

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's Remarks**  
**At the**  
**Special Pre-Conference Luncheon**  
**of the**  
**International Conference on Family Planning**  
**(ICFP) "Investing for a lifetime of returns".**

**Kigali, 12 November 2018**

**Ma chère sœur, la Première Dame d'Haïti;**

**Honourable ED of UNFPA and United Nations  
Under-Secretary General, Dr. Natalia Kanem;**

**Honourable Ministers;**

**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;**

**Esteemed Speakers;**

**Youth Delegates;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

**Good afternoon.**

Allow me to thank the organizers, for bringing the 5<sup>th</sup>  
International Conference on Family Planning to our

country, and for the opportunity to offer my remarks at this special luncheon.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to Rwanda, to all participants. I do hope your time among us will be one of stimulating and fruitful discussions; and that you will have enough time on your hands to discover our Rwandan culture, art, cuisine and especially the people, with whom you will hopefully foster closer friendships by the time you travel back home.

**Dear Jessica, Ivanna and Isaac,**

Thank you for sharing your personal stories with us. Each of your experiences spoke to me as a woman, a mother and a concerned human being, who believes it is a basic right to receive information on sexual and reproductive health, as well as to access the related services and appropriate counselling, to ensure that every pregnancy is safe and wanted.

It is my firm belief that I am not alone, in feeling the depth of your experiences, which emphasize the need and imperative for family planning. We know that the best possible outcomes can be achieved, when potential mothers and fathers have open, and honest dialogues about their deepest aspirations, and expectations, and can plan their lives accordingly.

Your testimonies also bring to light, the need for more platforms such as this one, offered by our Ministry of Health with the generous support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health at the Johns Hopkins-Bloomberg School of Public Health, and others, which aims at sharing life-changing information and innovative ideas on family planning.

### **Distinguished Guests,**

The history of our world taught us that parents would have more children to offset the higher rates of child mortality; but also, that larger families were often associated with greater pride, as well as a solution for

economic stability, since children would take care of their parents, once they could no longer work.

The question we are now facing is what short, medium and long-term approaches would foster a positive mindset shift in our societies, if we wanted to encourage a greater uptake in family planning, to respond to our new socio-economic realities.

As highlighted in the report ***‘Future Drivers of Growth in Rwanda’***, which was launched last week by the Government of Rwanda, in partnership with the World Bank, our Vision 2050 for sustainable development, will need all of us to put first the four key drivers, namely, ***innovation, integration, agglomeration, and competition.***

With one of the key areas being the development of human capital, we must address the question of demographic expansion, and its impact on the realization of our ambitious economic growth.

Indeed, we must ensure that all relevant stakeholders, from public health, economics, sociology, political science, and psychology disciplines, will work hand in hand with demographers, to yield sound and friendly policies, inspired by relevant specific population studies<sup>1</sup>.

We need to ask ourselves, to what socio-economic achievements should our communities aspire, to be convinced of the long-term benefits of determining the number of births, according to one's economic abilities, while spacing them out for healthier babies and mothers?

Moreover, how do we reconcile cultural and religious beliefs that discourage the use of family planning

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Global Family Planning Revolution: Three Decades of Population Policies and Programs.' 2007. Robinson, Warren C., Ross. John A., <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRH/Resources/GlobalFamilyPlanningRevolution.pdf>

methods, with the reality that with smaller families, our communities can enjoy greater economic freedom, access to education and health services, while preserving our natural environment?

### **Esteemed audience,**

Modernization carries in itself several ambitions that can only be fulfilled when our societies become more educated, healthier, industrious, and consistent with their gender empowerment mechanisms, for sustainable socio-economic gains, across the board<sup>2</sup>.

The acceleration of our economic growth, and poverty reduction, requires access to comprehensive family planning services, for a more favorable population age structure, with more people being of working age.<sup>3</sup>

Improving family planning by availing comprehensive sexual education, is therefore essential to ensuring the holistic development of our communities. We

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unfpa.org/news/new-study-shows-benefits-family-planning-well-being-women-families-and-economies>.

<sup>3</sup> 'Family planning, demographic change and poverty: A call for action.' The World Bank investing in Health Blog. 2016. <http://blogs.worldbank.org/health/family-planning-demographic-change-and-poverty-call-action>

should continue to advocate for universal access to quality sexual and reproductive health services, so that our communities are able to fully enjoy the right to plan their families, whenever and however they wish.

As a matter of fact, being able to plan, is about life-long opportunities, as much as it is about human dignity and rights, particularly those of women and youth.

### **Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,**

In Rwanda, advancing family planning and reproductive health has been proven to have a direct correlation to overall empowerment of families.

As a result, our commitment to FP 2020<sup>4</sup> at the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning, led us to work

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<sup>4</sup> FP2020: Rwanda. <http://www.familyplanning2020.org/rwanda>.

FP2020 works with governments, civil society, multilateral organizations, donors, the private sector, and the research and development community to enable 120 million more women and girls to use contraceptives by 2020.

FP2020 is an outcome of the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning where more than 20 governments made commitments to address the policy, financing,

even harder towards ensuring the availability of adequate services – including the provision of long-lasting contraceptives – and the training of thousands of community health workers, tasked to follow up and respond to our population’s health needs at the grassroots level.

Today, due to concerted efforts and global partnerships formed by our government, more Rwandans are making informed decisions on these issues, as we witnessed:

- the gap in unmet needs for family planning, falling from 40% in 1992 <sup>5</sup>, down to 19% by 2015;
- and an increase from 10% in 2005, to 48% in 2015 in the use of modern contraceptive methods.

While this progress is encouraging, we cannot slow down our efforts, as significant challenges are still ahead of us, for example:

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delivery and socio-cultural barriers to women accessing contraceptive information, services and supplies, and donors pledged an additional US\$2.6 billion in funding.

<sup>5</sup> DHS 2014-2015

- The need for more sufficient and accurate information on sexual and reproductive health, especially among the youth;
- The capacity of more healthcare givers to provide quality services and therefore effectively promote family planning and sexual reproductive health;
- The small number of players and partners providing adequate services and interventions in response to unplanned pregnancies, and teenage pregnancy.

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Through the work of my organization, Imbuto Foundation, I am constantly reminded of the difference that targeted and qualitative sexual and reproductive health information and services, make in the lives of Rwandans, especially the youth.

That is why, this theme features in most of the Foundation's programmes. We provide an integrated package of interventions, ranging from community

dialogues – in particular between parents and adolescents; capacity training; and youth-friendly spaces, with a view of helping families and youth, become better informed about prevention, and how to deal with the consequences of unplanned pregnancies.

On this note, I encourage you to attend the presentations scheduled this Wednesday, to gain a deeper understanding of family planning interventions, in Rwanda and elsewhere, including those of my Foundation.

**Distinguished delegates,**

In the next days of this important conference, we will discuss substantive, difficult and at times uncomfortable topics, on challenges posed by family planning, and sexual and reproductive health.

However, as complex as these discussions might be, we know that we have to confront them and dare our

very own stereotypes, our learned attitudes and cultural norms. We have to interrogate in the wake of changing times, for the sake of our collective wellbeing, our economies and the future generations.

Given the caliber, experience and diversity of the people in this room, I have no doubt in my mind, that we will come away with the best possible options and with 'implementable' ideas – so to speak – to apply in our respective countries and regions.

I encourage you to decisively push the boundaries and challenge the stereotypes until services are universal.

I thank you for your kind attention, and wish us all insightful deliberations.

**END**