REPUBLIC OF RWANDA

AFRICAN GROUP STATEMENT

DELIVERED BY

H.E. VALENTINE RUGWABIZA

AFRICAN GROUP CHAIR OF THE MONTH

AT THE HIGH-LEVEL PLENARY MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO COMMEMORATE AND PROMOTE THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF MULTILATERALISM AND DIPLOMACY FOR PEACE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY HALL, UN HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

24 APRIL 2019

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY
EXCELENCIES,

DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES,

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

Madam Chair,

I have the honor to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group on a topic that is of importance to the group. I will begin with a brief historical overview of the centrality of multilateralism (in its various forms) and diplomacy for Africa.

Madam Chair,

Centuries before colonization of Africa, we know that royal, diplomatic and trade delegations from African Kingdoms arrived in European capitals to advance trade relations and build alliances. The first persistent effort to build ties with Europe came from the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia, who attempted to forge alliances with Christian Europe. Records show African ambassadors visiting European courts as early as the 1300’s, at times astonishing their European counterparts with their mastery of various European languages and culture.

These early instances of African diplomacy, while predating the modern nation-state system, clearly show that multilateralism and
diplomacy have long been essential tools for our people to advance and defend their interests.

Africa Union is rooted in a belief that regional organizations can demonstrate how multilateralism can continue to be relevant and beneficial to all our peoples and ultimately, a rules-based multilateral system is indispensable to secure peace and prosperity for our people and our planet.

In more recent times, Africa has taken significant steps towards closer multilateral efforts. It is worth mentioning the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement, an ambitious plan to create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of persons and investments, to eventually pave the way for the establishment of a continental customs union. The potential of this Agreement is inspiring. The AfCFTA will cover a market of 1.2 billion people and a GDP of $2.5 trillion. With a population of Africa that is projected to reach 2.5 billion by 2050, and with an economy that is estimated to grow twice as rapidly as that of the developed world. Africa is positioning itself for tremendous dividends. And all of this is being pursued via multilateral and diplomatic mechanisms.

I say all this to stress the point that multilateralism and diplomacy are the bedrock of Africa’s transformation agenda. As I have underlined above, as a group, our long history has shown us the importance of multilateralism and diplomacy, and in that spirit, we
reaffirm our commitment to preserving the values of multilateralism and international cooperation.

**Madam Chair,**

Beyond our continental experience and aspirations, what we see today is that multilateralism is at a crossroads. Paradoxically, as issues grow in complexity and call for global responses, we are witnessing increased attacks on the multilateral system and its institutions. Given this situation there is no doubt that multilateralism needs to be defended and the UN strengthened to deal with complex global challenges and there is no better forum than here at the UN, the ultimate center of multilateralism.

As members of the UN, we have a responsibility to work together, to improve the multilateral system we have built over the last seven decades and show its relevance to all people and countries.

The Group recognizes that the contemporary challenges in the international system also require a reinvigorated multilateral system. Climate change, terrorism, poverty, inequalities are all challenges that go beyond individual Member States however strong they perceive themselves to be. Isolationism and protectionism may temporarily build national legitimacy for some in power or those seeking power, but it has never been a viable strategy in the long term. At the end of the day, our world has been integrated and globalized far too deeply for us to dismember ourselves and try to fix things alone.
In this regard, the United Nations will become even more relevant in the years to come. However, for us to be prepared to address these and future challenges in the international system, we must also reckon with the fact that the United Nations urgently needs reform.

The African Group will continue to support the Secretary General’s UN Reform Agenda and pursue its common position on UN reforms, including the need for equitable representation in the UN Security Council. A stronger United Nations, reflecting the realities of the contemporary world, will allow it to meet the challenges in the international system today and in the years ahead. In addition, it will strengthen the United Nations to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

La vitalité et l’efficacité du multilatéralisme dépendent de sa capacité à permettre un dialogue réel entre les États. Dans ce contexte, le multilinguisme est au fondement d’un multilatéralisme effectif. Il est nécessaire au maintien des équilibres, à la dignité et à l’égalité de tous. Chaque pays doit disposer des mêmes opportunités de prendre part aux débats et d’avoir accès à l’information dans les langues officielles de l’ONU.

La bonne représentation tant géographique que linguistique, aussi bien que l’égalité femmes – hommes au sein des Nations Unies, sont les conditions de la confiance dans le système multilatéral. Il ne saurait y avoir une revitalisation du multilatéralisme sans un ancrage du multilinguisme dans le fonctionnement quotidien des Nations Unies.
In closing, Madam Chair,

The Group commends you for convening this important plenary meeting that has given us an opportunity to reflect on the importance and benefits of multilateralism and diplomacy for peace. Rest assured that in the African Group, you have a solid ally to advance practical solutions to strengthen multilateralism and international cooperation, including the UN SG’s Reform Agenda. Indeed, we owe it to the people we represent, to work together efficiently and on equal terms, and deliver tangible results that benefit their lives.

I thank you all for your attention