

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF BURUNDI, YOUTH CHAMPION OF THE AFRICAN UNION, ON
THE OCCASION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL MENTORSHIP CHAT WITH
THE NIGERIAN YOUTH**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen;

Dear Young Leaders of Nigeria,

My dear friends,

- 1. Allow me, above all, to thank God the Merciful, for the grace he gave us to meet for these unprecedented exchanges.**

For a personal note, this meeting is very crucial as its set a stage to promote youth inclusion, participation and empowerment.

I have always seen youth as an opportunity for our continent and I am delighted that in Nigeria you too have this highly positive approach on maximizing the African youth demographic dividend.

- 2. I would like to thank Amb. Sukubo Sara-Igbe Sukubo, President of the National Youth Council of Nigeria, for the opportunity given to me to speak on a subject that is close to my heart, because young people are at the heart of the government action in Burundi.**

This is undeniable proof of the friendship of the Burundian and Nigerian peoples and I have no doubt that the young people of our countries will now play a major role in consolidating the fraternal ties that have bound us for decades. Indeed, I hope that this meeting will be the starting point of a vast and rich

partnership between the National Youth Council of Burundi and your Council.

3. Indeed, the essential role currently played by Burundian youth is made exceptional by the dark past experienced by our country, Burundi, which has been hard hit by cyclical violence for several years. Young people were the most affected with a whole host of problems such as instrumentalization in conflicts, poverty in families, access to education, health care, separation of children and their families, in short, situations that have weakened this fringe of the population, which is nevertheless essential to the building of the Nation.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

4. Today, the page of war has been definitively turned in Burundi. After realizing that without peace there is no development, and without development there is no peace, young people who were once mobilized in combat are now the best peacemakers and spearheads in the implementation of national community development policies.

I am delighted today to see that the echoes of the efforts of the Government of Burundi resonate throughout the African continent and particularly here in Nigeria, a country with know-how and youth empowerment.

5. To achieve this result in Burundi, we have organized civic and patriotic training sessions throughout the country and for all segments and categories of the Burundian population. We are very pleased with the awareness and awakening of the young people who are breaking with old mentalities and who are now engaged into development activities.

6. Having myself been very severely affected by the war in my youth when I had to take up arms, I make up for my lost youth time by putting youth at the heart of the socio-economic development of Burundi by listening to them and supporting their entrepreneurial initiatives. Beyond free primary education, we have built Regional Multisector Learning Centers which aims, among other things, to improve the technical and professional skills of young people, build a qualified workforce to improve their employability and better fight against unemployment.

To better support youth entrepreneurship initiatives, we have put in place several support and financing mechanisms for projects, including the Youth Investment Bank and the Youth Economic Empowerment and Employment Program. Thanks to this programme, fifty-two thousand six hundred and fourteen (52,614) young people have received training on how to set up projects and have been supported in their implementation. Among them, approximately one thousand two hundred and seventy-six (1276) projects were supported by the programme, and twenty thousand one hundred eighty-four (20184) jobs were created, not to mention one thousand nine hundred and seventy (1970) young people who have had internship in public and private companies.

7. Before reaching this stage, we encouraged young people to organize themselves into cooperatives and/or production groups and focus their investments in agro-pastoral processing and export because this is a sector with very promising growth.

In all these areas, Burundian youth undoubtedly have a lot to learn from their Nigerian sisters and brothers and vice versa. I like to believe that the path of developed countries would never have experienced growth had it not been for the collective

awareness of their active population, the youth. Therefore, I am firmly convinced that the transformative force of young Africans is essential to the economic recovery of our continent.

8. However, peace and politico-security stability in our countries are a prerequisite for any ambition of sustainable socio-economic development. From experience, I can say that all wars are born from a feeling of exclusion, insecurity and socio-economic precariousness of a part of the population. It is for this reason that all our efforts converge in the fight against a common enemy and source of all evil: Poverty.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends,

9. African demography is a double-edged knife; if young people are poorly supervised or abandoned to themselves without hope for tomorrow, they will easily be drawn into delinquency and crime, and therefore easy to be instrumentalized in the destruction of their own country and their own destiny by crooked political actors. We also know that the poor economic situation pushes some young people to take to the sea at the risk of their lives in search of a better life in the West. Thus, to prevent wars and resolve conflicts in a sustainable manner, a culture of peace and tolerance among young people should be promoted through peace-oriented education. Job creation and other supporting programs then become critical shields.
10. Whenever the opportunity arises, I appeal to policy makers to give youth a chance, because the socio-economic empowerment of young people is a response to the problems of poverty and insecurity. There are no more effective weapons than youth in the fight against poverty and in the prevention of conflicts.

Furthermore, non-discrimination against young people is one of the flagship provisions of the African Youth Charter.

11. While it is true that I am in favor of non-discrimination against young people, I remain convinced that young people must themselves make themselves indispensable in decision-making spheres: nothing is acquired easily, get informed and get trained, join forces so that you can carry all your weight in your communities, your countries, your businesses.

And, everything is given by the wisdom of work, it is work that ennobles man.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear friends,

12. If there is one thing I admire in Nigerian youth, it is your drive and creativity. Moreover, the musical, artistic and cultural industry driven by Nigerian youth is a textbook case on the continent and in the world. Your know-how in these areas would be a great asset for those who want to invest in Burundi, which has enormous potential.

13. I would like to end by encouraging you to remain united and mobilized for the only war worth fighting, the one against poverty. African solidarity must now serve the development and economic independence of our countries. We must form a common front if we do not want history to repeat itself on our continent. You are the future and the time to act is now. I urge you, dear friends, to move from words to action and to embody the Union so preached and desired by our Pan-African elders.

14. Indeed, to realize the dreams of the African Union, African youth find themselves at a turning point in the history of the

Continent: it is essential to define a common ideal and make our diversity a transforming force.

- 15. As an African Youth Champion, I am committed to work with you and for you, to set up a continental platform that will bridge and enable youth to share their experiences that you, African youth, have in abundance as you have the same challenges and dreams you want to turn into reality.**
- 16. The platform will consist of a mentorship program that will transcend nationalities and allow, for example, a young Nigerian to share his experience, give a hand to one or two Burundian youths out of poverty and vice versa.**
- 17. Beyond a socio-economic dimension, this continental platform will come to revitalize African solidarity which has been the cornerstone of the success of pan-Africanism.**
- 18. As all of us know that the origin of humanity is Africa, few know that Africa is also and above all the future of humanity. Once again, I urge you to form a common front if we don't want history to repeat itself, you are not the next generation, you are the generation. Your time is now.**
- 19. Thank you once again for your invitation and for your kind attention.**

Long live Nigerian youth!

Long live the Burundian-Nigerian cooperation, Thank you.