

7 April 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at the International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in
Rwanda**

Mr Foreign Minister, Mr Secretary General, Mr President of the Security Council, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

If we could turn back the hands of time, we would surely go back to that fateful day and time in 1994 when ethnic and other differences erupted into tragedy, violence and genocide in Rwanda, and shook the region and the world. Knowing what we know now, there would be no blurred lines or ambiguities to affect our understanding of the complexities that triggered the genocide. Importantly, we would be better prepared to take preventive and other action consistent with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

But while we may look backwards, we must move forward. The direction in which we should go has been set out for us by the leaders of the countries and continent, Africa, most profoundly affected by the catastrophic events in Rwanda. The General Assembly has concurred with the Executive Council of the African Union in determining, in its resolution 58/... that in commemoration of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, an international day of reflection and commitment to fight against genocide, throughout the world, should be proclaimed. Today, 7 April 2004, we commemorate that International Day of Reflection on the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda.

The charge to us, on this International Day of Reflection, is quite specific. It begins, as it ought to, with honouring the memory of victims of the genocide in Rwanda. These victims were the people of whom the United Nations Charter speaks, and to whom entitlements of human rights and fundamental freedoms, of tolerance and social justice were accorded under the Charter. Yet, no less than eight hundred thousand (800,000) of them - men, women and children - perished at the hands of those with whom they should have been engaged in nation building.

What a pity it is that ethnicity did not yield to nationhood. What a pity it is that the deliberate killing of the President of Rwanda, together with the President of Burundi, would not have caused a nation to mourn, but instead would have resulted in one hundred days of terror and violence, in full view of the United Nations and of the world. What a pity it was that people could be targeted for assassination, that complicity could be all around, that the media could help to fuel the conflict.

So, on this solemn occasion, we remember those who lost their lives; we express our sincere sympathy to their families and friends; and we share the hopes and aspirations of to the

Government and people of Rwanda in seeking to heal and rebuild a nation that is democratic and which has as its overarching vision of economic and social progress for all.

What happened in Rwanda is recognised by the international community as genocide, within the scope of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. We are reminded, therefore, on this International Day of Reflection, that we must act in accordance with that Convention, in Rwanda and wherever genocide and other violent acts and atrocities are perpetrated.

Many of those who perpetrated violent acts in Rwanda - government officials, the military and civilians - were not people in faceless crowds. They could be identified, and could be brought to justice. They could be made to understand that it is not wise to seek to remake a diverse world such as ours in their own image. For seeking to do so could result in untold tragedy.

The early establishment by the Security Council of the Rwanda Tribunal - in November 1994 - with its seat in Arusha, Tanzania, has sent a clear message that genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in Rwanda, and even in neighbouring states, could not be perpetrated with impunity. The Tribunal's task is a prodigious one; but its accomplishments are critical to assuring survivors and families of the victims of the genocide in Rwanda and others who would perpetrate similar acts throughout the world - that justice can and will be done.

The United Nations, and specifically the Security Council, has been given authority under the Charter, to maintain international peace and security. It is an authority it is called upon to exercise, no matter how formidable the challenge. We can ill afford to be silent, selective or inconsistent in our responses, when violence threatens to engulf a country or a region.

The international community did not act in time to stop the violence in Rwanda - we know horrific acts were taking place even as United Nations peacekeeping forces were on the ground, and that some peacekeepers also lost their lives in the wake of the violence. Having had a decade to reflect on what happened in Rwanda, I know we will all agree that we should have acted differently. This underscores the challenge to all of us to seek to ensure that our commitment to multilateralism is given the standing to which we agreed in the Charter of the United Nations and in international law, no matter what the circumstances.

I believe, nevertheless, that the tragedy in Rwanda has swung open the door of opportunity, for Rwanda, the United Nations and for the international community. It has, I believe, underscored for the Government and people of Rwanda the value of finding alternatives to armed conflict and violence, and the importance of according a central place to dialogue, human rights, human dignity and national unity in the affairs of their country.

For the United Nations, it has stimulated discussion and debate over the broad spectrum of issues concerning the organisation's role in crisis and civil conflict within Member States. Importantly,

it has afforded the organisation the opportunity to confront, head on, the issues that could lead to other tragedies such as the one that occurred in Rwanda.

Today, we are called upon to consider implementing the recommendations of the Carlsson Report, as part of our reflection on the matter of genocide. We must be progressive, I believe, in determining our shortcomings in Rwanda, what we have done since then, and what remains to be done to prevent genocide in the years ahead. Those passionate voices that call in distress to our United Nations in the midst of tragedy must be assured that the United Nations will stand for human rights, for freedom and justice, for peace and security, and that an appropriate response will be forthcoming.

I extend my sincere best wishes the Government and people of Rwanda, on their road to permanent and lasting peace.

I thank you.