Nowadays, when Rwandans look back on the early years of aftermath, they say, “In the beginning.”

On the fifteenth anniversary of the genocide, Rwanda is one of the safest and the most orderly countries in Africa. Since 1994, per-capita gross domestic product has nearly tripled, even as the population has increased by nearly twenty-five per cent, to more than ten million. There is national health insurance, and a steadily improving education system. Tourism is a boom industry and a strong draw for foreign capital investment. In Kigali, the capital, whisk-broom-wielding women in frocks and gloves sweep the streets at dawn. Plastic bags are outlawed, to keep litter under control and to protect the environment. Broadband Internet service is widespread in the cities, and networks are being extended into the countryside. Cell phones work nearly everywhere. Traffic police enforce speed limits and the mandatory use of seat belts and motorbike helmets. Government officials are required to be at their desks by seven in the morning. It is the only government on earth in which the majority of parliamentarians are women. Soldiers are almost nowhere to be seen. Kigali is now home to nearly a million people—roughly double the number ten years ago—and there is incessant construction of new homes, office blocks, medical facilities, shopping centers, hotels, schools, transport depots, foreign embassies, and roads. A billboard used to stand beside one of the main traffic circles, riddled by machine-gun fire and advertising Guinness stout with the slogan “The Power of Love”; today, a new billboard across the street says, “Pay Taxes—Build Rwanda—Be Proud.” Most of the prisoners accused or convicted of genocide have been released. The death penalty has been abolished. And Rwanda is the only nation where hundreds of thousands of people who took part in mass murder live intermingled at every level of society with the families of their victims.

“So far, so good,” Rwanda’s President, Paul Kagame, told me. Kagame, who is fifty-one, and is so thin that in official photographs with visiting dignitaries it often looks as if his guests had been posed with a cardboard cutout of him, led the rebel force—the Rwandan Patriotic Front—that stopped the genocide. He has presided over Rwanda’s destiny ever since, and he has come to be recognized, by his adversaries and his admirers alike, as one of the most formidable political figures of our age. “Fifteen years,” he said. “It sounds like a pretty long time. But if you look at it, and the value of the whole country—maybe where the country has moved to and where it should be—it becomes a very small thing.”

Kagame, who is commonly described as authoritarian even in the Rwandan press, was elected in 2003 with more than ninety-five per cent of the vote, after running effectively unopposed. But he told me that if he cannot build the national institutions that allow him to retire and preside over a peaceful transfer of power by 2017, when the Constitution requires that he step aside, then “It’s a failure.”

* From 2009 New Yorker aticle by [**PHILIP GOUREVITCH**](http://www.newyorker.com/contributors/philip-gourevitch)