

Check Against Delivery

**WELCOMING STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED
REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA, HIS EXCELLENCY BENJAMIN WILLIAM
MKAPA, AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE BURUNDI
PEACE TALKS, ARUSHA, 15TH JUNE, 1998**

Your Excellency Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni,
President of the Republic of Uganda and Chairman of
the Arusha Initiative on the Burundi Peace Process;

Your Excellency Mr. Pasteur Bizimungu,
President of the Republic of Rwanda;

Your Excellency Mr. Pierre Buyoya,
President of the Republic of Burundi,

(1) Your Excellency Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere,
Facilitator of the Burundi Peace Process;

Hon. Lt. Gen. Christon Tembo,
Vice-President of the Republic of Zambia

Hon. Ablasse Ouedraogu,
Foreign Minister of Burkina Faso and Representative
of The OAU Chairman,

Hon. Dr. B. Godana, Foreign Minister of the Republic
of Kenya and Representative of President Moi,

Benjamin William Mkapa
Hon. Leonce Ngendakumana,
Speaker of the Burundi National Assembly;

Honourable Ministers;

Leaders of Political Parties and other Stakeholders;

Leaders of Observer Missions;

Distinguished Guests;

Excellencies;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Government and People of Tanzania, I welcome you all to
our country, and to Arusha - the town that has come to symbolise unprecedented

collective regional efforts for greater peace, security and stability in the Great Lakes Region. I am truly thankful that, in spite of the short notice, you could manage to come for this event, an event we all hope will be a turning point in the sad recent Burundi history.

Your presence is yet another reaffirmation of your individual, national and collective attachment and commitment to the Arusha Peace Process, and to your unwavering confidence in the Facilitator. The Arusha Initiative is truly an expression of solidarity, unity of purpose, commitment to peace and stability, and genuine friendship and co-operation among all of us in the Great Lakes Region. That in itself is a great testament of which we all have the right to feel proud, but, more importantly, which we must strive to sustain and flourish.

It is also a reflection of shared political and democratic values that are now taking root in our region. They are values our brothers and sisters in Burundi equally cherish and are entitled to. So deep is our collective commitment to these democratic values that we were unanimous in taking painful, but necessary, measures against the military regime in Bujumbura in 1996.

In pursuit of these ideals, we accept a collective obligation to help our brothers and sisters retreat from the precipice of mutually destructive stand-points of intolerance and deep-seated mutual suspicion and fear. We are convinced that a peaceful and secure future for all Burundi can only be reached through all-inclusive political negotiations based on the practical application of democratic principles and values, while guaranteeing the security of everyone, including the minorities. It is this process that we in the region are here to help and encourage.

The peace process for Burundi has had its ups and downs. To be frank, it has been a tortuous and disconcerting one. Time and again our hopes were raised only to be dashed. Whether in Arusha, in Mwanza or in Rome; in Bujumbura, in Dar es Salaam or in Kampala, we were all dismayed as it appeared the only constant factor among the variables in the peace equation was disappointment and frustration. But all those efforts were not in vain. With the benefit of hindsight, I now see each initiative that was taken as having been an important building block to today's historic event.

I, therefore, wish to express my deep gratitude to all persons, institutions and Governments that worked so hard and so relentlessly to ensure that at last the all-inclusive peace talks we demanded for so long can start. Mwalimu Nyerere, the Facilitator, has been the model of patience, wisdom and singular statesmanship. His ^{supreme} competence and veritable neutrality has kept him firmly at the centre as the unquestioned anchor of the entire process. I thank him most sincerely.

I thank all my fellow regional leaders who, without exception, supported the Facilitator and provided the regional context in which his work was pursued, and the resounding political support he needed for his authoritative and decisive influence.

I thank all the parties and stakeholders in Burundi, those within Burundi and those outside, for agreeing to take part in these 'all-inclusive' talks. I also wish to thank the OAU Chairman, H.E. President Blaise Compaore of Burkina Faso for sending his Foreign Minister as his representative to this important occasion for Africa.

