

First Lady Jeannette Kagame's
Remarks during the Inauguration and Graduation Ceremony
held at
Maranyundo Girls School
Bugesera
4th November 2017

Honourable Ministers,

Government officials and Security organs representatives,

Headmistress of Maranyundo Girls School,

Distinguished Friends from Maranyundo Initiative,

Esteemed Parents, Staff, Teachers and Partners

Dear Students of Maranyundo Girls School,

Good Afternoon.

It is heart-warming to see all of you gathered here today to celebrate our young graduates, and inaugurate the new educational facilities, symbolizing Maranyundo Girls School's commitment to pushing the boundaries of knowledge and learning for its students.

But first things first. This, is a momentous event for many of you, young ladies. So allow me to take a moment to acknowledge your accomplishments, and offer hearty congratulatory wishes to the 60 girls graduating from O' Level, and the 57 graduating from A' Level.

Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,

How far has Maranyundo School come! Some of you may remember the official opening of this school in 2008, when a group of committed individuals, from Rwanda and beyond, were pulling ideas and resources together, in the hopes of bringing to life our vision for a successful and sustainable institution, capable of continuously delivering the kind of achievements seen in the past few years.

Others may also have flashbacks to 2014 and the dream to expand the school's infrastructure to accommodate A' Level students, a dream soon translated into a 40 Million Rwandan francs fundraiser held by parents, which turned into a beautiful reality.

And today, in keeping with the same vision to offer the best learning platform to the girls, thanks to concerted efforts of parents, diverse sponsors and the Maranyundo Initiative, this school is now revealing its newest 'Knowledge Centre'.

Distinguished audience,

Rwanda is among a number of countries that have given due importance to education. That is because we profoundly understand its power to build an edified nation, one in which human beings are at the heart of policies, and where the right settings will allow individuals to thrive, and lead the country towards higher horizons.

As a result, not only do we focus on making education accessible to all in primary and secondary school, but we also emphasize the value of learning about a range of subjects, from Social Studies to STEM.

As a matter of fact, you may already know that our country has put at the forefront of its priorities, efforts to promote gender equality across all fields. As such, our commitment to advocate for girls' education, has over the years led to a steady growth in the enrolment of girls and women in educational institutions.

At the same time, as mentioned earlier, we concentrated on improving the presence of girls in the STEM fields. So last year's

figure of forty-one thousand five hundred and forty-three girls (41,543) enrolled in STEM-focused secondary schools was invigorating, though we continue to monitor its steady increase, since it is in the government's plan to triple the number of girls pursuing TVET (Technical & Vocational Education & Training), most importantly in the field of STEM, by the year 2020.

Distinguished Guests,

I must say that with our shared philosophy on the importance of girls' education, I am honoured to see that the partnership between Maranyundo Girls School and my Foundation, Imbuto Foundation, has been able to empower several girls, through opportunities to pursue a well-rounded education.

To my great delight, we have had quite a number of girls broaden their path to success, and rewarded as the Best Performing Girls (or BPGs) while they attended Maranyundo Girls School. In the last few years for example, out of the 4,400 girls rewarded nationally, we have

had up to 40 Best Performing Girls in this school, in addition to another 20 students who received scholarships for Maranyundo School, under Imbuto's 'Edified Generation' programme.

Babyeyi,

Mwe mwagize amahirwe yo kurerera muri iri shuli, mumfashe dushimire Umuryango w'Abenebikira badufashije kurerera u Rwanda, uyu muni ishuli rikaba ryatumurikiye imfura zaryo!

Hashize imyaka irindwi umuryango w'Abenebikira weguriwe rino shuli. Mu nshingano bihaye zo guteza imbere uburezi n'uburere bw'umwana w'umukobwa, bamaze kugera kuri byinshi harimo n'inyubako twamurikiye uyu muni.

Nubwo dufite byinshi twishimira mu iterambere ry'uburezi, hari aho ugisanga imyumvire iri hasi, aho abana bata ishuli batarangije n'amashuli abanza. Ibi birababaje ariko bitume twibaza icyo dukwiye gukora nk'ababyeyi ndetse nk'abarezi.

Babyeyi, kwigisha abana bacu ni wo murage nyawo dukwiye kubasigira, ntibikwiye ko bava mu ishuli batarangije byibura amashuri yisumbuye.

Munyemerere, twongere twihe intego yo gukundisha abana ishuri, tubibutse ko kwiga aribyo bizabafasha guhangana n'umuvuduko w'iyi si dutuye, ndetse bikabaha ububasha bwo gutegura ejo heza hazaza no kuba ababyeyi beza, bazarerera u Rwanda.

Distinguished friends from Maranyundo Initiative,

Our past has taught us many lessons about the power of good friendships, in times of adversity, and in times of joy.

We are truly grateful for the interest you have shown in our country, and your continued investment, over the years, for the wellbeing of our people.

Your dedication and unrelenting support towards the balanced education provided at Maranyundo Girls School, is laying out a

sound foundation on which our girls will stand to build a stronger future, for themselves, and our global communities at large.

You have been there since the beginning, and have helped create what we are celebrating here today. Indeed, your special care towards our girls will forever be at the heart of this school, and our communities.

Thank you for your compassion and your commitment.

Dear Graduates,

As you begin a new stage in your lives, always look back with gratitude but also inspiration, to this school and its staff, to your classmates and the many lessons you were provided to refine your academic growth. And all the while, be ready to take part in our nation's quest for peace, stability and socio-economic success.

I feel great joy and pride when I look at you today; thinking about the boundless opportunities that lie ahead of you. Do not worry, the

dedication and resilience you had to show at different times in this journey at Maranyundo School, will greatly serve you as you now set your sights on materializing your goals and dreams.

It is my hope, that the strong ties that make this school what it is; that the Maranyundo spirit of 'togetherness' as sister Marie Juvenale said; that has given you a sense of belonging, a 'sisterhood' that transcends time and space; will keep you grounded and connected to one another and to those future students who will follow in your footsteps.

Distinguished Graduating Class of 2017,

I ask you to never cease seeking greater accomplishments, be they in academia, in the social, or the professional world.

Be the footsteps that guide your sisters, the footsteps that have helped push this school to its ranking as one of the top best girls' schools in the country.

It is your responsibility to keep this flame, this drive, this hunger for high academic performance, alive.

And my hope is that years from now, you will remember these words:

- Be bold in the choices you make.
- Do not be afraid of making mistakes, for often times, they teach us great lessons about ourselves.
- Most importantly, go forth with your lives, not afraid of the greatness you are capable of reaching.

And now, as I conclude my remarks, I would like you to take a minute to look at the proud faces surrounding you today; your parents, the teachers, your peers, and friends of Maranyundo, who came from near and far to be with you on this special day. In many ways, these people are the reason why you are here today, celebrating a milestone in your lives.

Remember as well, that education holds the power to change the world, and this is even more applicable to you; because of the blessings of a solid education and a caring heart nurtured by the Benebikira Sisters.

I urge you to continue sharpening these tools you have been given, so you can use them for the benefit of this global village that we live in.

I wish you all the best in your future endeavours and again, congratulations to you all!

I thank you for your kind attention.