

PAUL KAGAME

President of the Republic of Rwanda

Dr. Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Chairman of the World Policy Conference,
Excellencies,
Honorable Ministers and Senior Government Officials,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy to be back at the World Policy Conference, and I wish to thank Thierry de Montbrial for the invitation to join you here in Abu Dhabi.

The past two years have been particularly consequential. The Covid pandemic is unprecedented, but it has exposed weaknesses, in both the national and global systems, that have been there all along. This includes insufficiencies in both public health and governance. The crisis has also revealed, quite starkly, the economic and power imbalances within the international community. While major powers work to contain and constrain each other, Africa is at the receiving end, in all senses. That means, of course, that when vaccine supplies are scarce, Africa is last in line to get doses.

Africa is also, almost as an afterthought, attacked for all sorts of things, in the name of so many things including democracy, human rights, as if these concepts or values were totally foreign to Africa. You could say that one function of Africa in international relations, is to serve as a foil for the importance of universal values, precisely because so many states outside of Africa continue to fall short themselves. The unspoken assumption is that only rich countries and their political elites have interests. Poor countries should allow their interests to be looked after by others.

The rights and well-being of ordinary people are completely forgotten. We cannot talk about a theoretical democracy that is not built on what the actual citizens of that place desire for themselves, their families, and their societies. That is the confusion, in some cases, for example, of contemporary liberal democracy with its singular emphasis on individual freedoms, identities, and desires, even at the expense of the common good. This is not to say that there are no serious shortcomings in Africa, like elsewhere there is a lot to address in Africa. That is not the point at all. But the double standards and hypocrisy that consistently applied to Africa, show that something else is going on. However, where the main global players have stuck to certain principles, these can and do work.

We seem to be turning a corner on the pandemic, despite obstacles. For example, Covax was supposed to be a solution to assist low-income countries to get access to vaccines and therapies. But Covax could not compete with wealthy countries for supply, and we saw examples of hoarding. In actual fact, the rich countries are the ones who were offering vaccine doses through Covax. To add insult to injury, we now see some travel restrictions based on where people were vaccinated, even though the vaccines themselves are exactly



the same. So we have now an issue of where you were vaccinated, something else that is about to come or is slowly coming is: what type of vaccine.

Despite this, there is progress. Access to vaccines has begun to increase, both through donations and doses we purchase for ourselves. In Rwanda, we have administered more than 2 million doses, and 90% of residents of cities, especially the capital, Kigali, have received a dose. We see also cooperating with various commercial and development partners to launch an ambitious program to manufacture vaccines and other pharmaceuticals for the African market, beginning next year. So, even though things could have been better, we do appreciate the good cooperation that has been there.

Another area where good partnerships can produce results is in the fight against insecurity, terrorism, extremist ideologies, including genocide ideology. There are cross-border challenges that require close cooperation. Rwanda's engagement in peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions in Africa falls under this rubric. Islamist insurgents are now on the run in northern Mozambique in the province of Cabo Delgado, because of a good program of cooperation between Rwanda's Defense Forces, and those of Mozambique and the region. Similarly, our commitment to the Central African Republic, which is both bilateral and multilateral, through the United Nations, aims to create the space for the country to chart its own path to political reconciliation, peacefully. The next step is to consolidate the gains and focus on providing services and guaranteeing rights for citizens. These are just two examples that might link to some of the themes under discussion at this event.

Once again, I thank the World Policy Conference for this wonderful evening and opportunity. And thank you all for your kind attention and interest. I look forward to our discussions to take place immediately. Thank you.