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PAUL KAGAME, PRESIDENT OF RWANDA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. AHAMED: His Excellency, President Paul Kagame, and distinguished guests, it is my honor to welcome you to the Brookings Institution today for a discussion on the future of the African Union. My name is Liaquat Ahamed; I am a member of the Brookings board of trustees.

Brookings has a tradition of bringing together a wide range of individuals and groups with diverse opinions and backgrounds to engage in important discussions and debates. This includes regularly hosting heads of state and senior officials and providing a forum for them to share their views and debate important topics and have a discussion with our audience. Brookings' commitment to institutional independence is rooted in the individual independence of our scholars and the institution does not take positions on policy issues. Our mission is to conduct high quality independent research to inform public debate on global issues.

President Kagame has kindly agreed to join us at the invitation of the Brookings Africa Growth Initiative. AGI, as it's known as, believes that the time is right for Africa to sustainably and inclusively converge with the rest of the world in terms of standards of living, opportunity, and GDP per capita. For Africa to achieve this transformative growth regional leaders and partners need new models and policies for economic development. AGI supports this process by producing and disseminating high quality independent policy research which helps establish long-term strategies for economic growth.

Dr. Brahim Coulibaly, known as Coul, who joined Brookings about six months ago, is the director of the program and senior fellow in the Global Economy and Development department. He comes to Brookings from the Federal Reserve Board where he was chief economist in charge of emerging markets. Under his direction, AGI is continuing the tradition of providing evidence-based research on the policies, institutions, and reforms needed to promote inclusive growth in Africa.

And we are delighted to hold this conversation today with President Kagame. His Excellency Paul Kagame was sworn in as President of the Republic of Rwanda for a third term in August 2017. Earlier in the year, in response to a request from AU member states, President Kagame presented a report on the proposed recommendations for the institutional reform of the African Union. It identifies concrete steps to make the UA more effective. This report, whose recommendations were adopted by the AU Assembly, highlights several strategies for revitalizing AU reform. They fall into four broad

categories. Realigning AU institutions to deliver its priorities, managing the AU effectively at both the political and operational levels, and sustainably self-financing the AU. On this last point the report stresses the importance of implementing the Kigali financing decision, which directs all AU member states to implement a 0.2 percent levy on eligible imports to finance the AU. According to the implementation timeline the target for the completion of these reports in January 2019. That's an ambitious yet attainable goal.

During today's discussion we look forward to hearing from the president his prospective on the AU reform process and how a reformed AU will better serve the interests of the African citizens. After that my colleague, Coul, will join President Kagame for a moderated discussion, which will provide you in the audience an opportunity to ask questions.

Today's event is being webcast live, and those of you on Twitter please feel free to join in the discussion using #AUReform.

Now, it is my pleasure to welcome to the stage His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of Rwanda. (Applause)

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Mr. Liaquat Ahamed, Brookings Trustee, Dr. Brahim Coulibaly, Director of the African Growth Initiative, scholars of the Brookings Institution, members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to be with you this afternoon and I would like to begin by thanking Brookings Institution for the invitation.

When Strobe Talbott proposed a conversation about the African Union reforms I immediately accepted. A more effective African Union is not only good for Africa but for everybody else as well. That's why this discussion comes at the right moment. Let me share a bit of background with you.

You may know that the African Union is mostly financed by external partners. In fact, our programs in the range of 97 percent donor funded. This reality makes no sense for anyone involved. Africa's interests, including ownership, get lost and I doubt that the interests of donors are being adequately addressed either. It is also unsustainable. The rapid changes taking place in the global economic and political environment make plain recklessness of relying so heavily on sources of funding that are likely to dry up sooner rather than later. Even when they still exist they are tied. Meanwhile

Africa has the means to pay for programs that we value and we should do so.

Two years ago in this context African heads of state appointed Donald Kaberuka, who is here, Acha Leke, who I have also seen around, by Carlos Lopes, and others to identify alternative sources of funding for the African Union as well as its new piece funding. Their proposal, which was adopted at the Kigali Summit in July 2016, was to institute a 0.2 percent levy on eligible imports to finance African Union activities. This decision immediately brought the African Union's effectiveness and capability into sharp focus. We simply had to make it work. After all, when it's your own money you naturally want to be sure that it's being well spent. As a result I was tasked by the heads of state to supervise the completion of the stalled institutional reform process and submit a plan of action at the next summit.

