



**SPECIAL REPORT**

# **Listening, Leading conference: From Rwanda to the world**

## **Introducing the Isoko Peace Institute 2024**



# International Conference on “Listening and Leading: The Art and Science of Peace, Resilience, and Transformational Justice.” From Rwanda to the World.

“In a world that seems broken, and where peace seems to be impossible, let’s all come together to learn about peace for the next three days in Rwanda, a country that I believe has a lot to teach us.”

Ms. Jenny Ohlsson  
Chair of the Board of Trustees, Aegis Trust



## Introduction

From July 26th to 28th, the Aegis Trust successfully hosted the international conference titled “Listening and Leading: The Art and Science of Peace, Resilience, and Transformational Justice” in Kigali. Co-hosted by the University of Rwanda, Tufts University, and the Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement (MINUBUMWE), the event gathered over 500 distinguished experts, internationally recognized scholars, peace practitioners, educators, policymakers, changemakers, and community builders committed to reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, and transformational justice.

The conference featured a significant announcement by the Aegis Trust regarding the establishment of the Isoko Peace Institute—an international institute dedicated to fostering peace and promoting the practice of peaceful coexistence. To be located in Bugesera near Rwanda’s new international airport, the Isoko Peace Institute will serve as a global hub for peace initiatives, benefiting communities in Rwanda, Africa, and beyond.

In his opening remarks, Rwanda’s Minister of National Unity and Civic Engagement, Honorable Dr. Jean-Damascène Bizimana, commended Aegis Trust for its invaluable contributions to preserving the memory of the Genocide against the Tutsi and promoting peace. The Minister also pledged the government’s support for the creation of the Isoko Peace Institute.

During the conference, Aegis Trust signed three pivotal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs):

1. **With the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect:** This MOU focuses on cooperation in preventing genocide and its incitement.

2. **With the Ministry of Education:** This MOU supports the establishment of the Isoko Peace Institute.

3. **With the Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement (MINUBUMWE):** This MOU outlines the implementation of the Aegis Isoko Institute in Bugesera District.

The conference concluded with the presentation of the 2024 Aegis Award to three Central African faith leaders who played a crucial role in preventing further violence in the Central African Republic during the crisis following the 2013 Seleka takeover and the subsequent Anti-Balaka reprisals. The Aegis Award honours humanitarian actions that go beyond the call of duty, recognizing those who have intervened in exemplary ways to save lives during times of war, persecution, or genocide.

The success of this conference was made possible by our esteemed co-hosts—the Ministry of National Unity and Civic Engagement, the University of Rwanda, and Tufts University. We also extend our deepest gratitude to our sponsors for their financial support and guidance: Templeton World Charity Foundation, Templeton Religion Trust, Auburn Seminary, Marriott Corporation, Bridgeway Foundation, One Acre Fund, Champion Humanity Enterprise, and the Medical College of Wisconsin. Their trust and support enabled us to create an international conference of significant scope and impact.





# DAY ONE

**Dr Jean-Damascène Bizimana**

Rwanda Minister of National Unity and Civic Engagement

**Ms. Jenny Ohlsson**

Chair of the Board of Trustees, Aegis Trust

**Dr Kayihura Muganga Didas**

Associate Professor and Vice Chancellor, University of Rwanda

**Johanna Teague**

Swedish Ambassador to Rwanda

**Stefania Giannini**

UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education

**Alice Wairimu Nderitu**

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide

**Dr Jonathan Tirrell**

Director, Generous Listening and Dialogue Center, Tisch College of Civic Life, Tufts University

**Dr William Christopher Stewart**

Chief Grants Officer, Templeton Religion Trust

**Ruth W. Messinger**

Global Ambassador, American Jewish World Service, Trustee, Aegis Trust

Video greetings from

**President Bill Clinton**

Founder and Chairman of the Board, Clinton Foundation

“We have worked on preserving the memory of this Genocide through the archive work that has been crucial. This could not have been possible without the hard work of Aegis Trust, which has played an important role in memory preservation and peace building as well.

The Isoko Peace Institute reflects the government’s unending efforts of building peace and sharing our experience with the world.

As Rwandans, we are proud to be the ground upon which this Institute is built on.”

Dr Jean-Damascène Bizimana  
Rwanda Minister of National Unity and Civic Engagement



“Visitors to Rwanda today, aside from the many poignant genocide memorials, will see little evidence of the unimaginable violence that took place 30 years ago. Instead, they’ll find a vibrant, stable country with a growing economy that’s an innovative engine for the region and beyond. This progress would not have been possible without the peace, education and trauma healing work.”

