are the most numerous in the country. They need to be supported by the Government to get them to work and contribute to increasing production. Very recently, we have set up banks that will make it easier for you to find the capital you need, since you said you have strength. So get to work because the capital is available now. Make it profitable and make it generate profits, so that future generations will find these banks more developed.

This policy of facilitating the self-development of the youth is the key to the progress of our country. Indeed, an amount of forty billion Burundi Francs is enough capital for us to have achieved in a period of two years a production far superior to that.

I was overjoyed when these young people promised me this at the last youth conference from 8 to 9 April this year.

➤ To all workers:

Let each of you do your work with dedication and diligence as an example to others.

Let us work in the hope of leaving a good legacy, a good name, each of us concerned with being a person of value of which the next generation will be proud and boast. Nothing would be more interesting than to hear someone say: "I work like so-and-so"; or "This is so-and-so's legacy".

➤ About Social Dialogue at work:

When work-related problems arise, which is normal because we are on earth where nothing is perfect, let's first do the problem mapping to understand them fully, and then let's seek together to resolve them in a sustainable way, in accordance with the Labor Code. If we cannot resolve them, let us seek advice before we refer them to the upper level or expose them to the public.

This good practice will help us increase production and reduce the number of disputes that are referred to the courts.

We call on employers to stop being called "Shebuja" (lord) because employees are not "abaja" (slaves).

Employees in turn must see themselves as shareholders in the company or as the real owner of the company when they are at work. Similarly, union members must be good advisors at work, for their own good, for the good of the company and for the good of the country.

If they work at a loss, let them suffer together, without one blaming the other; and if they make a profit, let them share the outcome.

➤ Regarding the good health of workers:

We are called to keep in mind that it is a healthy person who works. Let us be concerned about our health, especially in the fight against the pandemic of COVID-19 and AIDS. As the Burundian proverb says, "He who has good health cannot miss a good harvest".

➤ Relating the National Development Plan (NDP Burundi 2018-2027) and work

Ladies and gentlemen, employees and employers, please refer to the projects contained in the 10-year National Development Plan (NDP Burundi 2018-2027), because they can inspire you in planning the micro-projects that would help you live well and continue to develop.

The Government is committed to supporting you by putting in place mechanisms that can facilitate your work, including: granting you credit at an affordable interest rate, building good roads for transporting your goods, building hydroelectric power plants, training efficient technicians, promoting public health without forgetting the maintenance of public security and anything that is needed to facilitate the implementation of your projects.

➤ Within the framework of good governance and the sharing of public goods:

In order to help the Government to serve you properly, the Government must have sufficient means. These means come from increased production and increased taxes. So avoid hiding your production or engaging in tax evasion.

Help us also to build an indestructible front against embezzlement of public funds, economic malpractice, corruption and misuse of public property. We would like all revenues to be returned to the state coffers in order to contribute to integral and integrated development.

➤ To people who are used to eating without working

I am talking about some associations that claimed to themselves the right to collect money from working people, while these associations never do anything in their favour; associations of transporters, some trade unions, associations of households workers, those who sell products they have not harvested, animals they have not raised and houses they have not built and who spend their time doing nothing. All these people contribute to the increase in poverty. I urge them to abandon these bad practices, to pull themselves together and find something to do to contribute to development and eat the bread they have earned by the sweat of their brow.

➤ On the subject of the care of pensioners:

I would like to address the INSS and the ONPR, reminding them that the resources they collect belong to the workers, and that their duty is to manage them and make them profitable in their favour, which is why, in principle, the workers should retire finding their contributions increased. Let them know that we will now keep an eye on their money wherever it is invested, so that those who retire can be properly accompanied, because they have been useful to the country.

➤ To the Mutuelle de la Fonction Publique (Public Service Insurance Company)

I would also like to remind them that the leftovers from each year's budget must be used to provide care for retirees because it is their money.

I wish to make a wink to Burundian citizens regarding the Medical Assistance Card (CAM) by telling them that they should not buy it when they are ill. He who does so wants to suck the government dry when he is one of those who can take care of themselves. It is unbelievable someone becomes indigent just when he gets sick.

➤ In the context of Insurance and Prevention

I would like to draw the attention of employees and employers to the fact that old age insurance is done while they still have the strength and means to do it.

This means that everyone should think about doing and plan for the future so that they do not regret the time they wasted travelling too far when they become old and unfit.

Preventing the future is not only about saving money in a proper fund, it is also about initiating development projects while you are still able to do so, so that they can sustain you in old age. Indeed, even children will need to be bequeathed something resulting from the projects carried out, the fruit of your efforts.

I ask all workers to initiate projects that will make them live after retirement, and thus get used to taking out loans in banks to execute their projects.

It is true that there are people who are distracted from their professional work by such self-development projects; but they must know that they can entrust them to others who can carry them out properly for them.

We will be happy if we reach the state where every state official has a project, however small, for his personal development and that of the community. Each one should create and offer at least three jobs, and allow trade union freedom to its employees, so that they contribute effectively to the development of the country, because we have understood that the trade union movement is not about rivalry or arm-wrestling with the authorities.

➤ In the environment sector:

I appeal to all employees, employers and especially trade union members to mobilize in the implementation of the National Reforestation and Environmental Protection Program called: "EWE BURUNDI URAMBAYE". I invite everyone to plant at least one tree at work or at home, so that we can breathe clean air. Our wish is that within five years, Burundi will be a green wonder, an example that the whole planet will try to imitate. As you know, if we get together, employees and employers, this is possible.

25. Before concluding, I would like to remind all Burundians, especially civil servants, to fight against laziness, so as not to be an obstacle in the fight for the economic revival of the country that our Government (Reta-Mvyeyi/Reta-Nkozi) is leading, and to avoid injustice of any kind and not to fall into the error of neglecting the national interest.

26. Finally, I would like to wish you once again a happy Labor Day. Celebrate it with joy and hope for a better future while meditating on the theme: "Let us get to work and form a common front to fight and overcome the poverty»

Happy International Labor Day to all.

May God bless you.

Thank you.