SURF Survivors Fund
Supporting Survivors of Genocide against The Tutsi

Calgary Commemoration Speech 18th April 2026

Distinguished guests, the Rwanda community of Calgary, friends of Rwanda, and most importantly, survivors and your families good afternoon,

Thirty-two years, To many, it is a period of time that is measured, studied, and placed neatly within a timeline. But to those connected to the Genocide against the Tutsi, thirty-two years carries a very different meaning. It is not just time that has passed it is time that continues to live within people. It is memory that does not fade with distance or with years. It is something that is carried, consciously and unconsciously, in the mind, in the body, and in everyday life.

For many, the past is not behind them. It lives in the present. It shapes the way they experience the world, the way they relate to others, and the way they move through each day. It appears in moments that seem ordinary to others—a sound, a smell, a silence, a date on a calendar. It is both a lifetime and, at the same time, something that feels as immediate as yesterday.

We gather here today in Calgary, thousands of miles away from Rwanda, yet distance does not dilute memory. It does not soften truth, and it does not lessen responsibility. Memory travels. It lives in people, in families, in communities, and across generations. It crosses borders and oceans. It settles in places far from where the events occurred, but it remains just as real.

We are here for Kwibuka32—to remember, to unite, and to renew. But renewal is not simple. Renewal is not automatic. And renewal is not painless.

Renewal requires honesty. It requires courage. It requires us to sit with uncomfortable truths and to acknowledge both what has been rebuilt and what continues to remain broken. It requires us to hold two realities at the same time: that there has been remarkable progress, and that there is still deep and ongoing pain.

As a professional who has the privilege of serving survivors, I stand before you with humility. The stories I carry are not my own. They belong to

individuals who endure experiences that are difficult to fully comprehend. My role is not to speak for them, but to stand alongside them—to listen, to support, and to learn.

And what I learn, over and over again, is that survival is not a single moment. It is not something that happens once and then ends. Survival is a continuous journey. It unfolds every day, in ways that are often invisible to the outside world.

It is in the quiet decisions people make—to wake up, to engage, to participate in life, even when the weight of the past remains. It is in the effort it takes to maintain relationships, to raise children, to go to work, to contribute to society. These are not small things. They are acts of strength that often go unrecognized.

We often hear Rwanda's recovery described as a "miracle." It is a powerful word, and it reflects admiration. But it can also be misleading. It can suggest that what has been achieved happens by chance, or without human effort, or beyond human control.

Rwanda's progress is not accidental. It is intentional. It is built through deliberate effort—through policy, through leadership, and most importantly, through the daily choices of individuals who refuse to let destruction define their future.

It is built by survivors who wake up each day and choose to continue. It is built by individuals who, despite loss, choose to rebuild their lives. It is built by families who choose to reconnect, even when trust has been broken. It is built by communities that choose unity over division. It is also supported by leadership that commits to rebuilding a nation grounded in dignity, accountability, and shared identity.

What we see today is the result of years of intentional work—rebuilding institutions, restoring trust, investing in communities, strengthening systems, and creating space for healing.

Survivors choose, every single day, to participate in that rebuilding. They raise families. They educate their children. They contribute to their communities. They create businesses. They support one another, all while carrying deep personal loss.

So when we speak about Rwanda's progress, we must be clear: it is not a miracle in the sense of something unexplained. It is a testament to human will, discipline, and collective responsibility.

At the same time, acknowledging this progress does not mean that the pain disappears. Development does not erase trauma. Healing does not cancel memory. They exist alongside each other.

And if we are to truly understand the present, we must speak honestly about the past.

In 1994, in just 100 days, over one million people were killed. This is not just a statistic. It represents families erased. Names that are never spoken again. Entire generations lost. Children growing up without parents. Parents losing children. Communities losing not only people, but structure, identity, and safety. No one remained to tell the story of entire families.

This genocide was not accidental. It was planned. It was organized. It was fueled by hate. And it was enabled by silence.

It did not begin with violence. It began with words. It began with division. It began with the gradual dehumanization of one group by another.

Media played a powerful role in this process. It spread ideas, shaped perception, and normalized language that divided and harmed. It turned neighbors into enemies.

And today, while the tools have changed, the warning signs remain. Hate speech evolves. It spreads faster. It reaches wider audiences. It hides behind technology, but its impact remains the same.

If we are not vigilant, history does not stay in the past. It finds new ways to reappear.

“Never Again” must be more than a statement made during commemorations. It must be a responsibility carried in daily life in what we say, in what we challenge, and in what we refuse to tolerate.

There is a part of this history that is often spoken about quietly—too quietly. During the genocide, hundreds of thousands of women were subjected to systematic sexual violence.

This was not incidental. It was not random. It was deliberate. It was used as a weapon of war—to destroy dignity, fracture communities, and leave scars that last for generations.

Through my work, I have had the privilege—and responsibility—of sitting with some of these women and listening to their experiences.

And I want to say clearly their struggle is not in the past. It continues. Many are now in their fifties and sixties. Some live with untreated injuries and chronic pain. Others live with HIV, requiring lifelong treatment. For them, healing is not only emotional it is medical, daily, and ongoing.

Socially, many experience the burden of shame, placed on them unjustly, affects their ability to reconnect with society. Economically lost opportunities make rebuilding stability difficult.

Psychologically, trauma does not disappear with time. It evolves. It returns. It resurfaces, especially during periods of remembrance like this one.

I have sat with women who carry silence for decades—not because they have nothing to say, but because what they carry is too heavy to put into words.

And as time moves forward, we see the impact on the second generation. These are young people who did not experience the genocide directly, but who live with its consequences every day.

They grow up in homes shaped by trauma. They sense grief even when it is unspoken. They learn to read emotions without explanation. They carry questions that are not always answered.

Some feel pressure to succeed not only for themselves, but for those who were lost. That is a heavy burden.

For young people born of genocidal rape, the challenges are even more complex. They navigate identity, belonging, and stigma. Some feel caught between histories, uncertain of where they fit. Yet they continue searching—for identity, acceptance, and meaning.

Across individuals, families, and communities, mental health challenges persist.Depression, anxiety, trauma responses, emotional exhaustion, chronic pain, and illness linked to psychological distress are common realities.

Within families, trauma affects communication and connection. Parents may struggle to express love in ways that feel accessible to children. Children may sense distance even where care exists.

In communities, survivor's guilt and isolation remain. And during Kwibuka, memories return with intensity. Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma is real among many second-generation survivors, but there hope that much as trauma is transmissible across generation so is resilience.

And yet, despite all of this survivors continue. They continue to build lives, raise families, contribute, and show up. This is where we must talk about resilience.

Resilience is often misunderstood. It is not the absence of pain. It is the ability to live with it.

It is waking up with memory and still choosing to move forward. It is raising children while carrying grief. It is rebuilding trust after loss. It is contributing to society while holding experiences that cannot be erased.

Resilience is not a destination. It is a process. It is a daily decision. But we must be careful not to romanticize it. Behind resilience is effort, exhaustion, and persistence. Strength is not the absence of suffering—it is movement despite it. And that deserves recognition not only in words, but in action. Remembrance is not passive. It is responsibility.

We must reject hate, challenge denial, support justice, and build communities rooted in dignity. Indifference is not neutral. It allows harm to grow. Silence can be dangerous.

To the young people navigating identity—we recognize your journey.

To all survivors you are not alone. Let us remember not only those we lost, but those who continue to live with the impact of that loss.

Let us move beyond sympathy to action. Let us build a world where memory leads to responsibility.

And let us choose humanity every single day.

Twibuke Twiyubaka. Remember. Unite. Renew.

Thank you.