My first response was to ask for help from a team of distinguished experts from around our continent, including the others I mentioned earlier. Our method was not particularly novel. We built on the work of others and we consulted widely with the stakeholders all over Africa. We found that the African Union's problems had already been analyzed in meticulous detail over the years and good solutions identified. The report made to the assembly of heads of state in January 2017 presented the most relevant and urgent recommendations grouped into five reform areas which are, in a brief, as follows: First, focus on fewer priorities that are continental in scope. Second, make sure the various African Union institutions are able to deliver against those priorities. Third, connect the African Union to each citizen. Fourth, manage African Union business more efficiently, both politically and operationally. Fifth, finance the African Union sustainably. The recommendations were adopted, more or less, in full and now serve as the basis of the reform agenda, being implemented by the new chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and his team.

From the outset we were conscious that the risk of failure was real. Reforms had been adopted before then fallen into oblivion. The complexity of the politics cannot be underestimated. Change is required not only in the African Union Commission but also in each of the more than 50 member states. That's why the politics is being taken seriously. First, a reform implementation unit has been established in the office of the chairperson of the African Union to drive implementation over the next year and a half. Second, it was decided to institute a mechanism to ensure that legally binding

African Union decisions are respected by member states. Finally the Assembly took the unusual step of mandating me, assisted by current president or chair of the African Union, President Condé of Guinea, and the previous president or chair of the African Union, President Déby of Chad, together to work on supervising of the implementation process. Our role is to ensure that the chairperson of the African Union Commission has the support he needs and, very importantly, to maintain regular consultation with the heads of state and other key stakeholders along the way.

In closing, I would like to draw your attention to one critically important aspect of the reform agenda, and that is ensuring that Africa speaks with one voice on the global stage. This will require some accommodation and adjustment in terms of how we do business with each other. But it should be seen as a positive evolution not a challenge to the existing order. A more unified and assertive Africa will, for example, mean improved coordination on common security challenges where Africa already shoulders a significant share of the budget. Africa will also become more focused when it comes to international trade and economic growth. An integrated common market serving the world's most youthful and fastest growing population will create decades of growth opportunities for all of us. Partners such as the United States would do well to take the long view as Africa itself is doing. Efforts that we have seen to stall or even derail the reform process are counterproductive and should be reviewed. One concrete example is the attempt to through official channels to characterize the 0.2 percent levy on eligible imports as a violation of World Trade Organization commitments, which is not true. However, we are confident that any issues that arise can be addressed through dialogue based on mutual respect and our shared interests.

What should never get lost is that we are working together in good faith and for the benefit of everyone and with renewed determination to build a more stable and prosperous world for all of us.

Once again, I wish to thank you all for finding the time for this conversation, which I'm very much looking forward to.

Thank you. (Applause)

MR. COULIBALY: Thank you, Mr. President, for coming and for engaging in discussions with us on this important set of reforms. And I congratulate you on it; it looks really great, as well as

members of the Committee who work really hard to bring about this proposal.

But I told myself once I got a chance to sit down with President Kagame there's one question that I really want to ask, and it is a broader question about reform more broadly. It's usually the often prescribed policy reform, reform, reform, but it doesn't seem to be an easy process. But you have a pretty good track record with reform and I suspect that's why you were asked by your peers to lead this process. So what is President Kagame's secret recipe, if there is such a thing, or the Kagame Doctrine when it comes to reforms more broadly, and how has that helped with the current reform process?

