President Paul Kagame says Africa needs to stop sitting on the sidelines of the space industry and start shaping it

Speaking Thursday at the International Space Summit in Paris, where government officials, scientists, space agencies and private companies gathered to talk about where the industry is headed, Kagame argued that falling costs, new technology and growing private investment are opening doors that African countries can't afford to ignore.

"Africa intends to be a full participant in this growth, not only as a user of space capabilities, but also as a contributor to science, research, and global decision-making," he said.

He pointed to the continent's young, increasingly connected population as a real asset, one that could fuel new businesses and build up genuine expertise in the sector, rather than just importing it.

Rwanda has already put some of this into practice. The country set up its own space agency to coordinate activities and push the use of space tech for development, and back in 2019, Rwandan engineers, working with the University of Tokyo, built and launched the country's first satellite, RWASAT-1, largely as a way to grow local skills in the field.

Kagame said Rwanda is now applying space technology and AI in areas like agriculture, infrastructure and disaster response, and that the country's ground infrastructure is helping support space service providers regionally.

He also flagged a growing concern: as more satellites go up, the competition for orbital slots and radio frequencies is heating up, and African nations need to protect their share. Rwanda, he said, has been working with the African Telecommunications Union to help the continent reclaim orbital resources.

His broader appeal was for more international cooperation, and a real seat at the table for developing countries when decisions about the sector get made.

"We must avoid reproducing in space the inequalities that exist in other domains," he said.

The summit ran September 9–10 in Paris, covering the space economy, scientific research, exploration, and questions around space security and regulation.