

*By Vincent Biruta **

A Rwandan proverb says: “Two people working together are better than eight fighting against each other”.

As a landlocked country, we know that regional and international cooperation is an imperative to thrive and succeed. Even more so, since COVID-19 has highlighted that in an interconnected and interdependent world, countries share a common destiny. The accelerated international response to the current public health emergency is an illustration that when we combine our efforts, we have the capacity to prepare for future threats but also, to act on pre-existing ones. In that context, the Commonwealth, which has been leader on environment and climate change that continue to affect communities around the globe, could also play a key role in ensuring equitable access to and distribution of fairly priced COVID-19 vaccines.

The 26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) scheduled to take place in June 2021, in Rwanda, under the theme “Delivering a common future: connecting, innovating, transforming”, will be an opportunity for Commonwealth Leaders to reflect on new forms of global governance while also raising ambitions on key decisions taken during CHOGM 2018. It will also be the occasion to build unified positions ahead of key upcoming events, including the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) scheduled for early November 2021, in Glasgow, UK.

It is indeed time to put our words into action, by making our governance models more inclusive; by making our health systems more resilient; by ensuring our economies and trade attain sustainable growth; by strengthening our social protection systems; by taking bold action on climate and by unlocking the advantages of technology for development.

We must adapt our national, regional and international systems to respond to both current and pressing challenges and as our talented and innovative young people will inherit this world, we shall do it with them, rather than for them.

Let us build on CHOGM’s momentum, to strengthen existing strategic partnerships and alliance as well as build new ones towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, as well as other major international commitments designed to preserve global common goods.

As we look ahead with optimism that the global health situation will improve over the next few months, Rwanda, as the youngest member of the Commonwealth family of Nations, is looking forward to welcoming all of you in your extended home.

Our national COVID-19 response has been focused on multi-sectoral collaboration and built upon regional and international responses. As we continue to strengthen our capabilities, be reassured that we will host you in a safe environment, in respect of all World Health Organization recommendations.

Murakaza neza mu Rwanda! (Welcome to Rwanda!).

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