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Well, I wouldn't say there is anything so special about Kagame or Rwanda, but I'll just say given our own history, which has been very challenging, looking at where we have been, meaning Rwanda and the long journey we have travelled to this day and the changes that have taken place and progress made, I think we have benefitted from these immense challenges because we have had to stand up and confront and, you know, deal with them in a straightforward manner because we did not think that sitting back and doing nothing but expecting other people to come and do things for us would take us anywhere. Again, we've learned these lessons ourselves directly. So I'm not talking about stories of other places I have heard about or read. So it just comes to making a decision and choices as to how you or whether you confront these challenges and improve your own situation and the lives of people involved, which was the case for Rwanda. We are challenged by many things as you may know. It's the history, the politics, the genocide, you know, loss of a million lives in just a hundred days. But even originally, even before that, we're just a poor country and we were badly governed and as may mirror what has happened in some other parts of our continent. So for us to have these, you know -- if you will, two things, one that others were not experiencing and that's the tragedy of genocide, the other, which was generally shared, about poverty, about bad politics, and so on. So to come out of this there is no miracle, it's just doing what is doable by human beings. I think it's what is humanly possible. We did simply -- and we're decided, we're determined, we're focused on making sure that, you know, this can't be what we deserve in the first place, this can be changed, and beginning with ourselves and if we are to be able to get assistance from other places. And that thinking was generally shared by the people of Rwanda. And I think catalyzed really by the kind of suffering Rwandans have gone through. I think it hardened the people, it made them, you know, more determined and decided on

making these hard choices and doing even the hard work to get out of that situation and move on.

So we're able to galvanize the efforts of everyone, and based on this thinking we found we're making progress, even in a situation with limited resources. But it is the will and the determination where we are not limited. We were falling short on the means and a few other things, but we were not falling short on determination and dedication to do our part.

MR. COULIBALY: Okay. And so then that has created the basis to, at least our experiments, was leverage in terms of thinking about how to approach the AU reform?

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Yes, yes.

MR. COULIBALY: Okay.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: In fact that's how the African is having seen where one has been, where we have come from, and where we are, and the progress we made. The must have taken notice that it had to take certain maybe qualities or efforts or determination to actually bring about the change. And I think based on that, added on constantly sharing what has been happening in our country and what we have done to overcome these difficulties, they must have said maybe there is something there with the people of Rwanda that can help carry out -- these are the reforms that we need across -- because, again, there are similarities. There are more similarities than differences across the continent. So I think one thing led to another and influenced another, then I think that's how they came to select Rwanda and myself to champion this. But working with other Africans that had been identified to part of the team, each one to bring their own expertise and experiences to try and work with other Africans, to carry out the overall or the broad reform across the continent.

MR. COULIBALY: Okay. So then an institution like the AU is obviously kind of complex in terms of ability to reform it and it's just not the AU. I think to a large organization, like European Union, to even see meaningful reform the United Nations you have to go back several decades I think to the sort of the '60s. So even with your experience you must have encountered some kind of obstacles. And I think in your remarks in July you alluded to where there is some hesitation that should not discourage us and that it could likely reflect misunderstandings or miscommunications. And that as a family those could be addressed.

Are we now in a position where we think such concerns have been addressed or that

they don't pose any significant threat to the reform process?

PRESIDENT KAGAME: The concerns would be addressed along the way. In fact, maybe you're dealing with some concerns others emerge. Or even when you have no (inaudible) there and they have supported and even made claim to be supportive, maybe along the way again something else crops up, either by influence from wherever and would create doubt in people who initially were not doubtful. But this is expected. I think that's where we started from. The moment you expect these challenges so when they come up they don't surprise you, maybe you also plan ahead or, you know, as they come up, how to deal with them. And it sort of is going to be a life of challenges. In fact, we face much bigger and more challenges by not doing what we are trying to do.

MR. COULIBALY: Right. Yes.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: So I think the challenges posed by trying to cut out reform expected. Nonetheless I think they can be dealt with, but you know once you made a step in that regard everyone actually benefits immensely. So there is an incentive, if you will, for people to try everything that is possible to do that. But you'll always found doubts, you'll always find excuses, you'll always -- as happens with changes in many regards for, you know, many things, changes are a problem unto themselves and you just need to remain focused on the prize, the real thing you want to get at. But for challenges, those are guaranteed.

MR. COULIBALY: Okay. So we are quite optimistic at this stage that the process is on track?

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Very optimistic. Because we have seen across the continent the desire to see these reforms work. I think there are more countries, more people who have the desire to see us make improvement. I mean everybody wants this kind of progress. So we have to deal with the few challenges, but I think with the growing numbers of countries and people who are interested in making this work, I have no doubt about the end result being what we want.

