

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's Remarks at  
the UNITAID – CHAI – IMBUTO joint side  
event**

***“Effective Partnership for Cervical Cancer Prevention”,***

**in the Margins of ICASA 2019**

Tuesday, 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2019

Kigali, Rwanda

**Excellencies Dear Sisters; Mes Chères Sœurs,**

**Excellence Hinda Deby Itno, Première Dame de la  
République du Tchad,**

**Excellence Aïssata Issoufou Mahamadou, Première  
Dame de la République du Niger,**

**Excellency Neo Jane Masisi, First Lady of the  
Republic of Botswana,**

**Madame Marisol Touraine, Présidente de l'Unitaid**

**Honourable Ministers and Government Officials,**

**Distinguished partners and panelists,**

**Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,**

**Good morning.**

As I begin, allow me to express my gratitude at seeing all of you gathered here today, for this high-level discussion on ***“Effective Partnership for Cervical Cancer Prevention”***, held in the margins of the 20<sup>th</sup> ICASA.

This highly preventable disease, which touches on a sensitive aspect of women's health, is one that surely deserves more attention from the general public, as it has been the subject of misguided views, that turned out to be detrimental to the early

detection, and prevention of this cancer.

Today's event therefore affords us another opportunity to reflect on our shared responsibilities – being civil society, public or private sectors – to invest in evidence-based guidelines supported by technical know-how, in designing interventions, aimed at eliminating some of the biggest threats, affecting our sustainable development.

Here, I would like to commend the partnership spearheaded by the Government of Rwanda, UNITAID, and the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), for the new cervical cancer programme, which will focus on screening and treating adult women living with HIV/AIDS. This new cancer prevention programme will screen over 70,000 women aged 30-49, using HPV-DNA testing, as well as visual inspection with acetic acid; while treating cervical precancerous lesions with thermo ablation devices.

Through my foundation, Imbuto, the needed community awareness and mobilization efforts, will be conducted in the 5 districts of the pilot phase, scheduled to run for the next two years and a half.

## **Honourable guests,**

According to World Health Organization (WHO), cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women worldwide. In Africa, it ranks the second, and it is far “deadlier than elsewhere, despite being a preventable disease”.

Today, Rwanda is among high burden cervical cancer countries, with cervical cancer as the most frequent cancer in adults, and an incidence rate of 31.9/100,000 women (1304 new cases) and a mortality rate of 24.1/100,000 (921 deaths), as observed by WHO in 2018.

Consequently, we are increasingly strengthening our health systems; availing the necessary equipment for diagnosis and treatment in over 50% of our community level health centers, and tertiary hospitals across the country; building the capacity of healthcare providers—including home-based care practitioners and specialized training for university students; while educating Rwandans, through awareness raising campaigns.

Moreover, through our community health insurance scheme, or *mutuelle de santé*, women can be screened for cervical cancer, during their annual checkup.

And last but not least, our desire and commitment to prevent further cases of cervical cancer, also led us to our 2011 nationwide vaccination plan. Thanks to collective efforts of different partners (many of whom are with us today), and active involvement of the community, more than 93% of girls from the age of 12, were vaccinated against the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

**Distinguished guests,**

It is very essential to protect these efforts, and ensure proper early screening and treatment services are accessible to our population. This will require all of us, in our different capacities, to jointly develop financing mechanisms, to leverage technologies that will strengthen our health systems, and required infrastructure.

**Honourable ladies and gentlemen,**

Women living with HIV are up to 10 times more likely to develop cervical cancer, making cervical cancer a major threat to the health of women living with HIV.

My organization, Imbuto Foundation, has been engaged in developing, and implementing, pioneer initiatives in health, offering a comprehensive package of services to families affected by HIV; and promoting the rights of our young people, to be informed and access quality prevention and treatment services.

With these efforts, combined with community education and social mobilization efforts, we are working towards addressing the existing gap in reaching adult women, and eliminating any more deaths, caused by cervical cancer.

**Distingués invités,**

Pour conclure, permettez-moi de réitérer que nos sociétés se doivent d'analyser les causes sous-jacentes de ce type de cancer.

Certes, celles-ci sont génétiques et environnementales, mais nous devons aussi reconnaître que les cas de cancers qui sont détectés à un stade avancé, résultent d'un manque d'informations suffisantes, et/ou d'accès aux méthodes de prévention existantes, ainsi qu'à des inégalités basées sur le genre, des patientes qui en souffrent.

Nous ne le répèterons jamais assez, l'élimination du cancer du col de l'utérus est possible.

Cependant il requiert des partenariats plus forts, et au niveau mondial, comme l'objet de cet événement le suggère.

Je fais donc appel à vous, présents aujourd'hui, afin de continuer à mobiliser des ressources pour le développement du capital humain, et la mise en place de systèmes infailibles, en vue d'atteindre et maintenir nos objectifs.

Je vous remercie de votre aimable attention.