Finally, I thank the observers and the special representatives to the region, as well as the Governments and institutions who financed the consultations and the preparations for this and other meetings related to the Burundi peace process. We could not have come this far without their support. The work is far from over, indeed it is only beginning now in earnest, and their support will continue to be needed.

Mr. Chairman,

It is imperative that the peace talks being launched today proceed smoothly, seriously and earnestly towards actual, in-depth negotiations. We, the regional leaders, do not expect this to be another photo-opportunity, or an ordinary palaver the kind of which we have witnessed long enough. Instead we want and expect each party to get to work quickly and engage in serious negotiations with the other players in this process.

I can understand perfectly well the need for each party to seek certain guarantees at each stage of the negotiations so as to make the process sustainable. But they must be reasonable guarantees and demands, not mere excuses for holding up the overall process. All necessary factors for success are in place. The regional leaders remain as ever ready to buttress the process. Observers and resource persons can be available to help the process along. The participation is all-inclusive with a

scope never achieved before. And above all, the process is uniquely blessed with the extraordinary asset of the Facilitator, whose personal stature, knowledge of the problem, and dedication to a peaceful solution should be inspirational.

There is, of course, the outstanding matter of the sanctions we, the regional leaders, imposed on Burundi following the military coup of July 1996. First, I should make it clear that the large part of the sanctions regime was removed at subsequent Summits of the Great Lakes region as verifiable progress was made in Burundi towards attaining the benchmarks we had put in place for their relaxation. All those sanctions that hurt ordinary people, and vulnerable sections of the populace, such as food, medicine, agricultural inputs, educational and construction material and so on, have already been lifted.

Secondly, we have always asserted that as soon as the peace talks start in earnest, and all sides demonstrate a clear desire to engage in negotiations in good faith, a Great Lakes Summit would make a final review of the question of sanctions.

We cannot, and must not, lift all sanctions prematurely. We do not want to take the wind out of the sail of the negotiating process. I dare say so because I believe the sanctions regime contributed quite significantly to ensuring these peace talks are relaunched today. It was thanks to the sanctions that:

- A government decree was issued on September, 13, 1996, restoring the National Assembly and unbanning political parties;
- Some *regroupement* camps were closed;
- An internal dialogue between the various parties has taken place along with an on-going dialogue between the different parties and the Facilitator;
- The Speaker, Leonce Ngendakumana, who was the embodiment of legality, was released from custody along with former Presidents Ntibantunganya and Bagaza, and allowed to take their rightful place in the peace process; and

- Externally-based groups have been included in the peace process after being recognised that they too mattered, and had a stake.

Yes, sanctions have helped to encourage the Burundi peace process along, and we should be sure of where the process stands before discarding them as a tool of persuasion. We can only do so when there is evidence of irreversible progress in these talks being launched today. Such progress will be quickly recognised and rewarded.

In conclusion, let me repeat that we, the regional leaders, have come for this opening ceremony of the Burundi peace talks to show our solidarity with the Burundi, and to show our collective political will to help the peace process along. We are here to show our willingness and determination to contribute whatever we can to a lasting solution to the political and security problems facing our neighbours in Burundi. It is within the power of all the Burundi parties and groups, including the armed forces and all armed groups, to choose the path of peace rather than that of war; the path of reconciliation rather than of mutual recrimination, the path of life rather than of death.

I thank you all, Your Excellencies the Heads of State, or their representatives, for coming to Arusha once again for this purpose. I thank President Buyoya and all the parties to the negotiations for coming. To them I issue an earnest appeal to put parochial interests aside, and focus instead on the future of the Burundi nation. The eyes, ears, and hopes of the people of Burundi, the people and governments of the Great Lakes Region and of Africa, and indeed of the whole world are focused here. Please do not let them and us down. Above all take this burden off the shoulders of the ordinary Burundi. They, more than anyone else, have the right to expect an honourable and quick conclusion to this process.

I wish this meeting great success.

I thank you for your kind attention.