High Commission of India
Kigali
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HC's Speech for Policy Dialogue "India-Rwanda Socio-economic ties: innovations, opportunities and challenges" at Kigali Convention Centre

Hon. Virgile Rwanyagatare, Director General, Asia and the Pacific, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Government of Rwanda,

Dr. Jean Baptiste SAGAHUTU, Chairperson, Economic Policy Research Network (EPRN) Rwanda,

Your Excellencies – Ambassadors, High Commissioners and representatives of Diplomatic Missions,

Senior officials of the Government of Rwanda,

Esteemed members of academia, think-tanks, and media,

Dear members of the Indian business community present here today,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies & Gentlemen.

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this Policy Dialogue on the theme "India-Rwanda Socio-economic ties: innovations, opportunities and challenges". To begin with, I would like to convey our gratitude to Hon. Virgile Rwanyagatare, Director General, Asia and the Pacific, the Guest of Honour of today's event.

I am happy to know that this is the first Joint Policy Dialogue on India-Rwanda relations, and the first ever Track 1.5 initiative between our two sides. Such

events provide a unique perspective to look at bilateral relations holistically, drawing views and suggestions from our track-II interlocutors as well as private sector. These valuable inputs can then inform decision making at the Track-I or Governmental level.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Our Leaders have set ambitious development agenda for our two countries. Under the Viksit Bharat @2047 vision, India seeks to become a developed country by the centenary of our independence in 2047 with an economy of 30-40 trillion US dollars, high per capita income ranging from USD 15000 to USD 18000, sustainable growth, modern infrastructure, top-tier social sectors, and enhanced social welfare. This finds echo in Rwanda's Vision 2050 to become a high per capita income country by 2050. This commonality of visions could provide a long-term framework for our bilateral partnership.

This having stated, let me turn to India-Rwanda bilateral relations. While our bilateral relations encompass a wide range of sectors, I want to focus on five specific areas that also align with the theme of today’s event, namely **agriculture, education, technology, trade & economic cooperation, and culture**.

At the time of India’s independence in 1947, following almost 200 years of colonial rule, India's agriculture was characterized by low productivity, outdated technology, heavy dependence on monsoon rains, and severe food shortages. Today, after almost 79 years as an independent nation, India is a global leader in agriculture, recording 40% growth in output over the past

decade. India exported agri products worth around USD 50 billion to the world in the FY 2024-25, and aims to double it to USD 100 billion in the next few years. This progress has been achieved through innovative policies which could also find wider implementation outside India.

These initiatives *inter alia* include the Soil Health Card Scheme to promote balanced, nutrient-based fertilizer usage; e-National Agriculture Market, an online trading platform connecting more than 1200 agri markets to create a unified national market; Digital Agriculture Mission to build digital public infrastructure (AgriStack) for farmers; and Namo Drone Didi scheme to provide drones to 15,000 Women Self Help Groups for spraying fertilizers and pesticides. Other initiatives include provision of concessional short-term agri-loans to farmers; incentives to form farmer producer organizations; promotion of comprehensive organic farming and niche missions such as the National Beekeeping and Honey Mission, and Prime Minister Matsya Sampada Yojana to boost fisheries production.

I believe India's experience in implementation of these agricultural programmes could dovetail into Rwanda's vision to transform its agriculture sector from subsistence farming to a modernized, market-oriented, and sustainable system.

Education is another promising area of cooperation. We appreciate Rwanda's national goal to become an upper-middle-income country by 2035, and a high-income country by 2050, through a knowledge-based economy. This, I believe, requires a skilled, knowledgeable, and innovative workforce. India, with an experience of almost 80 years in expanding access to quality

education to its citizens has much to share with Rwanda. In 1950-51, India had just 30 universities and 578 colleges. Today, there are 1,168 universities, 45,473 colleges and 12,002 stand-alone institutions. Over the last two decades, the number of colleges alone has more than quadrupled, highlighting a remarkable growth in the sector. The quality of education has also improved, with an impressive 318% increase in the last ten years representation in global rankings—the highest growth among the G20 nations.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

India and Rwanda share ambitious goals of modernization through innovation and technology-led development. India, with the world's third-largest startup ecosystem, could help the budding Rwandan startup ecosystem through knowledge sharing, mentorship, joint programmes, skill development, hackathons etc. In particular, founders of Indian startups could leverage Kigali Innovation city as a launchpad to spread their tested solutions in East Africa and beyond. I would also like to recall the India-Rwanda Innovation Growth Programme (IRIGP), a bilateral initiative launched in February 2017 to foster science, technology, and innovation, linking Indian technologies with Rwandan socio-economic needs. It was aimed at deploying validated, affordable Indian innovations to create sustainable social enterprises, particularly in agriculture, health, IT, and energy. This work is half done. We need to revive it.

Trade and economic cooperation continues to be an important area of bilateral cooperation. The current bilateral trade of approx. USD 125 million is

not commensurate with close bilateral ties. Diversification of the trade basket through addition of products such as heavy engineering goods, four wheelers, refined petroleum products, chemicals, semi-precious stones/jewellery is required to boost bilateral trade. I am happy to note that the proposal for the export of avocadoes from Rwanda to India is at an advanced stage. We should also aim for a greater exchange of trade delegations, mutual participation in trade events such as Buyer Seller Meets(BSM), Reverse Buyer Seller Meets(RBSM), Roadshows, and B2B meetings. Rwandan entrepreneurs should aim to meet some of India's needs, and utilize the benefits of Duty Free Tariff Preference Scheme (DFPT) for LDC countries extended by Government of India.

At the same time, I am happy to know that Indian businesses rank as the second largest group of investors in Rwanda with an investment of USD 450 million in 2024 alone. Indian & PIO-owned companies have made significant investments in sectors such as Iron & Steel, Telecom, Tea, Two Wheelers, Consumable goods, Sugar, Textile, LEDs, and basic materials such as cement.

Last, but not the least, India and Rwanda share many cultural similarities. We both respect nature and environment. Respect and admiration for animals such as cow as life sustaining forms are deeply ingrained in our socio-cultural psyche. We have strived to preserve our environment, while embarking on the path of development. While cultural exchanges between India and Rwanda have seen good progress in recent times, there is a need to have deeper cultural cooperation through joint cultural performances, food and film festivals, fashion shows etc. The people of our two friendly countries

need to know each other and collaborate more. After all, more and more people to people exchanges can only bring our two countries closer together. I would take this opportunity to invite more Rwandan tourists to visit India and see our great country in its glory and splendor – from Kashmir in the north to Kanyakumari in the South, and from Arunachal Pradesh in the North-East to Gujarat in the West.

I would like to conclude by expressing hope that today's discussions will be productive, offering positive recommendations for taking India-Rwanda relations to the next level.

I thank EPRN for jointly organizing this event, and hope that we can continue working closely together for the betterment of our two countries and our two peoples.

Thank you!

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