

- **Honorable Minister of Education Dr. Papias Musafiri and other Ministers,**
- **US Ambassador to Rwanda Mrs. Erica Barks-Ruggles and other members of the diplomatic corps,**
- **Deputy Special Representative for Global Partnership U.S. Department of State Thomas Debass,**
- **Governor of the Eastern Province and Mayor of Bugesera district,**
- **Army and Police,**
- **Representatives from schools across Africa,**
- **Partners from Intel, AOL Foundation, Microsoft, Girl Up, Rwanda Girls Initiative,**
- **Executive Camp Director, Joseph Nsengimana,**
- **Dear Parents,**
- **Young lady participants of the WiSci camp,**

A very good afternoon to you all,

It is wonderful to be back at the Gashora Girls School of Science and Technology. Today, I am particularly delighted to join all you brilliant *Women in Science and Innovation (WiSci)* for the summer camp graduation. Let me hope you all had such a refreshing experience, that you did not miss home too much.

When this school opened in 2011, I recall telling the girls who were here at that time, how interesting it would be to hear about future

innovations that would emerge, thanks to the conducive learning environment that the Gashora School provides.

Our expectations have obviously been exceeded, judging from the projects you have displayed and the skills you possess. Hearing all that you girls have learned in just 3 weeks is extraordinary. If you think technology is impressive, try combining it with the power I see in each one of you girls. Explosive, I would say.

I wish to thank the organizers and partners for selecting Rwanda, to hold this science and innovation camp. I wish to also acknowledge the Let Girls Learn initiative championed by First Lady Michelle Obama; the US State Department; the technology companies, our Ministry of Education and all those who had a hand in making this camp successful. We hope to see more of these camps offering unique learning opportunities to girls across Rwanda and the continent.

Rwanda is pleased to have hosted the first Women in Science and Innovation summer camp of its kind. The camp comes as a timely complement to the solid foundation that has already been laid; I

believe it will provide us with new pathways for action in the areas of **Science Technology Engineering Art and Mathematics (STEAM)**.

What we see in Rwanda today is a heavy investment and a high level of commitment towards promoting girls education; it is a modern day application of the high regard that our culture has always placed on women. Historically, Rwandan women were treated with great respect and seen as a quiet force; women were often consulted before any important decisions were made.

Guided by our culture and the current leadership, we are sparing no effort in addressing all the dimensions of exclusion, which prevent girls from participating fully in every aspect of productive life. It is important to take a holistic approach when it comes to uplifting girls and women, and to establish the right environment in homes, at school, in the workplace, in communities, and indeed in any place that a girl or woman may find potentially constraining challenges.

Young girls, Ladies and Gentlemen,

To put everything into perspective, allow me to share just a few achievements Rwanda has registered in favor of women and girls (although we cannot forget about the boys):

- Over the last 21 years 84,000 students have graduated from 38 higher learning institutions; compared to about 2,500 students that graduated from independence up until the eve of the genocide. We have come a long way and the journey continues;
- Today primary school enrolment stands at 96%, meaning we have achieved universal primary education. With girls' enrolment rate at primary school as high as 98%, gender parity has also been realized;
- Under the 12-year basic education program, public school is free from grades 1 to 12. This has helped improve retention rates especially for girls, due to proximity of schools to homes;
- One Laptop Per Child is a program that has expanded knowledge in STEM for thousands of primary school children, by introducing technology into education at an early age;
- Over the last 5 years, about 15,000 classrooms were constructed mostly by our armed forces alongside ordinary Rwandans, to make room for more students to receive an education;

- By 2013, we had 52% girls enrolled in STEM courses at secondary school;
- It is encouraging to see young bold women entering into our airforce and national airline (Rwandair) as pilots and engineers; we hope to see this number increase in the future;
- We have 1,814 female police officers on our force, with 160 currently serving in peacekeeping missions in various countries;
- 97% of girls aged 11-15 have been immunized against cervical cancer with the HPV vaccine;
- It is a constitutional requirement to have 30% women in decision-making positions in the public sector;
- Rwanda enjoys the highest female legislative representation worldwide at 64%; 40% of the cabinet is made up of women and the judiciary has 40% women as well;
- Laws granting equal inheritance rights to men and women were put in place in the late 90s;
- Men and women with the same competencies and capabilities have the right to equal pay for equal work, without discrimination.

These few statistics are testament to the fact that the right environment exists. What remains is for girls, families and communities to work hard together to provide space and resources for our young girls to blossom and for their true worth to shine through.

At the Foundation I lead (Imbuto Foundation), we conduct a campaign every year to empower young girls (most of them your age), by awarding those who excel at school. Over the last 10 years, 4,000 girls have been awarded for academic excellence. Once the girls are awarded they become part of a network. This is a platform whereby the girls further empower one another, mentor their younger sisters, and remain connected. Let this camp be the beginning of a powerful network for girls in STEAM.

As I end my remarks, I leave you with these few points to reflect upon:

Do not be afraid to explore the world around you, in all its diversity and dynamism, after all and I quote: "What technology brings to us

individually is the possibility of finding out who we are, more importantly, who we might be”.

Keep using technology to unleash your talents. Be present, observant and sensitive to the needs in your community so as to create social change; be a pioneer, discover the tools needed to surprise the world. Go forth and shine girls!

It is now my singular honour to hereby declare the 2015 *Women in Science and Innovation* summer camp officially closed.

Thank you for your kind attention.