Her Excellency Mrs. Jeannette Kagame’s
Acceptance Speech
at
Oklahoma Christian University
Commencement Ceremony

April 30th, 2010
Your Excellency President Kagame,

Don Millican, Chairman of the Board of trustees,

Dr. O’Neil, Oklahoma Christian University President,

Distinguished University administration, faculty, and students,

2010 graduates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon,

It is such a delight to be among the OCU community after a long time. Thank you, Mike, for the kind words and acknowledgement that you have just made in your proclamation. It is with great humility and pleasure that I graciously accept the award of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa from Oklahoma Christian University, and I wish to sincerely thank the university and the selection committee for this honour; an honour which I receive on behalf of my fellow Rwandans, whose incredible lives and stories compelled me to get involved in the work that I am doing.

- It is because of the ordinary Rwandans who do extraordinary things that I stand here today.

- It is because of the Rwandan men, women and children who, with dignity, courage, and resilience that I have never seen anywhere before, have rebuilt their shattered and broken lives, forgiven the killers of their kith and kin, and who today live side by side in
reconciliation on the same hills barely 16 years after one of the most vicious tragedies in human history.

I draw strength from the orphans who head households, who do not complain but clean their wounds, stitch their tattered clothes and return to school – and who today are excelling inside and outside Rwanda. Orphans who weep in silence as they remember whole families they lost, and who, when they come out in public, dry their eyes and walk tall among their fellow Rwandans.

Not long ago, actually last week, I visited an association of widows in the Southern part of Rwanda. All the members of the association were raped and some were deliberately infected with HIV/AIDS during the genocide. One of them, Suzanne, who is 74 years old, was gang-raped. This tormenting ordeal brought her unimaginable pain and serious gynecological complications. She was stripped bare of her dignity, she couldn’t sit, stand or answer nature’s call normally. Today, she walks with dignity, dances with energy, and has decided to live with the promise of a bright future. If Suzanne does not give up, then how can I?

As I reflect, ladies and gentlemen, on the significance of this special honor, I recognize that the award symbolizes a duty and a call, one that bears responsibility and involves great challenges. It is a sober reminder that the bar has been set higher and even more is expected of me. I pledge my commitment to continue upholding the very principles and values that we, at the Imbuto Foundation hold dear to our hearts and share with this university. It is worth noting that the students who graduate from this prestigious institution go forth, not only with a world-class education but are empowered to become leaders of great character, vision and courage. I am indeed proud to be associated with Oklahoma Christian University.
I dedicate this award to the resilient men, women and children of Rwanda, with whom we toil daily, and whose lives and testimony have put me at this place of honour and prestige. I cannot end without thanking this university for partnering with us on our journey towards providing quality education to Rwanda’s youth.

Thank you for the award, and thank you for your kind attention.