Nsengiyumva urges Africa to protect parks from terrorism, highlights Rwanda's success in wildlife recovery

Prime Minister, Dr. Justin Nsengiyumva, called for stronger global cooperation to protect biodiversity, saying that lasting peace and sustainable development depend on environmental conservation.

Nsengiyumva made the remarks while in Washington, D.C., where he attended two high-level events — one hosted by the International Conservation Caucus Foundation (ICCF) and another at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium. Both gatherings brought together global leaders, business executives, lawmakers, philanthropists and conservation advocates.

The prime minister joined Mozambique President Daniel Chapo and other dignitaries to discuss Africa's leadership in protecting natural resources. The ICCF dinner, attended by about 200 guests, has previously featured figures such as Britain's King Charles III, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Queen Noor of Jordan, Prince Albert II of Monaco, and former U.S. Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.

"Peace and development cannot be sustained if we fail to protect the environment on which our people depend," Nsengiyumva said. "That is why, for nearly 30 years, Rwanda has placed biodiversity conservation at the heart of our national development strategy."

He highlighted *Kwita Izina*, Rwanda's annual gorilla naming ceremony launched two decades ago, as a symbol of successful community-based conservation. Once on the brink of extinction, the mountain gorilla population has grown to more than 1,000 — a fourfold increase — thanks to local engagement and long-term protection.

Nsengiyumva also pointed to Akagera National Park as a major success story. Since entering a co-management partnership with African Parks 15 years ago, Rwanda has seen the park's wildlife population rise from fewer than 5,000 to nearly 12,000 animals. Lions were reintroduced in 2015 after being wiped out during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, followed by both black and white rhinos — some airlifted to Rwanda through support from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

He credited local communities living near the parks for their essential role in

conservation. “They are the first guardians of our wildlife because we ensure they benefit directly from these efforts,” he said.

Nsengiyumva warned that African parks must never be exploited by extremist or criminal groups. “We cannot allow terrorists or militias to use our protected areas to spread instability,” he said.

The prime minister reaffirmed Rwanda’s continental leadership through initiatives such as the Kigali Call to Action for People and Nature, endorsed by African heads of state in 2022, and the Africa Keystone Protected Area Partnership, which promotes innovation, research and technology for conservation.

He thanked the United States and President Donald Trump for supporting peacebuilding efforts between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo and welcomed the creation of the U.S. Foundation for International Conservation to promote sustainable development.

Nsengiyumva concluded by praising philanthropist Rob Walton for establishing the African Conservation Academy in Akagera National Park to train future conservation professionals.

“When we work together, we can build a better future for our children and our planet,” he said.