

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's Remarks
At the High-Level Panel
"Women of Impact: Global Leaders Creating Positive
Change"
During the International Conference on Family Planning
(ICFP).**

Kigali, 13 November 2018

**Ma chère sœur la Première Dame d’Haïti,
Your Royal Highness Princess Sarah Zeid of Jordan,
Excellency Toyin Saraki, Founder of the Wellbeing
Foundation,
Distinguished Chair of the ICFP International Steering
Committee,
Senior Representatives of the Bill & Melinda Gates
Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at
the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public
Health;
Senior Representatives of Government and Civil Society;
Distinguished FP 2020 reference group members;
Valued Partners;
Youth delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good Morning.

Thank you once again for the high honour of addressing this distinguished audience, and the eminent panel to whom the theme **“Women of Impact”** is testimony to their daily walk. They are indeed **“Global Leaders Creating Positive Change”** for the wellbeing of their communities.

We are heartened that you have chosen Rwanda, to host the **International Conference on Family Planning**, which stands to enrich all our efforts, in promoting quality access to family planning, and sexual reproductive health services.

Our path to delivering the much-needed, and sustainable change, in our communities, has been made more efficient, thanks to the work of the United Nations, together with our Governments. Consequently, we are able to focus our energies, toward the achievement of all the SDGs, with Goal 5 for gender equality and empowerment, at the epicentre of this work. Indeed, this is in tandem with and response to Rwanda's National Strategy for Transformation.

Honourable Guests,

Since time immemorial, women have held roles that are vital, yet that have often been taken for granted, in child-bearing, nurturing, educating, feeding and raising the world. Every so often, this comes with a heavy cost to their health, and wellbeing.

It is therefore logical that when provided with a conducive environment, and truly empowered to voice their opinions, they thrive. We have seen women morph into strong, insightful and intuitive key players, able to effectively impact positive, and lasting change around them.

It behoves us, therefore, to use this and any powerful platform, to encourage women's efforts in order to promote and avail the life-altering, liberating family planning, and sexual reproductive health services.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are often called upon to become the face of diverse causes, because the public sees in us, our abilities to multitask. In one stroke, we become the Advocate; the Catalyst; Facilitator; Convener; Coordinator; Applauder of others in their roles, as we strive to hold ourselves and those around us, accountable for the promises and actions we make.

This is what women's leadership is about. We catalyze positive change, we lead without imposing. We face challenges head on as 'natural leaders', because our orientation from childhood is one of caregiving and oversight.

Esteemed delegates,

If women leaders are indeed often recognized for leading with passion and purpose, for embodying change, while staying authentic to their cause, imagine what happens in their absence?

Imagine what happens when women leaders are not seated at the table, where decisions concerning entire communities are being made. Communities, with whom they are inherently linked; communities they understand only too well.

Indeed, let us all take a moment to imagine what would fill that void.

Allow me to share with you, two specific mechanisms that illustrate the development imprint left, when principles of gender equality, inform and permeate every area in society.

My first example borrows from our national **Gender Monitoring Office** (or GMO), whose mission is to ‘effectively monitor gender mainstreaming and the fight against Gender-Based Violence; and all forms of injustice in public, private, civil society and religious institutions for the achievement of gender equality in Rwanda’.

The second example I would like to share with you, comes from the American **2020 Women on Boards** organization, which commits to ‘increase the percentage of women on U.S. company boards to 20% or greater, by the year 2020’. In fact, the **2020 Women on Boards** is guided by the following principles¹, which speak volumes for the need to encourage

¹ <https://www.2020wob.com/about/guiding-principles>.

more women, to embrace their leadership capabilities. These principles affirm the following:

- “We are inclusive.
- We are passionate.
- We are focused.
- We are change agents who do not promote “business as usual.”
- We are advocates.
- We are respectful.
- We are urgent in our activities.
- We are educators.
- We are ethical.
- We are believers. Together we can make it happen!”

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is where our ‘women of impact’ come in. This is where you and I come in. Our collective knowledge, skill sets, vast and varied experiences, will help us innovate, challenge norms and standards that do not promote equality, and always find the best possible solutions, which truly ensure that “no one is left behind”.

I hope that the esteemed panel, as well as the audience, will offer candid contributions that will dare the uncharted path – go to places we have not been in this discussion – and which

I truly believe will bring us closer, to solving our common and individual challenges, related to family planning and sexual reproductive health.

Let us all walk away from this session satisfied that we have left no stone unturned, and that our ideas will solidly contribute to strengthening current interventions, so that we are indeed “**Women of Impact: Global Leaders Creating the most Positive of Changes**”.

Thank you indeed for your kind attention.