

RWANDA WOMEN LEADERS'
PRAYER BREAKFAST

Welcome Remarks by H.E. Jeannette Kagame,
First Lady of the Republic of Rwanda
Kigali, Sunday 17 June 2012

Dear Sister Mrs. Janet Museveni, First Lady of the Republic of Uganda,
Minister for Karamoja Affairs and MP for Ruhama County,
Honorable Members of Government,
Honorable Members of Parliament,
Religious leaders,
To my dear friends Grace, Sophie, Huda, Mulu, Susan, Lynn and Anne,
Distinguished ladies,

It is with joy that I welcome you all to this year's "Rwanda Women Leaders' Prayer breakfast"! Allow me to extend a special welcome to all our distinguished guests, in particular to my sister H.E Janet Museveni, and Mrs. Grace Nelson who is here with other special guests Sophie, Huda, Mulu, Susan, Lynn and Anne. Thank you for honouring our invitation with your presence.

Excellencies, ladies, Rwandans have a history of fellowship and communing with one another. When In February, at the invitation of Mrs. Grace Nelson, wife of US Senator Bill Nelson, I attended the prayer breakfast in Washington, D.C., I said to myself: "Wouldn't it be wonderful to open our own fellowship here in Rwanda to our friends and distinguished leaders from other parts of the world?" I am glad we are doing this now as we learn a lot from sharing our own experiences, and are enriched by the perspectives of other people.

I remember that in one of my moments of doubt caused by the role of the church in the genocide against the Tutsi, I found comforting words from my

sister and friend, Janet Museveni, who reminded me that one's relationship with God is personal. It is not based on the dictates, management or character of any institution or individual.

It is to God that we owe allegiance. I was able to appreciate that people at different levels of spirituality can unlock some doors that were otherwise closed.

Today, we are being invited to reflect together upon the theme of **Leadership and Family values** – a topic that is, I am sure, close to our hearts.

Leadership, as you know, comes with much responsibility and many expectations. Leadership, it is said, comes from God (Romans 13:1 NIV). The leader is a vehicle of social and family values, and indeed a mirror before which the people see themselves. The leader has the tremendous responsibility of being as transparent as possible in everything that he or she does.

When I speak of leadership, Excellencies, I do not speak only of government authority, of church leadership. It is leadership in its different forms, at different levels. You represent all those faces of leadership. It is that leadership that is exemplified by many who influenced the world by their works. Not the wealthy, not the powerful, not office bearers, but those who, through the work they do, touch lives and change people's attitudes in profound ways. By the force of their characters and the integrity of their

ways, they command moral authority and earn the respect of others. This is what great leadership is about!

There are seven values that I would like to speak about today that form the core of a true leader: These are

- Honesty
- Humility
- Integrity
- Fairness
- Nobility
- Loyalty and
- Servant hood

On Honesty: A leader must, of necessity, be **honest**. Honest with others and, more importantly, honest with oneself. A true leader cannot and should not hide who he is, or try to be who he is not. There are some people who believe that leadership is about posturing, about projecting a certain image of “greatness”, “perfection”, and “infallibility” and “superiority”. Such people live with painful contradictions within themselves and end up being their own prisoners. Let's be the best of ourselves - we are only human! We all have shortcomings, just as we all have our strengths. As long as we do things to the best of our abilities; as long as we endeavour to always bring out the best in others and in ourselves; and as long as we consciously work towards overcoming our weaknesses and enhancing our strengths, we are on the road to great leadership.

On humility: It is not a sign of weakness to be measured and modest. In fact, it is a reflection of greatness. Modesty is really the outworking of a pure heart. It means that we do not see ourselves as being better than others; it means that we are ready for introspection to nip in the bud any creeping signs of pride and arrogance. It is an acknowledgement that our positions of leadership and privilege are but an opportunity to serve others and to leave a legacy. Humility is indeed one of the most admirable qualities and a mark of great leadership.

On integrity: With integrity comes transparency – “What we see is what we get”. A person of integrity has no ambiguity in their character and there are never any surprises. Such people rarely have skeletons in their closets that can cause embarrassment to themselves, their families, their communities or indeed their countries. An upright person is easy to deal with because they live, they tell and they speak their truth without fear or favour. They keep their word and can walk tall, with their heads held high. They are true to themselves, all the while recognizing that just as they do, others too have rights that must be respected. They are careful to live at peace with God and with man. In Kinyarwanda, we call them *inyangamugayo*. Such are the great leaders we are looking for.

On fairness: Leaders treat people fairly and even-handedly. They do not pay attention only to those from whom they stand to benefit or whom they wish to impress and ignore those who they feel are worth little or who have no influence. And in the same way, they do not hesitate to call out those who have done wrong, no matter how important they are, and are always prepared to deal with whatever consequences follow. A leader who is able to consistently deal in fairness is indeed a great leader.

On Nobility. A noble person is one who keeps his word. A noble person is not selfish or judgmental, has high moral qualities, and is honorable and magnanimous. Nobility is not necessarily the sole preserve of monarchs but should be found in leaders. Sadly, a handful of leaders actually exhibit this particular value or truly merit the titles they hold. Let us all revisit our moral standing and ask ourselves the hard question “Whose role model am I? What am I giving them as an example?” Nobility is the mark of a great leader!

On Loyalty. Loyalty, as a quality of leadership, is such a delight. A loyal person can be depended upon. A loyal person is consistent and you know what to expect. A loyal person is truthful and you can rest assured that the person will deliver. In the absence of results, there will be a very good reason why the person could not deliver. A loyal person is always by your side and you can count on their support. The population can indeed count on the loyalty of a leader who never wavers from the path of principle, truth and justice. Loyalty is essential in good leadership!

On Servant hood: How many can, like Jesus, bend at his disciples feet and wash them? Literally, it is hard to imagine, but it simply means using our positions of influence to serve others diligently, to feed them before we feed ourselves. It means never betraying those who depend on you. It means being unselfish, sacrificing for the greater good of humanity and of the nation. Anything less is false modesty and fraud! It is that leadership that is exemplified by many who influenced the world by their works. This is what great leadership is about!

As I said earlier, we are human and far from perfect. But we know that we have been blessed with much and much is expected from us. This is why we pray and seek counsel from each other.

May God give us all the wisdom to exhibit true leadership and sound values. May God give us the courage to form a strong bond of sisterhood whereby we can look each other in the eye and correct each other with love. We must be vigilant not to allow leaders among us with doubtful moral values. We must, of necessity, ensure that we have leaders who are role models and who are capable of transmitting positive moral values to the next generation.

I thank you for your kind attention!