



## **KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER OLIVIER NDUHUNGIREHE AT THE AUSTRALIAN LEADERSHIP RETREAT**

*“How Rwanda has used a strategic approach to the  
development of home-grown solutions”*

*Brisbane, 15 August, 2025*

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Today, I am given the difficult task to talk about Rwanda’s strategic approach to home-grown solutions.

Answering this question is, in truth, telling the story of how my country managed to stand again on its own terms and move forward.

Allow me to provide context on Rwanda, our history and how we came to where we are today.

Rwanda as a nation-state predates the arrival of Europeans by centuries.

Ours was a well-structured society which operated according to its own laws, cultural codes and values enshrined in our identity as Rwandans.



The arrival of the Germans, then the Belgians, was not met with great resistance. But their presence and imported dogmas began eroding the social fabric of our society.

With the coming of independence in 1962, Rwanda, like other African countries, was left in a state of political turmoil.

Belgian colonizers had succeeded in imposing their rule through a divide and conquer strategy.

Effectively, they managed to turn socio-economic groups and divisions of labor into full-fledge ethnic groups of “*Hutu*”, “*Tutsi*”, and “*Twa*”.

This concept rung hollow and foreign to Rwandans themselves at the time.

Favoring the Hutu majority, the Belgians supported the so-called “*social revolution*” creating an ethnic Republic and abolishing traditional governance structures.

Pogroms and violence quickly followed. Hundreds of thousands of Rwandans were forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries.



In the years following independence, an apartheid-like regime was fully installed in Rwanda.

Tutsis were discriminated against, including in schools and administration, in total indifference from the international community.

Cyclical violence, hate speech and institutionalized racism laid the groundwork for the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi.

In April 1994, a group of extremists put in motion a “*final solution*” to kill every Tutsi in Rwanda. They mobilized the general population to carry out this plan. Those who opposed the massacres were also killed.

It is only in July 1994, that the forces of the Rwandan Patriotic Army put an end to Genocide, but not before a million Rwandans lost their lives.

After the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, Rwanda was in mourning. There was no money to rebuild, institutions were destroyed, many thought Rwanda was doomed. Thankfully, Rwanda’s story does not stop there.



In the aftermath of this tragedy, Rwandans made three choices that went on to define our DNA. We chose to stay together, to be accountable, and to think big.

As a result, Rwanda decided to shape its own path to development, starting with building the foundation for its future growth.

In 2000, we launched Vision 2020 with the objective to transform our country in a knowledge-based middle-income economy.

Millions were lifted out of poverty, universal healthcare coverage was established and primary education was made free.

However, it was quickly understood that development was not a one-size-fits-all model.

With modest means of developing country, Rwanda nonetheless reformed its institutions and re-organized itself to do more, be more and have more in the future.

Hardships were turned into opportunities by developing solutions rooted in our context, drawing on our traditions, and aimed at restoring dignity for all Rwandans.



For us, dignity or *Agaciro* in our language means that Rwanda has its rightful place in the world.

It also means that we, Rwandans, are to take the driving seat of our own lives.

Some solutions were born out of necessity. *Gacaca* community courts, for instance, responded to the impossibility of prosecuting genocide perpetrators through conventional courts.

In just a decade, they processed nearly two million cases, with local communities directly involved as judges and witnesses.

Other solutions drew directly from our culture. An example is “*Umuganda*”, a monthly community work bringing together citizens to do public works. This can include litter cleanup, tree planting, building houses for the vulnerable to cite just a few.

Another example is the *Imihigo*, or performance contracts where leaders set measurable targets and are evaluated on their delivery.



This practice now drives accountability across all levels of Government, creating a results-driven culture and strengthened trust between citizens and leaders.

Our citizen-centered approach was built on the conviction that no one should be left behind.

It is why we have undergone inclusive reforms to foster gender inclusivity in all branches of Government.

As a result, today, Rwanda has the highest number of women in Parliament than anywhere else on the globe.

As enshrined in our Constitution, safeguards were also put in place to ensure women participation in all aspects of society, with equal rights, and equal access to services and property.

Cognizant that gender inclusivity is more than representation, Rwanda has developed a unique approach to gender-responsive budgeting.

This approach enabled public institutions to account and plan for gender in their budgets, starting with Education, Infrastructure, Health and Agriculture.



To stimulate our economy, programs were rolled out such as the “*one laptop per child*”, a policy aimed at leapfrogging into the digital age; and “*Girinka*”, a poverty reduction policy consisting in gifting cows to the most vulnerable.

Sometimes achieving our goals meant resisting pressure from partners whose preferences did not align with our long-term strategy.

We chose to work with those who respected our vision.

We do not claim our model is universal. But Rwanda sees the importance of sharing its experience with other like-minded partners.

This is why, in 2018, we have put in place the “Rwanda Cooperation Initiative” to promote and share innovative development initiatives through South-South and Triangular Cooperation.

We believe sharing our story, our successes and failures, can have meaningful impact for those willing to implement and adapt them at home.



Before I conclude, I would like to leave you with this thought.

Rwanda's story is proof that building institutions and solutions that fit context is hard. It requires patience, resilience, and sometimes taking the more difficult path.

But the return on investment is worth it. In our case, it translated in restored unity, socio-economic progress and a sense of ownership among citizens.

Whether in Africa, here in Australia, or anywhere else, development should never be about fitting into a frame designed elsewhere.

It should be rooted in values, driven by pragmatism, and flexible enough to adapt to an ever-changing world.

I thank you for your kind attention.