MR. COULIBALY: So in your remarks you stress a couple of elements. One was the financing and the other was the need for Africa to speak with one voice. And I think these are key elements of the reform. The financing decision actually you mentioned started earlier. And I wonder if there's been sufficient time now to be able to see whether African states are eagerly contributing the

share they should be contributing to the financing of the AU. And other processes too, where one may be looking to gauge if sufficient progress could be -- the upcoming summits, one in Abidjan of AU Africa Partnership, and then following month in Buenos Aires, World Trade Organization. Are we getting a sense also that Africa is approaching those meetings within the framework and spirit of the reforms?

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Again, it's a question of process. But to begin with I think there was consensus that there's a need for reform, there was a need for self-financing for the AU. So that principle is very important that it generated a consensus across the continent. The problem will always be in the area of implementation, people not being exactly what they have committed themselves to or doing half of that or, you know, going slowly and so on. But an example, we have now 12 countries who have actually started using this formula. In regards to matter of (inaudible), even with the difficulties the countries were expressing of going along that proposal that was made because of, you know, legal, constitutional, and other matters in their own countries. But because none of them were determined, again, they went back home and they clearly had those that were there so that progress will be made. You could see 11-12 countries, you know, taking up that and (inaudible). And so, first, I think it's a very good sign. And the others were said to be doing what needs to be done and they were talking about also speeding it up so that it starts working.

But here we are not dealing with a new problem. It's a very old problem. In fact, that's indeed what problem is associated with the complexity. The problem of Africa not being independent is -- you know, has a very long history as you know. And of course related to that lack of one voice representing Africa. So we have a lot of challenges to overcome. But it doesn't in any case take away the need for us to really tackle this problem because when we're Africa speaking as one voice, when we need to be independent. Because as we know it's a simple estimation date. It's very interesting because, as I said, having 97 percent in some areas of activities being paid from outside, even when we said no, we need to start paying for ourselves, you know, those owners who were actually paying started complaining. It's like the outsiders are interested in paying our bills for everything, than to see us take responsibility. I mean in between that what do you notice? I think you'll find something very strange about it. If somebody is paying my bills and I say, you know what, let me take a share of it or let me pay and say, no, no, no, don't worry. (Laughter) I think it is cause for a lot of suspicion. And why would

African be suspicious. This is another thing. We may have a problem with Africans who don't find this suspicious. I mean there's something wrong, therefore we needed to correct that.

So it's an old problem, but I think Africans across the whole continent, especially the young ones -- yeah, even the old ones I think (laughter) are beginning to say I think there is a need to change this old bad habit. And I think what is happening on the ground also our situation in our countries, even for those who are insensitive, I think some things start happening that they wake up to this reality that we need to change. And it is good for us. By the way, it is also good for our partners. I think our partners needed to be working with Africa that wants to raise its stake in world affairs and stand up for ourselves. And you have a better partner who brings something, rather than the one who keeps asking for you to give charity.

MR. COULIBALY: And I think in terms of that partnership obviously one big issue is the migration (inaudible) everywhere, especially as Africa is good for everybody. And whenever we see stories about young people risking their lives to reach the shores of Europe, again it's a stark reminder of how we need to be doing a big more, taking our responsibilities. And I think in the AU context they've outlined an Agenda 2063 which has some really important aspirations, really ambitious. I wanted to use this chance before I turn to the audience for open discussion as to how likely is it or how would a reformed AU -- or let's put it this way, if the reform of the AU does not succeed for whatever reason, and we are all really rooting for it to succeed, what is the likelihood of being able to fulfill those aspirations under Agenda 2063?

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Well, I think the two are very closely related for the ambitions and the goals of 2063. There is a pathway. There is a certain direction you have to take to get there. And part of that is making the reform work. They are really tied in together. So unless 2063 continues to just become wishful thinking, but you have to create these pathways that will lead us there. And one of them is to be able to do these things mostly ourselves and be able to finance our activities, because we can. You see, it's really -- but that most of these countries in Africa -- I mean we can't keep having an Africa that is, you know, so wealthy in terms of all kinds of resources but at the same time we have poor Africans.

