

REPUBLIC OF RWANDA



Statement by

H.E. Paul KAGAME
President of the Republic of Rwanda

**At the general debate of the 66th Session of the
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Please check against delivery

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- ↓ Your Excellency, President of the General Assembly;**
- ↓ Excellencies Heads of State and Government;**
- ↓ Distinguished Delegates;**
- ↓ Ladies and Gentlemen;**

As the world continues to deal with crises including conflicts across the globe, we need to examine the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution, and the part each one of us needs to play.

Mr. President, the effect of decades of conflict has been unacceptable loss of life and a reversal of global social and economic progress.

What has also become clear is that although most conflicts are now intra-state in nature, and continue to have a destabilizing effect on neighbouring countries and the rest of the world.

One needs to carefully look at the dividends of striving towards shared global prosperity, which in turn increases capacity to deal with conflict. By tackling development issues, for example through the framework of the Millennium Development Goals, we create conducive conditions for a more stable world.

The UN's own figures indicate that about \$7.1 billion will be spent in 2011/2012 for peacekeeping purposes. Conflicts consume resources like these that could be otherwise channeled through the UN or other relevant institutions to better the lives of millions of people.

So, while it is appropriate to talk about how mediation can support efforts to prevent and manage conflict, we should also ask ourselves why, after decades of trying, we are not making the progress we would like to in this regard?

We know that the likelihood of conflict is high when citizens feel disenfranchised and marginalized, and where governments do not govern in the interests of their people. If rule of law is absent, and access to opportunity is limited or exclusive, this is a problem. We should address this as a global community, consistently and with commitment.

It makes good economic and political sense to invest in conflict prevention, thus reducing future outbreaks and avoiding short-term quick-fix solutions.

Apart from traditional interventions that we employ with varying success, there is one major investment that remains under-utilized, and that is our youth. This generation carries less historical and political baggage, and is more inclined to getting the most out of this global village we all find ourselves sharing. With social and communication tools, they are key innovators and thought leaders not only of tomorrow but right now. We have an important responsibility to empower them to believe in themselves and in a better future.

Returning to the topic of mediation, and the associated issues of negotiation and reconciliation, these are not new practices to Africa, or to my country Rwanda. They play a useful role, and this should be strengthened.

However, Mr. President, various experiences have shown that if mediation is to succeed, national efforts should be supported in the first place, based on specific cultural and political contexts. In Rwanda, for instance, we have seen this produce long-lasting solutions and tangible results on the ground because they are home-grown.

It is also important to involve regional and sub-regional players, who have ample knowledge of the often complex regional dynamics of the conflicts in the mediation efforts. These organizations should be supported expeditiously, before disputes escalate into intractable conflicts.

Additionally, we need to take a good look at the toll that traditional diplomatic mediation can have on the lives involved in conflict areas. Too often, while resolutions are being debated and refined, people are dying. And sometimes when those resolutions are eventually adopted, enforcement is slow, or they only halt the conflict for a short time but with no sustainable solutions.

Let us also remember the limitations faced by external mediation experts, who even when having good intentions are often unable to foster any lasting change at the root level of the conflict. National ownership remains critical.

Mediation efforts must be based on an over-riding desire to bring conflicting parties to resolve their differences. But this should not be confused with supporting one side in the conflict, or imposing a solution in the interests of the mediators.

↓ Mr. President;

Let me conclude by saying that the most viable option for preventing conflict is to empower our own citizens -especially the youth - politically, economically and socially, so that they have a stake in the management and stability of the nation. Ultimately, long-lasting solutions are the ones which emanate from within.

I thank you for your kind attention.