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4300 Marsh Ridge Road • Suite 114 • Carrollton, TX 75010
972.267.1111 • 972.267.3535 (fax) • www.alarryross.com

FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Larry Ross 972-267-1111
Whitney Kelley 972-267-1111
whitney@alarryross.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KAY WARREN CHALLENGES RWANDAN WOMEN ABOUT RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS PRIOR TO 14TH NATIONAL WEEK OF MOURNING FOR GENOCIDE: Wife of Pastor Rick Warren Stresses Rwanda is Becoming Known not for Genocide, but for Teaching the World about Reconciliation

KIGALI, RWANDA, April 6 – On the weekend before the 14th National Week of Mourning for the 1994 Genocide, to be commemorated beginning Monday, April 7, Kay Warren addressed a group of several hundred women at the Jali Club in Kigali on the topic, “Overflowing Grace,” during which she spoke personally and candidly about the biblical principal that the only reconciliation that will last starts with forgiveness.

“Our main purpose in meeting is to seek the Lord and know His purposes for our lives at this time; we in a land of much suffering want to hear from a woman who has also known suffering,” moderator Christine Baingana said before introducing Mrs. Warren.

“These are days of mourning and reflection, but also days of hope and healing,” Mrs. Warren said. “Rwanda is becoming known – not just for genocide, but for what you are teaching the world about reconciliation. But true reconciliation is not possible without forgiveness.”

Mrs. Warren used the New Testament passage found in Matthew 18 about the unforgiving servant, emphasizing that we are forgiven, so that we can forgive. “I believe in this story that Jesus is calling us to forgiveness, saying, ‘It is time to let it go,’” she said.

“It is time for us to understand this concept, that nothing we do to each other is as awful as what we have done to God,” Mrs. Warren continued. “We need to take our bitterness and the things that have wounded us to Jesus and nail them to His Cross. The good news is that God gives us many chances to forgive each other, to share the grace that has been given to us back to our fellow human beings.

“My prayer for every woman in this place is that you would feel and experience forgiveness from God, and that out of grateful hearts for His mercy toward us, we would all find ways to release others who have been wounded.”

Preceding Mrs. Warren’s keynote address were several powerful testimonies from women who had experienced premature death of family members, humiliation and abuse.

“Many of you have seen and suffered the death of loved ones in the genocide, as have I and my family about the same time,” said Susan Hillis, a researcher from the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta who was visiting Rwanda to provide orphan and widow care. “While on a family bike ride in our neighborhood, our then 10-year-old boy was struck by a car and killed. I didn’t think I would ever recover, but God is an expert in turning sorrow into joy.

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“Even though we don’t know each other, I see the joy on your faces and know the Lord has done for you what he did for me,” Mrs. Hillis continued. “I have a strong sense that your country is going to become as famous for its light as it was previously for its darkness.”

Mrs. Hillis then explained that out of the death of her son, she and her husband have adopted eight other orphan children as their own, and challenged other women to do likewise. “You have 822,000 orphans in your country, which is one out of every three children. God wants to make disciples of all nations, and the only way to do that is to include the orphans.”

Chantel, a Rwandan woman, then shared her story, vividly describing her horrific suffering during the 1994 genocide, after her entire family – except for her and her sister – was among the first shot and burned after the president’s plane was shot down near their home. A soldier and a watchman subsequently kept her captive in a nearby house and repeatedly raped her, from which she eventually contracted a sexually transmitted disease.

Her desire for revenge was so strong that she gave false testimony in court against one of her neighbors, lying that he had killed another person on their block. But eventually she couldn’t deal with her guilt, and turned back to her faith.

“I could see how Satan used the Hutus for evil, but also he used Tutsis in revenge,” she said. “I asked God what He wanted, and began to change. As I prayed, I felt a peace in my heart that enabled me to tell the truth in a follow-up trial and begin to pray for the salvation of that man and his children.”

Later, she had to bring herself to forgive the genocider who killed and burned her parents, as she confronted him in the genocide prison. “As I stared into the face of that person, I had to check my heart, and when I found I only had love for him it scared me. But my heart is now filled with joy, and that is much better than living with pain.”

Mrs. Warren and her husband, Rick, pastor of Saddleback Church in California, have been in Rwanda for more than one week, meeting with government, business and church leaders and inspecting the progress on their massive Western Rwanda HIV/AIDS Healthcare Initiative Project. On Monday, April 7, Dr. Warren will depart Kigali for Nairobi, Kenya, to meet with leaders from all three sectors in the wake of the recent violence following national elections.