MR. COULIBALY: That's a paradox.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: We have to bridge the gap, and one way is through these reforms, is through implementation, doing things. And there is no lack of knowledge as to what we need to do. Largely all African leaders, citizens, whoever we talk about, the majority are aware of what needs to be done. It's just, you know, pushing that button to make sure that everybody thinking and the actions they are accompanying that so that we change things. I think we will get there and (inaudible). It's a reform process, it's the 2063 Agenda, it's their mindset, change that we have to even look back and say why are we here, where others have been but have left us and have gone so far ahead. What is it, what's wrong with Africa? We need to answers these questions. It's not a curse. It's just that, you know, it can't be because most of these are advanced economies, unfortunately actually contributed to by Africans, a lot of them. If these Africans could really start doing some of the things they know they could help within our continent and therefore our political systems could allow that to happen. Also when I say that I'm talking about leaders at different levels who really have authority, power, responsibility in their hands. We need to change things, otherwise they just won't change without us doing what we need to do.

MR. COULIBALY: Okay. So with this I'll turn over to the audience and open it up for questions. I'm sure you've been eagerly waiting to get into the discussion.

Yes, Ambassador.

MS. MULAMULA: Thank you very much, Couli.

MR. COULIBALY: And, if you would, please as you come to ask questions state your name and your affiliation. That would be great. Thank you.

MS. MULAMULA: I'm Liberata Mulamula; they call me Ambassador. I'm now with the George Washington University. Mr. President, (inaudible).

PRESIDENT KAGAME: (Inaudible).

MS. MULAMULA: I'm now on the other side.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Which side? (Laughter)

MS. MULAMULA: So I can be fairly free to pose a question. Mr. President, this week we have had round tables. I'm sure you are familiar with this, constituents for Africa. We had round tables at the African Union at the George Washington University. One of the round tables was about empowering the next generation of leaders. And this was the most challenging round table because we had the youth,

the students putting us to task. And this of course also was in the framework of the African Union. They said that we have all these reforms, we have all these initiatives, but then we don't see the youth, the young people at the table. And when they are at the table they are not engaged in the conversation.

So I'm posing this to, because I'm also teaching about the gender and leadership in Africa. And the question every time that comes around is African Union in terms of the leadership is a man's club. But also for things like the reforms they said you are just speaking among yourselves. You need to have a new trajectory, you need to bring this youth, these young minds, that they use technology. For example, when you talk of 0.2 percent, how you do it, we can also bring their tools to see how best you can have this implemented.

So the question which I'm putting to you, which you should help me, to be able to come back to this youth, the young leaders and what is this pleasure, what is their hope for them to get to engage the African leaders?

This is my question. Thank you.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Yes. But I think it is not entirely true that the young people are not engaging because I've been to places where young people have been engaged. In some cases maybe they are not where they really are truly expect to be, but that doesn't work for every case. But I think the point being made is clear. The point you are making is in all these processes we should involve everybody, and particularly the young people. I think that's the point that has been made for a long time wherever you go. So I don't disagree with that, not at all. I think, one, everybody who has want to contribute should be engaged, two, the young people especially have a lot to offer and they should therefore be brought in as well in terms of communicating what there is, but also making them, you know, get involved and probably taking some of the responsibilities they should.

Having said that, I think we will need to correct -- and maybe this can be corrected by the way we communicate -- we need to first of all involve the youth. Those who have responsibility at different levels need to think about that and because there is a lot that we can tap from them. But I think the young people should feel they have that responsibility to show up. They need to be there, they need to show up. They can't be there and say no, no, they didn't call me, so. (Laughter) The responsibility should be shared. Yes, the young people are important. But you see when you are important and say

okay I'm important so somebody should recognize that and come to me, there is a problem. Young people are important, they are needed, they should show up, they should come forward. And even a demand, say no we want to be part of this. It's their right to demand.

So, again, it's a long journey. It won't happen overnight, it won't happen just because somebody remembers to do that and another one does it. And then the young people show sometimes they are there and other times they are not there. We need all to move, to get things moving, and come forward and do some of these things. But the point is taken. The young people -- tell them I completely agree with you, they should be involved, but they should really show up.

MR. COULIBALY: And I'd like to underscore that point. One of the key proposals in your reform I believe is actually to set up quotas for young people and women.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Yes. Women, yes.

