President Paul Kagame on Thursday called on African countries to turn global political and economic pressures into an opportunity to strengthen self-reliance and reduce dependence on external powers.

Speaking in an interview with CNN journalist Eleni Giokos during the Africa CEO Forum 2026 in Kigali, Kagame said the current international order is weakening amid geopolitical tensions, sanctions and competing global interests.

He said pressure from major world powers should serve as a wake-up call for Africa to focus on its own capabilities and long-term priorities.

“This pressure coming from other parts of the world should remind Africa to wake up,” Kagame said. “Pressure is not always bad because it pushes us to look inward and determine what we should do.”

Kagame said Africa has the resources and human capital needed to become more economically independent and globally influential but continues to underutilize its potential. He pointed to the continent’s vast solar energy potential and critical minerals used in battery production and other modern technologies, saying Africa often fails to fully benefit from its natural wealth.

“Africa has almost everything, yet it continues to lag behind because it is not properly using what it has,” he said.

He also criticized what he described as the selective application of international law and global governance systems, saying powerful countries often prioritize their own interests over fairness and consistency.

Kagame urged African countries to strengthen regional cooperation and move from discussion to practical implementation in addressing shared challenges.

“There is a lot Africa can do to transform itself, but it requires working together and moving from words to action,” he said.

He added that Africa could play a stronger role in the emerging global order if its leaders stop waiting for external solutions and instead build on the continent’s own strengths.

The remarks came as Kagame also addressed concerns about sanctions on African countries, saying they are often driven by the interests of powerful nations rather than principles of fairness.

Speaking to the CNN reporter, the discussion that opened the Africa CEO Forum, Kagame said global challenges should push Africa to define its own priorities and take greater responsibility for its development.

“We should rely on the opportunities we have. Why is Africa always behind?” he said.

He pointed again to Africa’s vast mineral resources, particularly those used in battery manufacturing and other technologies, saying global powers are competing for access while African countries often fail to fully benefit.

“Africa has many of these minerals, but it remains silent or loses most of them to powerful countries because they know how to use them,” he said.

Kagame said sanctions and external pressure are often applied selectively based on strategic interests and criticized what he described as inconsistencies in global governance.

He also said some powerful nations promote human rights and democracy while simultaneously pursuing economic interests in the same countries.

Kagame likened aspects of the current global system to earlier eras of colonial influence, saying African sovereignty is sometimes undermined through economic and political pressure.

He urged African countries to assert greater dignity and resist unfair external influence, saying such pressure should instead motivate the continent to fully harness its own potential.

The Africa CEO Forum 2026 brought together more than 2,800 participants from 69 countries, including heads of state, investors and senior business leaders. Six African heads of state attended, among them President Kagame; Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu; Gabonese leader Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema; Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani; Guinean leader Mamadi Doumbouya; and Mozambican President Daniel Chapo.