H.E President Bill Clinton



works to create conversations, safe spaces and mechanisms that we can all learn from as we work together to create long lasting peace.”

Alice Wairimu Nderitu, The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide



“As the world is constructed through people’s minds we need to reach the minds of people in order to achieve sustainable peace.”

Stefania Giannini  
UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Education



# DAY ONE

## Announcement of the Isōko Peace Institute



**“Isōko Peace Institute is all about peace in practice. This is not a Rwandan organization taking a message to the world. This is a global organization based in Rwanda, enabling others to learn what it means to practice peace on a day-to-day basis and to take that knowledge back to their own countries, organizations, and their own conflicts.”**

Stephen D. Smith PhD  
Co-Founder Aegis Trust

**“The Kigali Genocide Memorial addresses a crucial question: How did hatred evolve and culminate in Genocide? Through our exhibition, young generations learn from history. Furthermore, they engage with our Peace Education programs, which make them aware of what happened and how it happened, ensuring they cannot be manipulated as the youth were in 1994. Today, it is a privilege to see that Peace Education has been adopted into Rwanda’s national curriculum, and it continues to grow.”**

Freddy Mutanguha  
CEO, Aegis Trust, and the Kigali Genocide Memorial

## Peace Education at Aegis Trust

**“Today the education system has changed, the teaching methodology is now competence-based allowing critical thinking and creativity to ensure that students are at the center of their own learning, and Aegis Trust has been part of this as their peace education has been incorporated in the national curriculum.”**

Hon. Claudette Irere  
Minister of State for Education, Rwanda



## The Rweru Reconciliation Village

Rweru Reconciliation Village, an intentional community shared by perpetrators and survivors of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.



**“I was one of those who killed Maria’s husband and children, and it weighed heavily on me. Through the ‘Prisoners’ Fellowship’ program, I was encouraged to seek forgiveness from survivors. After my release, I approached Maria, and though it was not easy, she welcomed me into her home and even asked her daughter to hear me out. In the end, she forgave me, and I sought forgiveness.”**

Philbert Ntezirizaza  
former perpetrator of the Genocide against the Tutsi in 1994



# DAY TWO

## Topics of conversations covered:

- World Report: Genocide Prevention in our Time
- Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: The Role of Accountability in Preventing Genocide
- The Health of Our Nations after Genocide, Violence and Mass Atrocities
- What We Leave Our Children: Next Generation Challenges and Responses
- Forgiveness and Reconciliation: The Path Forward
- Confronting the Past – Inspiring Change Makers Leaders in Africa and Asia
- Forgiveness and Peacebuilding: Researcher-Practitioner Partnerships and Scaling Lessons Learned from Rwanda to the World
- Integrity and Dignity: The Ethics of Restorative Narratives
- The Power of Testimony in Healing and Peacebuilding
- Scaling Impact: Lessons from Million Peacemakers

**“I am still grieving, I still have moments when I am alone and let thoughts out, I miss them, but I do not have anger, I really know how anger feels like, I was there. When we hold other people, we really do not major the consequences, but every evil action has its consequences.”**

Immaculée Ilibagiza  
Genocide survivor, Inspirational Speaker, and Writer



**“We’re going to have to find new ways of working in a more holistic manner of engaging to try to make sure that future generations do not experience what the Rwandan society has experienced.”**

Naomi Kikoler  
Director, Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

**“We know that the lack of accountability for past crimes provided fertile ground for current violence, & that we urgently need to investigate ongoing violations & abuses and pursue accountability to protect those at risk & provide justice for victims & survivors.”**

Wairimu Nderitu  
The United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide



**“Sometimes we get the criticism that our work is preventing reconciliation from taking place. Well, justice alone cannot achieve reconciliation. Reconciliation**

**needs to come from within a society by the communities affected, victims and perpetrators.”**

Dr. Serge Brammertz  
United Nations Under Secretary General; Chief Prosecutor- International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals





**“The power of storytelling: “When the stories come to us as artists, we receive them as gifts, and we are always indebted to give them back as gifts. And when we do that, the journey of healing always keeps going.”**

Hope Azeda  
Founder of Mashirika Performing Arts and Media Company



**“We learnt resilience, the desire to keep going even after a tragedy, and that peace is possible even when everything is destroyed. Personal, social, and country development is possible.”**

