

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's
Welcome Remarks**

During the OAFLAD High Event Themed:

***"Leadership of African First Ladies in the
fight against HIV and AIDS"***

**At the 20th International Conference on AIDS
and STIs in Africa (ICASA)**

**"AIDS Free Africa - Innovation, Community,
and Political Leadership".**

Monday, 2nd December 2019
Kigali, Rwanda

**Excellence Madame la Présidente de l’OPDAD, ma chère
sœur Antoinette Sassou N’guessou,
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 Rebecca Akufo-Addo, First Lady of the
Republic of Ghana,
Excellency Neo Jane Masisi, First Lady of the Republic of
Botswana,
Distinguished Partners,
Esteemed Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Bonjour.

Permettez-moi tout d’abord d’exprimer combien il m’est très agréable de commencer cette semaine avec vous. Votre présence honore ce panel autour de la question du **“Leadership des premières dames d’Afrique dans la lutte contre le VIH/SIDA”**.

Pouvoir organiser cette **20^e Conférence internationale sur le SIDA et les infections sexuellement transmissibles en Afrique (ICASA)** est un honneur pour le Rwanda, du fait de notre engagement de longue date, dans ce combat contre le SIDA ; mais aussi de voir réunies chez nous, tant de personnes déterminées à résoudre ce grand défi de notre époque.

Je vous souhaite donc la bienvenue à Kigali, et je vous invite à prendre le temps, en dehors de cette conférence, de visiter et de profiter de ce que notre pays des mille collines, a à vous offrir.

Distinguished Guests,

The Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA) was born, 17 years ago, out of our collective need, to amplify the voices of those living with, and affected by HIV and AIDS, especially the most vulnerable among them: women and children.

At the time, the urgency of the situation in most of our countries, demanded that each of us prioritize programmes and projects, that were suited to the needs of the most disadvantaged families that were affected.

As we gain more ground in the fight against HIV/AIDS, the strategies and scope of our organization as a whole, have evolved - reflecting a deeper understanding, and appreciation of our reach, as first ladies.

Dear Sisters, Distinguished Partners,

As we gather here today, there is good cause for us to celebrate the impact of our joint efforts, and continuous commitment.

We can all attest to the difference that initiatives, such as the **'Free to Shine' Campaign**, have made in each one of our countries - pushing us to strengthen our efforts and commitment to end pediatric AIDS and keep mothers healthy.

At my foundation, **Imbuto**, we have also focused on designing and implementing projects, which align with national and international priorities set at a macro level, such as Rwanda's **National Strategy for Transformation**, the **Agenda 2063** of the African Union, and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

Projects such as **Family Package**, born to address pressing PMTCT needs 18 years ago, offers a comprehensive package of services to families affected by HIV/AIDS, as well as teenage mothers.

Through this project, HIV+ families are linked to health centres, and adherence to ART (antiretroviral therapy) treatment is ensured through the follow up of a network of community health workers, and peer educators. Thanks to nationwide efforts, current PMTCT coverage have now reached 96%¹.

Our **Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health** projects, promoting access to information, quality treatment and services for the youth, to decrease new HIV infections among young people in both urban and rural areas since 2010, also contribute to our national, and the continental fight against HIV/AIDs and STIs.

Indeed concerted efforts, between public and private stakeholders, have resulted in notable progress toward ending AIDS, at different levels.

In Rwanda, as of 2018, new HIV infections had decreased by 83%; and AIDS-related deaths had dropped by 82% in the last 20 years².

¹ https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/RWA_2017_countryreport.pdf

² For new HIV infections, figures went down from 23,000, to 3,600 between 1998 and 2018. For AIDS-related deaths, figures went down from 16,000 to 2,900 between 1998 and 2018.

<https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/rwanda>

Distinguished Guests,

Celebrating our gains, should also give way, to a deep analysis of our journey thus far.

It should be an opportunity for us, to have genuine and open conversations, about the diverse challenges, including those resulting from gender inequality - that despite our efforts, keep holding the African continent back, in terms of effectively responding, and preventing HIV/AIDS among our people. It should be a chance for us, to exchange ideas on possible solutions, to achieve our demographic dividend.

My Dear Sisters,

As we reflect on our multifaceted roles, in this journey to ensure that our communities fully thrive – let us acknowledge, what has worked, and reveal what has not. This, I believe, will enable us to make more meaningful interventions.

Distingués invités,

Pour conclure, permettez-moi de vous remercier de nouveau de vous être joints à nous, pour cette conférence d'ICASA, qui je le crois, nous rapproche encore plus de notre objectif de mettre fin, à cette épidémie qu'est le VIH/SIDA.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.