MR. COULIBALY: I think the gentleman in the third row with the glasses is next.

QUESTIONER: Hi, Mr. President. My name is Anasou, I'm from Zimbabwe and I'm a young person and I'm going to show up. (Laughter) I'm showing up.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: That's a good example.

QUESTIONER: In fact, I'm going to set a proposal that whatever committee is going to be formed for young people I'm inviting myself to that committee.

My question really is I'm a master student for international development here in Washington, D.C., at the School for International training. My question really is about to do with financing. I hear the African Union is really focusing on how we should finance ourselves. But as I look at it, most African countries don't have that capacity to finance themselves let alone the African Union. So I'll give an example, for example if I am a business person in Zimbabwe and I have a product I will choose to go and sell that product in Europe because I will get more money than going at that product maybe in Zambia because they probably want to pay me as much as I have. So shouldn't we be focusing more on how to really build our economies to be functional economies and really have those currencies that we need so that we have enough capacity to fund not just the African Union but our own countries? What focus is happening towards that direction? That's my question to you.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: But it is not either or. When we are talking about being able to

finance activities, we weren't talking about stopping countries growing their economies at all. We are saying they should happen at the same time. But it is also not true. If you look at every country across the continent actually what is asked of them to pay their share of burden for the AU is something they can afford. And it's not a flat kind of contribution. Those who have more contribute more than others, those who have less will contribute less. I think that was taken care of. It's not a big thing.

But there is a problem here that we may be missing. Even things as they stand today, before this formula was given, and initially countries were not really complaining that they're being asked to pay more than they are capable. That hasn't become an issue. But of course what we find is that some countries among those who actually don't have resources don't even pay. And not paying doesn't have relationship with being capable or not to pay, it is just the will to pay or the understanding of what that does that should be positive for the continent. So it's a lot to -- I mean I think there's more politics involved and the will (inaudible) advancing the cause of the continent is advancing your own cause as a country. There is a sort of disconnect.

MR. COULIBALY: Yes, thank you. You're next.

AMBASSADOR CHIHOMBORI: Good afternoon, Your Excellency. I'm Ambassador Arikana Chihombori. I'm your African Union Ambassador to the United States.

Mine is a comment. And I just wanted to thank you first and foremost for what you have done for the women of Rwanda. And hopefully you will duplicate that in the rest of the continent. For those of you who do not know, Rwanda has a 64 percent female cabinet. No country in the world comes even close.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Parliament.

AMBASSADOR CHIHOMBORI: Parliament, yes. (Laughter) 64 percent.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: And 40-something in the cabinet. (Laughter) (Applause)

AMBASSADOR CHIHOMBORI: So for that we want to thank you. And those are some of the things that we need to highlight as we engage our conversations about Africa.

And to my sister Ambassador I wanted to say for you, to your students, you need to let your students know that for you to be able to contribute to the development of Africa, first and foremost, you must stand up and be counted. We have no idea who you are and where you are. The Indian

diaspora are organized. Their voices are loud and clear. The Chinese, the Indian, the Irish, the Japanese, you name it, the diaspora from other ethnic groups are very organized. When you ask for the voices of the African diaspora go to the graveyard because we are nowhere to be heard. So before the leadership can stand up and help us they must know where we are and what we are doing. So tell your young people. And you, young man from Zimbabwe, stand up and be counted so we can speak for you.

Thank you. (Applause; laughter)

MR. COULIBALY: Thank you.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: I think the African Union is well represented. (Laughter)

QUESTIONER: Thank you, Your Excellency. First, my name is Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and I'm on the Advisory Board along with Donald Kaberuka of the East African Growth Initiative. So among other things, so I wanted to first say congratulations to Coul and AGI and Brookings for doing this, bringing one of our top leaders to discuss an issue of great substance. This is where we want to go. But I wanted to push His Excellency a little bit. He has done some remarkable reforms in Rwanda that really matter, which is the open borders. Anyone African, I understand now, can come in without a visa. You have agreements with several other countries for a joint visa to move around. I think every African, if we are really to make progress on trade and other economic issues, we want these open borders for people to be able to move around. It's like the one reform that Africans could see and really feel.

So I wanted to say how can you share your experience and the good results you are getting from this policy and push all of us on the continent to go the same way?