Alain Lazaret  
Aegis Trust Representative in Central Africa Republic



# DAY THREE

- Live Song Writer Podcast: Freddy Mutanguha, Hope Azeda, and Peace Jolis
- The Visual Arts as a Way toward Peace and Justice
- Philanthropy, Impact Investing, and Social Justice
- Awards Ceremony
- Faith Communities and Forgiveness: Developing and Living Our Values
- Memorial Museums in Advancing Peace, Reconciliation, and Justice

**“For us to understand better the significance of human dignity, we must not talk about human rights in just words. We must do so with our hearts and put them into practice. That is what will realize this dream of having a place where all men and women feel respected..”**

**“One of the beautiful things the world can learn from Rwanda is how context matters. Rwandans understood their roots, they drew from those cultural roots to create healing, forgiveness, ... they used what they had so beautifully.”**

Jacqueline Asimwe  
Author, and CEO at CivSource Africa.





# DAY THREE



“Forgiveness is one of the 18 virtues that Sir John Templeton, our founder, listed in his charter as worthy of study and scientific exploration. These include questions about what happens to our bodies and minds, our sense of belonging, and our meaning and purpose when we forgive. That’s why the Templeton World Charity Foundation is so deeply invested in the science of forgiveness.”

Karen Sommer Shalett





**“I really, really appreciate Aegis Trust for the long term vision. The Isōko Peace Institute will define ideas, shape new thinking, bring forward that new generation.”**



Alice Wairimu Nderitu  
UN Special Advisor on Genocide Prevention

## Dear Friends and Supporters,



I am honored to introduce to you the Isōko Peace Institute – born from recognition that if peace can be built after the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, then it truly can be achieved anywhere. The Institute will take the transformative peace education model developed by the Aegis Trust at the Kigali Genocide Memorial – which is now built into Rwanda’s national curriculum – and share it with a deeply divided world where changemakers in communities at risk of identity-based violence are desperate for tools and solutions which can help them restore cohesion before it’s too late.

Located in Bugesera, a district that bore witness to some of the darkest moments of Rwanda’s recent past, the Isōko Peace Institute will stand as a symbol of transformation and renewal. It will serve as a global hub for peace practitioners, researchers and community leaders to come together, learn from Rwanda’s journey, and develop innovative approaches to conflict resolution and sustainable peace.

In this special report we would like to share with you key thoughts, words and images from a visit to the site where the Isōko Peace Institute will be built. Organised on 25 July 2024, the day before we publicly launched the Institute in the ‘Listening and Leading’ conference at the Kigali Genocide Memorial, speakers addressing friends of Aegis who took part in this event included Richard Mutabazi, the Mayor of Bugesera District, and Alice Wairimu Nderitu, the UN Special Advisor on Genocide Prevention.

Through the Isōko Peace Institute, we aim to inspire and equip a new generation of peacebuilders, turning the lessons of our history into a force for positive change worldwide. I invite you to join us in this crucial endeavor. Together, we can create a legacy of peace that will resonate far beyond our borders and touch countless lives for generations to come.

Thank you.

Freddy Mutanguha, CEO Aegis Trust







**“We as a district are committed to work together to make this project successful. We can’t wait to see it alive.”**

Richard Mutabazi  
Mayor of Bugesera District

## Mayor of Bugesera welcomes platform for dialogue

Welcoming distinguished guests and peacebuilding partners to the site planned for the Isoko Peace Institute on the shore of Lake Rumira, where it will stand just 15 minutes’ drive from Rwanda’s new international airport, Mayor of Bugesera Richard Mutabazi expressed gratitude for their visit.

Highlighting Bugesera’s unique and tragic history in Rwanda, Mutabazi noted its severe suffering during the Genocide against the Tutsi due to discriminatory governance. The mayor recounted how Tutsi were deported to Bugesera, separating them from their families, siblings, parents and belongings. He described how in the early 1980s, another group was brought to the district’s borders to create “a center for security, a security belt that eventually came to be a strong barrier to Tutsis who would attempt to flee during the genocide.” The mayor also explained that Bugesera was “where testing of the killing machinery took place in early 90s, where the genocidal government wanted to know how many Tutsi they could kill a day.”

He expressed gratitude to UNESCO for registering the Nyamata Genocide Memorial as a World Heritage site in 2023 “to provide dignity to the beautiful souls and lives that we lost in 1994.” The mayor proudly noted that Bugesera is now home to “the first unity

and reconciliation villages, agglomerations where the community from diverse backgrounds ... genocide survivors, perpetrators, returnees ... live together in harmony.” He acknowledged the journey from initial struggles to eventual reconciliation, crediting “good politics of uniting people, reconciliative justice, the strong choice that Rwandans made to stay together.”

