

Address by H.E. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, at the United States Military Academy, Saturday, March 13 2010

- ✚ Brigadier General William E. Rapp, Commandant of Cadets;**
- ✚ Members of the Academic Board and Staff;**
- ✚ Fellow Parents;**
- ✚ Cadet Class of 2013:**

It truly is a pleasure to be with you this evening, so let me first of all thank the Commandant of Cadets, Brigadier General William Rapp, as well as the students of the Class of 2013, for preparing an outstanding weekend of activities.

I speak as a parent when I say how rewarding and reassuring it has been to see the progress our children are making here at West Point.

Furthermore, I am honoured to have the occasion to share thoughts with you on the security challenges facing our global community today and the opportunities before us to address them.

It is very clear in today's fast globalizing world – our understanding of what security means, and indeed, how to promote and maintain it at the national, regional and indeed international level must adjust accordingly.

Security can no longer be perceived solely in terms of sovereign state affairs, but now encompasses a broad spectrum of economic, developmental, social and even environmental issues.

Additionally, what affects one nation or region has inevitable consequences on others – a recent example of this is the financial crisis that reached global proportion and is only now beginning to recede.

However, the inverse is also true – secure and stable nations can positively influence those who wish to draw from the lessons learned by these societies along the way.

Allow me to briefly outline a few contemporary international security challenges.

I begin with the issue of threat assessment – generally defined by the intention and capability of a perceived adversary. While capabilities may be determined through intelligence and other means, intentions are often difficult to effectively assess. This may lead to action taken on the basis of an incorrect understanding of the actual situation – serving to heighten insecurity rather than diminish it.

A second serious challenge the world faces is International Terrorism. With increasingly porous borders, trans-national political causes and asymmetrical threats to traditional state defence capabilities – terrorism has taken on a new character altogether.

While in the past, wars were fought within the understood framework of armed forces – today, anyone with access to the internet and dangerous materials can wreak havoc on society.

Furthermore, the differences between “terrorism” and liberation struggles are not always understood the same way.

Nelson Mandela is a case in point – he was regarded as a terrorist by Apartheid South Africa and some of their supporters in the West, but emerged as a national and international hero. This situation has applied to other liberation movements in various developing countries. These disparities in the understanding and definition of terrorism therefore influence concerted efforts to successfully counter it.

Third is the threat posed by Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). These weapons are not only more accessible since the end of Cold War, they are also increasingly sought after by dangerous groups who are largely unaccountable to the international community, and indeed, even to their own constituencies.

Ethnic and religious extremism continue to threaten international security. You will recall that ethnic extremism was the factor behind ethnic cleansing in the Former Yugoslavia, and the genocides against the Jews by the Nazis and again in Rwanda half a century later against the Tutsi.

Aside from these catastrophic blights in our history, we have seen numerous conflicts related to this type of extremism – from Sri-Lanka, to Northern Ireland and Nigeria.

And finally, we cannot discount how cyber crimes, human and drug trafficking, the proliferation of Small and Medium Arms, climate change, and natural disasters like the recent earthquakes in Haiti and Chile, contribute to global insecurity.

As I mentioned a short while ago, the international community now shares similar security challenges. However, most regions will have issues specific to their history and circumstance. Africa, for instance, has battled with colonial interference, bad governance in the post-independence era, civil conflict, fragile transitional governments, persistent poverty and aid dependence. Solutions to these problems must originate from the concerned parties for the sake of sustainability, but should be executed in partnership with other stakeholders, who oftentimes, are directly or indirectly involved.

 Distinguished Ladies, Gentlemen, and Students;

Although the challenges facing us today may sometimes appear persistent, there is no reason why a common understanding on sustainable solutions cannot be sought and jointly pursued.

I will offer five suggestions for your consideration:

- 1. Adopt a holistic concept of human security - an exclusive state-centric view is no longer relevant. When citizens are hungry, uneducated, susceptible to preventable diseases, and jobless - insecurity will persist and can be exported across borders.**
- 2. Address root causes of conflict rather than the symptoms. The main reason why too many international conflicts remain unresolved is that attention is focused on alleviating symptoms of problems, such as refugee crises, rather than the root causes that are usually governance related.**
- 3. Enhance international response, solidarity and cooperation - it is sometimes the case that the required intervention to a given security concern only takes place when the interests of powerful nations are threatened. For example, we see a “War on Terror” launched after the horrific events of September 11, but seven years prior to that when genocide raged in Rwanda, the international community did not intervene.**

Up to today, there are genocide fugitives living in major capitals of the world, and remnant forces in the Great Lakes Region who have exported their reign of terror, yet response to this situation has always been slow and sporadic.

An international threat should carry the same weight and meaning to all countries irrespective of which interests are at stake. We have seen that the consequences of neglecting this responsibility extend far beyond the initial conflict, both in scope and magnitude.

- 4. Appreciate the causal link between sustainable development and sustainable peace - this approach can literally stop wars before they start. If the billions of dollars channeled into post-conflict situations in the form of humanitarian assistance were directed into promoting socio-economic development, trade and investment, the outcome would be self-sufficiency and increased ownership of national agendas. Linking peace dividends and sustainable economic activity should then be seen as an important governance issue.**

- 5. Adapt to the changing character of warfare. Rather than focusing exclusively on military solutions, there is useful debate about fighting for the “hearts and minds” of adversaries. If an enemy’s cause centers on an idea or belief, how can they be defeated with sophisticated weaponry alone? These are questions we need to ask ourselves.**

✚ **Class of 2013:**

✚ **Distinguished faculty and staff; fellow parents:**

Tonight, we are discussing these security challenges in a very specific context, and that is, how can you promising West Point cadets prepare yourselves to make a difference in this world we are living in.

Well, to start off, the mission of this Academy is relevant: *“To educate, train and inspire the corps of cadets so that each graduate is a commissioned leader of character committed to the values of duty, honour, country and prepared for the career of professional Excellence and service for the nation as an officer of the US Army”.*

If I may take the liberty that comes with being a parent, let me share with you what motivated me to encourage my son to consider West Point above the other options for College that he had before him.

There are very many good schools out there, I told him, and you could get an excellent education from any one of them. But there is something additional and crucial you will get if you go to West Point – that school develops young people into leaders.

There is no doubt that these values of leadership, discipline and honour have contributed to the outstanding performance of West Point Alumni whose accomplishments are well-known worldwide.

West Point continues to graduate leaders who are capable of facing both contemporary and future challenges to their country and global community with clarity and precision. This is an important legacy, and I suppose that has led to the common expression here that “*much of the history we teach was made by people we taught*”.

I believe the Cadet Class of 2013 have at their disposal everything they need to succeed – superior training that is physical, military and academic. This is a place to strive for excellence – in life there are always temptations to settle for mediocrity, but no one should accept to settle for that. Push as far as you can go – and that will always be further than you imagine – let the best come out of you and make your presence here count.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the faculty and staff of West Point for graciously hosting us this weekend; it is evident that the very good care given to the students is embedded in the institution’s culture and tradition. It should also be well noted that West Point opens its doors to aspiring officers from other countries – further testament to the School’s and the United States’ generosity and sense of responsibility to global security and mutual learning.

Let me once again convey my appreciation for the invitation to speak to you tonight – it has been truly memorable.

Thank you for your kind attention, and have a pleasant evening.