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Well, I wish pushing all of you would yield results, and we will try. But the best push comes in the way indeed of example. There are these things we have tried to do in our own country. Basically, you know, only serve interests meaning the benefits that come from what we are doing are primarily experienced by ones who have done that. But this I think may benefit others, you know, by working as an example of what is possible. In fact, some of the things we have done is like we are telling our brothers and sisters on the continent that if Rwanda can do it you can do it.

And, you know, for example, on the question of opening borders, all Africans find a visa to the airport when they are coming to Rwanda. There is no hassle for visas to Rwanda and even some other countries, but specifically for the Africans. And the demonstration here was also to tell Africans,

because some of them think if they open their borders, you know, everybody will come, the wrong people will come and cause problems in these countries. We haven't received the wrong people (laughter) causing us problems. So if I tell the rest of our continent and the world that, okay, by being open we haven't met any new problems that have come because of that, that's very true. And that's where our push is in that form. Because there is no way one country can push other countries to do what the country thinks is right or what is even working for them. But if you keep showing this example, if -- the way we have involved women in the whole, you know, structure of our economy, and the way it has worked -- I mean 52 percent of our population are women and we have involved women as much as they should be because it's not even a favor we are doing women, it's really -- we are doing sort of the favor of the whole country. Everybody is participating and then their rights are being also respected of everyone.

So maybe the harmony in Rwanda, the stability, and the continued growth of our economy can easily be attributed to this approach, that everybody is involved, and particularly women, who have been left behind before and like it still exists in other places, are actually part of this stability, continued growth, and so on and so forth. It's a benefit. If anyone can find sense in that and maybe apply it for a similar situation I think that's how it works. But constantly -- and we have had -- the beauty of it again and relating it to questions asked earlier, Africans are eager to have things change. And we have seen many countries, country delegations, one after another, come to Rwanda to ask us how did you do this, what are the results, what are the obstacles. We have many country delegations coming to share as we have done ourselves, going to places and say how did you do this. And we go out and do it. The difference is always going to be are you going to do it.

MR. COULIBALY: Well, we do give up when it gets hard.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: Yeah, that's the whole thing. Absolutely. If you don't give up, if you really do it, if you keep trying. So it will work.

MR. COULIBALY: So we may just have time for just one more question and then we'll have His Excellency have a last word before we wrap up.

MS. MUYANGWA: Thank you. My name is Monde Muyangwa. I'm the Director of the Africa Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

I wanted to follow up on this question about financing of the African Union. There are lots

of us who are cheering you on, and all the hard work that Rwanda and members of the Committee have done to ensure that Africa owns the African Union, because without that the future of that continent is actually quite bleak.

My question to you is this, we know that some African countries, including quite a few in the Southern African Development community, are pushing back on the .2 percent levy. Now, is that a question of the modalities that have been defined for contributing that .2 percent, or is it a question of the (inaudible) that was sent regarding the WTO? That that is presenting some fear about what the possible economic repercussions might be? Or is it the case that there are some countries, both within Africa and outside, who are afraid of what an efficient and effective AU might mean for the future?

PRESIDENT KAGAME: I think simply and straight forward, that last one. (Laughter) This is very clear because you find even several of those who really had no problem, they liked it, they supported it, then after some weeks they started saying no, but you see this and -- you really ask, you engage, you explain, and then you start saying, okay, what is the alternative. And they can't give you the alternative. So I think you've really answered my question.

Thank you.

MR. COULIBALY: Which is perhaps why we really need to do this. So unfortunately that's all the time we had. We really thank you, His Excellency, for joining us and sharing your perspective. Certainly here at the Africa Growth Initiative we'll be following the reforms, the progress, and we hope to be able to welcome you in the future to discuss at that time hopefully how the reform when implemented are contributing to prosperity on the continent.

So if you don't mind remaining seated for the next minute or so as His Excellency makes his exit of the building, I'd appreciate it. And thank you all for coming.

PRESIDENT KAGAME: But let me first thank you and the Brookings Institute for giving us this opportunity and the audience here that was very interesting. And I'll always be happy to come and share with you what is related to this reform or any other matters as an African. A very proud African.

MR. COULIBALY: Thank you. (Applause)

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