The mayor welcomed the establishment of the Isoko Peace Institute in Bugesera, viewing it as “a platform for dialogue, reconciliation and peace building in the community and across the world.” He expressed gratitude to Aegis Trust and its partners for considering Bugesera as an investment destination and pledged the district’s commitment to the project’s success, stating, “We can’t wait to see it alive.”

In closing, the Mayor shared a personal connection, recalling his work with Dr James Smith and the Aegis Trust twenty years ago. “I got the privilege to work with him while he was establishing the Kigali Genocide Memorial,” Mutabazi said. “I was still at college, but he gave me a chance to participate in the translation of thousands of testimonies.” He concluded, “Today we meet again under different hats, but with the same mission.”





# Aegis Founder pays tribute to Rwandan visionary



young,” he said. “I’m sure she’s looking down at us today, fulfilling the dream that she had to build peace, to build reconciliation, to think about forgiveness, to bring economic prosperity.”



**“Aloisia Inyumba had an incredible vision ... I’m sure she’s looking down at us today fulfilling the dream she had to build peace, to build reconciliation, to bring economic prosperity.”**

Opening with words of appreciation to Mayor Mutabazi and to the UN Special Advisor on Genocide Prevention, Aegis Founder Dr James Smith went on to pay tribute to Aloisia Inyumba, a pioneer of unity and reconciliation in Rwanda and “a dear friend who was guiding Aegis Trust in its very early days”. Inyumba was then serving as the first Executive Secretary of the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission, and as Mayor of Bugesera (then known as Kigali Ngali).

Dr Smith described her as “a visionary woman” who believed strongly in the need for an institution and memorial in Bugesera “not only to remember the genocide, but to bring people together, to support people economically and to bring healing to their lives.” She had, he said, been “way ahead of her time”. In the event, in 2003 Aegis was persuaded by the Mayor of Kigali and the government to develop the Kigali Genocide Memorial.

Aged just 47, Inyumba died of cancer in 2012. Reflecting on plans for the Isoko Peace Institute, Smith felt that her vision was finally being realized. “I couldn’t help but constantly be reminded about Aloisia Inyumba, who sadly passed away far too

# Aegis CEO outlines vision for Isoko Peace Institute



Thanking the Mayor, the UN Special Advisor on Genocide Prevention and all present for their support, the Aegis Trust’s CEO Freddy Mutanguha outlined the vision for the Isoko Peace Institute, describing the facilities planned for the ten-acre site – the “land of the future” where those assembled were now sitting.

He outlined three main components: a peacebuilding center, a trauma healing center, and accommodation facilities. The peacebuilding center will house learning and conference facilities, a world-class permanent exhibition, and archives. Catering to students and professionals engaged in various training programs, it will also be home to the Situation Room, where researchers, policy makers, mediators and communicators come together to find preventative solutions in situations of current or potential largescale identity-based violence.

The trauma healing center, named the ‘Marina’ after Aegis Trust co-founder Marina Smith, is designed as a retreat for peace practitioners.





Mutanguha explained its purpose: “We want people on the front line of peacebuilding to find a place to decompress and re-energize.” He emphasized the importance of protecting the mental health of people working in genocide memorials and those building peace in very challenging environments.

Mutanguha also described plans for accommodation facilities, including about 50 rooms of various

categories, to house trainees and visitors. Accommodation will be one part of the social enterprise activities set to form an integral component of the Institute’s mission. Contributing to financial sustainability while promoting sustainable livelihoods and community engagement, social enterprise aligns with the broader goal of building resilience against conflict.

Asked by Naomi Kikoler, Director of the Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide, about examples of the kind of work the Isoko Peace Institute would do, Freddy Mutanguha shared an example from the Aegis Trust’s work in the Central African Republic. He recounted how Aegis brought faith leaders and a militia spokesperson to Rwanda, exposing them to the experience of communities in Rwanda’s reconciliation villages. This led to a

transformative change, with the former militia spokesperson declaring himself a “bishop of peace” upon his return, since when he has never gone back to a militia movement. Mutanguha concluded by emphasizing the power of such experiences: “We will be able, with the Isoko Peace Institute, to bring more people like that here to get inspired with insight and ideas on how they can build peace and reconciliation in their own communities.”

# “Help us shape the Isoko Peace Institute. We live in co-creation; we want to create this together, and I invite everyone to be part of this journey.”

