

**First Lady's Speech at
the 17th Ordinary General Assembly of
the Organization of African First Ladies
against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA)
during the 27th African Union Summit**

Kigali, 18 July 2016

**My dear sisters,
Distinguished delegates,
All protocol observed.**

Good morning.

It is with a heart full of warmth – and I must confess a brim of excitement – that I wish to welcome every one of you to Kigali, for the 17th General Assembly of the Organization of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS.

J'espère que vous passez d'agréables moments parmi nous, et que vous avez pu prendre le temps de découvrir le patrimoine culturel et ces merveilles naturelles qui font, nous dit-on, le vrai charme de notre pays. Et je souhaite tout autant, que vous ayez profité des petits plaisirs d'une discussion ou d'une rencontre avec vos frères ou sœurs rwandais.

We are pleased, very pleased, to have you among us for these few days.

Mes chères sœurs,

Pour nous, la tenue du 1^{er} Sommet de l'Union Africaine sur cette terre rwandaise aux milles collines, a une résonance particulière. Elle illustre à nos yeux, un moment d'une portée historique et symbolique importante, tout juste 22 ans après le terrible Génocide des Tutsi, qui a contraint notre nation à lutter de toutes ses forces, pour restaurer la justice, la paix, l'unité et surtout la dignité de tout un peuple.

Indeed, what we have managed to do by rising up again, is to us, a symbol and testament to what Africans can accomplish and overcome, when we foster the will to work together and walk the same path towards a future of our own making.

You know, of course, that in the aftermath of the Genocide, there were limited means to answer our many priorities. We therefore had to be very strategic in pulling together human and material resources, to help rebuild the lives of millions.

Perhaps more importantly, we had to stay united and determined. We resolutely focused our hearts and minds, and elaborated culturally sensitive legal, socio-economic and health initiatives, to help our nation leave behind its darkest times.

Distinguished guests,

Some of the initiatives that made a difference, were directly inspired from OAFLA's. You must all remember **'Treat every child as your own'**, which drew from our traditional African practices, and placed the wellbeing of every child at the centre of our communities. We successfully launched it in Rwanda, after carefully adapting it to our cultural context.

En tant qu'Africains, nous partageons beaucoup de ces réalités qui touchent la santé, mais aussi d'autres domaines sociaux ou économiques. Nous partageons également des normes culturelles, qui s'inspirent de valeurs communes et d'un sens du devoir collectif.

Ainsi, nous pouvons réellement appliquer avec efficacité dans un pays donné, des solutions locales conçues dans un autre pays, tant qu'on prend soin de les adapter minutieusement.

Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,

As OAFILA is fast approaching its 15th anniversary, I cannot refrain from looking back at our early days, to lucidly assess our common journey. I humbly believe this to be an important exercise, to help us embrace what brought us together in the first place, as well as evaluate the legacy we wish to leave behind, regardless of when we began to implement the different initiatives, in our respective countries.

As an example, we are currently promoting the theme “*Advancing Sustainable Partnerships to end paediatric AIDS and improve Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights*”. So this is a good time to pause for a moment, and ask ourselves what we must do to strengthen health systems across the continent, and what linkages will most effectively help us to do so. And, even further, what kind of effective public-private partnerships we should

embark on, if we are to realize the ambitious goal of 90-90-90¹ to end AIDS.

Dear sisters,

Over the years, the Rwandan government implemented several programmes, to fight this epidemic worsened by the 1994 Genocide. Carefully selected interventions, relied on the involvement of all actors in our communities, including peer educators and community health workers, trained to provide primary care, and counsel on prevention and treatment methods. The aim was for our population to be able to access the services they needed, even if they did not seek consultations at health facilities.

It is thanks to strategic public-private partnerships, involving capacity building for healthcare professionals, and awareness-raising campaigns for prevention and treatment of the HIV virus, that we

¹ By 2020, 90% of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status. By 2020, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy. By 2020, 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have viral suppression.

saw members of our communities become agents of change and contribute to:

- the significant 50% reduction of new HIV infections since 1994;
- the suppression of viral load in 82% of the treated population;
- a 78% decline in AIDS-related deaths over the past 10 years, and;
- a 98% testing rate among pregnant women, followed by free ART for those testing positive and children under 5.

As you are aware, in the past days, we also launched the 'All-in' adolescent campaign, through a partnership with the Rwanda Military Hospital, which has joined efforts to prevent new HIV infections among our precious youth.

Mesdames et messieurs,

Bien que ces chiffres soient encourageants, et prouvent que des interventions pertinentes, et soutenues, sont incontournables pour réduire le taux de nouvelles infections, et améliorer la santé

des communautés, il est de notre devoir de poursuivre ces efforts, si nous tenons véritablement à éradiquer cette épidémie d'ici 2030.

Et pour que nous réalisons cet objectif, nous devons continuer à sensibiliser toutes les catégories de la société, en portant une attention particulière à la jeunesse et aux femmes, car nous sommes conscients que de leur santé, dépendra celle des générations futures.

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to call on us all dear sisters, to consistently assess, and re-assess our commitment to this organization, born of our duty to lend a voice to Africa's most vulnerable populations.

We must continue to invest ourselves and all possible resources, to live up to this mission. This introspective exercise will only help to ensure that OAFILA's current, and future partnerships, have at their core, the best interests of the African people. It will seal our resolution to work towards the dignified living, our people so rightfully deserve.

I thank you for your kind attention, and wish us all fruitful discussions.