

**KEYNOTE SPEECH BY H.E. PRESIDENT KAGAME AT ECOSOC
2014 INTEGRATION SEGMENT
*SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION***

United Nations - New York, 27 May 2014

- **Excellency, Angelino Garzón, Vice President of the Republic of Colombia**
- **Excellency Isabelle Picco (Monaco), Vice-President of the General Assembly Excellency,**
- **Excellency Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations**
- **Excellency Vladimir Drobniak, Vice President of the U.N. Economic and Social Council**
- **The Honourable Michael Bloomberg, UN Special Envoy & Former Mayor of New York City**
- **Distinguished Officials, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good morning.

I am pleased to be here and thank the President of the UN Economic and Social Council, for the kind invitation to speak at

this first Integration Summit. The discussions at this meeting are important for Africa — and indeed for the entire world.

Urbanisation is inevitable. More people will move to cities, at a faster rate than at any other time in human history. The most dramatic shifts will occur in Africa, currently the least urbanised continent, but with an urbanisation rate several times higher than anywhere else in the world.

When people move from rural areas to cities, they get exposed to new ideas, technologies, habits, and skills. They learn to work differently. In other words, they become more productive.

Urbanisation can help reduce poverty, sustainably, in ways that handouts never can. Growth without planned urbanisation, in contrast, is a recipe for soaring inequality.

Thus the choice is not whether to urbanise or not. The issue is whether we manage it in such a way that we obtain, together with our citizens, the maximum benefits possible.

That insight is critical, because increasing our citizens' productivity results in higher wages, empowering them to build a prosperous, secure future for themselves and their children.

That is why people will continue to move to cities by the millions every year, whether we want them to or not, affecting and being affected by the environment.

Rwanda shares with other African countries the many challenges and opportunities of rapid urbanisation.

These include the urgent need to upgrade informal settlements and avoid such development in the future; provide basic infrastructure and services; mitigate the risks of inequality and segregation of the poorest; protect urban wetlands and green space; and enable the private sector to create jobs, especially for youth.

In addition, twenty years after a genocide that destroyed Rwanda's social fabric, urbanisation is part and parcel of our rebuilding and unity and reconciliation efforts.

Rwanda's most recent national development agenda gives high importance to organised settlement – from rural market centres to small towns and larger urban areas, while taking care of our environment.

In an effort to make the most efficient possible use of Rwanda's land, the government established a comprehensive legal framework for the inclusive registration and management of land, and built a national database for property records and land use maps. This provides the basis for a vibrant and trustworthy property market.

Rwanda also seeks to establish financing and supply options for affordable housing and related services, such as education and health, to address the needs of low income earners.

- **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

The best response to the risks and dangers associated with urbanisation is innovation and cooperation rather than alarm.

For example, sometimes social problems become more noticeable when concentrated in urban areas, but that does not necessarily make them more difficult to deal with. In some cases, urban density may make them easier to solve.

Take the case of basic services, which will have to be provided more extensively in cities in the coming years.

The good news is that the money we spend on services goes further in towns and cities than in rural areas because of the bigger scale.

The role of urbanisation in development policy will continue to be the subject of vigorous debate, and rightly so.

This is, in some sense, inevitable, because cities have to work for everyone. Industries and investors. Real estate developers. The middle class. Environmentalists. And, above all, for the young people struggling to make a better life.

Against this background, it is important to resist the tendency to equate ambitious urban design — particularly in Africa — with an anti-poor agenda. After all, it is not just the well-off who appreciate and benefit from an orderly and predictable urban environment.

Modern central business districts are an important part of a balanced city capable of sustainable economic growth. But they are, of course, only a part of a comprehensive approach.

In Rwanda this includes an ever improving decentralisation system within which citizens participate in the decision-making process.

The emphasis on accountable governance and zero tolerance to corruption ensures that resources meant for urbanisation are used appropriately.

- **Distinguished Audience**

Let me once again thank the UN Economic and Social Council for providing this invaluable platform, to establish a common understanding of the role of urbanisation in sustainable development.

African leaders have adopted a common position on the Post-2015 sustainable development agenda which incorporates cities and human settlements. Drawing on our national experience, we will continue to work with partners such as UN Habitat and others at the regional and global level.

The road ahead is long, and we are aware that solutions that worked elsewhere in the past may not work as well today, in Africa. We will learn and innovate and adjust course as needed.

But the reason why sustainable urbanisation has moved to the centre of the development agenda is clear: It is key to the well-being of our citizens.

In order for cities to drive progress, our people must be able to afford to live in them. Once there, they must be able to afford to travel to work.

Our task as leaders is to maximise the benefits by promoting orderly migration, investing in basic services, and adopting policies that support affordable housing and transport.

If we work together to stay focused on these policy objectives, Africa can become a middle-income continent within our children's lifetimes.

Thank you for your attention.