Freddy Mutanguha, CEO Aegis Trust







**“When you hear  
a drum, you will  
feel it in your  
heartbeat.  
There was a time  
people could not  
dance in this  
country, could  
not sing in this  
country.  
I thank the  
dancers especially  
for the lessons  
they’ve taught us  
about Rwanda.”**

Alice Wairimu Nderitu  
UN Special Advisor on Genocide Prevention







# UN Special Advisor sees opportunity to reimagine peacebuilding

Alice Wairimu Nderitu, the UN Special Advisor on Genocide Prevention, began by expressing gratitude to the Aegis Trust, the mayor of Bugesera and the local community for their warm welcome. She highlighted the timeliness of the Isōko Peace Institute, linking it to her work in prevention of genocide and her background in human rights and peacebuilding.

Nderitu emphasized the need to reimagine peacebuilding in the context of atrocity crimes and modern warfare, stating, “We’ve really been thinking, what do you do when what you are doing is not sufficient, when peacebuilding is not sufficient, when the context you’re working in is a context that is clearly full of risk factors for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity?” She shared her hope that by the time the institute’s buildings are completed, there will already be an established online community and curriculum ready to be implemented.

The Special Advisor recounted her experience bringing 230 Kenyan teachers to Rwanda after Kenya’s post-election violence in 2007-2008, emphasizing the impact of visiting genocide memorials, particularly Nyamata. Inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 2023, Nyamata is one of two major genocide memorial sites situated in Bugesera, along with Ntarama.

Nderitu then announced the naming of a new action plan for media and journalists to counter hate speech

and prevent incitement to genocide. After much deliberation, she had her team had decided to call it ‘The Nyamata Plan of Action’. “We want people to ask us why Nyamata. And then we explain”, she said, highlighting the significance of this name and connecting it to the power of media during the genocide when radio broadcasts directed people to seek safety in places like Nyamata.

In closing, Nderitu expressed her appreciation for Aegis Trust’s vision and the work of Dr. James Smith and Freddy Mutanguha. She described Mutanguha’s book, ‘Kigali Genocide Memorial: The Inside Story’, as “one of the most important books I’ve ever read.” She looked forward to the Isōko Peace Institute’s future, saying, “I really, really appreciate Aegis Trust for the long term vision. The Isōko Peace Institute will define ideas, shape new thinking, bring forward that new generation.”



**“The Isōko Peace Institute provides us with that space to begin reimagining afresh, what does peacebuilding look like in the context of not only atrocity crimes, but also new ways of waging war?”**

Alice Wairimu Nderitu  
UN Special Advisor on Genocide Prevention



# Our vision: The Isōko Peace Institute

The Kigali Genocide Memorial is a home for survivors of the Genocide against the Tutsi, a place of remembrance, a place to honour the victims and tell their stories.

International peace building needs a new home outside of the Kigali Genocide Memorial, a place where we can reach more people with global impact.

The Isōko Peace Institute will build on Aegis' experience in peace education in Rwanda and the region. It will be a place for peace practitioners, where the Aegis Trust:

- Teaches the practice of prevention.
- Develops diagnostic tools.
- Enables changemakers to meet.
- Demonstrates the power of forgiveness.
- Illustrates case studies of reconciliation.
- Creates partnerships for scale.
- Enhances networks and resources.



The Isōko Peace Institute will be developed in Bugesera, Rwanda, minutes from the new international airport. It will be a launchpad to export peace from Rwanda to the World.

## The Isōko Peace Institute: core elements



World class exhibition: this will show how the Holocaust and the Genocide against the Tutsi shared roots in white supremacy and colonial racism, how Rwanda rose from the ashes, and how the model for peace education developed at the Kigali Genocide Memorial is relevant far beyond Rwanda's borders.



Training centre: this will be a global centre of excellence in training to build communities resilient to pressures that lead to violence, including stresses resulting from climate change. It will encourage partnerships and research programmes to improve effectiveness of peace education. Aegis' changemaker programme, already benefitting leaders from communities in crisis, will be at the core of its work.



Trauma healing centre: the Sanctuary will be a retreat for peacebuilders on the front line of prevention practice; a place of contemplation and restoration accessed by invitation only. Designed for whole body and mind restoration, it will provide intensive short term programmes and long term anti-burnout support.



Situation room: at the heart of the Institute, this will be used by the Aegis Trust's international policy and campaigns team to convene survivors, community representatives, researchers, campaigners and policy makers to develop strategic advocacy and campaigns for prevention, mitigation and ending of large-scale identity-based violence wherever it is a high risk or already happening around the World.



