

**First Lady Jeannette Kagame's
remarks**

at the

**Imbuto Foundation 20th
Anniversary Celebration Gala
Dinner**

Saturday, 27 November 2021

**My dear sister, Monica Geingos,
First Lady of Namibia,**

**Your Excellency Mrs Roman
Tesfaye, Former First Lady Of
Ethiopia**

Excellencies Ambassadors,

Honourable Ministers,

**Esteemed Partners and Friends
of Imbuto Foundation,**

Distinguished guests and

CYRWA/YouthConnekt

Champions Nominees,

**Valued Members and Staff of
Imbuto Foundation,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Mwiriwe ho, Good evening,
Bonsoir à tous.**

**Quel trajet nous avons parcouru
ensemble!**

**Merci d'y avoir cru, merci d'avoir
accepté de prendre part dans
cette belle aventure.**

It is such a joy to be here tonight, celebrating 20 years of service to Rwandan communities.

Two decades of progress in Youth Empowerment, Education and Health, certainly call for festivity.

The journey was not always sunny; in fact, it began amidst a storm. And yet we are here today, with the sun back in our hearts, as a light within, that will keep guiding us along the way ahead.

When I think of Imbutu, and earlier, PACFA, coming to life, I see the fulfilling of a moral obligation.

C'est comme si la piste avait été tracée pour nous. Je pense que les femmes qui m'ont soutenue dans cette entreprise l'ont ressenti autant que moi. Notre ambition était, et reste, non négociable: les Rwandais méritent des familles en bonne santé.

It seemed a revolutionary notion, amidst all the disease and vulnerability that 1994 had amplified.

That premature, preventable death, should no longer be a constant shadow, following mothers on their way to work, welcoming children as they are born, seemed unattainable with our financial means of the time.

"Untreated HIV had decimated entire families."

There is no silver lining to disease. There is no upside to death, or to suffering.

But in the pursuit of eradicating the cause of the ache - a robber of joy, dignity and independence – a path may appear.

Distinguished guests,

What we are celebrating here today, is not a feat of charity, but rather the fulfilling of duty.

The mission that drove Imbuto from the very beginning, and birthed PACFA 20 years ago, was not glory, it was ***responsibility***.

Un proverbe Africain dit que
**“celui qui a planté un arbre n’a
pas vécu inutilement”**. Pour
nous, citoyens d’un pays qui s’est
battu pour sa continuité, au prix
de la vie d’innombrables
compatriotes braves et engagés,
vivre inutilement ne pourrait être
un choix digne.

Half a decade after the genocide,
the soil of the rich land all
Rwandans could finally claim, was
ripe for fertilizing.

The first seed to be planted needed to show precedence; it had to become a robust, deeply rooted tree that would bear fruits, so long as the people needed to eat from it.

For this, there was no roadmap.

By my side were *simply* women, whose determination I could hardly quantify in a speech twice as long.

For these women would not count the hours, nor spare the efforts, a seed was laid in our hands.

Today we celebrate these women.

Merci pour votre générosité, votre passion et votre courage.

Babyeyi twatangiranye uru rugendo, turabashimira urugwiro, ubwitange n'umutima wakibyeyi byabaranze.

Excellencies, Partners and Friends,

As you know, the Protection and Care of Families Against HIV/AIDS (PACFA) combatted the idea that financial means should define access to treatment against the disease. The quest behind this initiative, was a pursuit and a reclaiming of the humanity, that so much conflict and loss had attempted to rob from us. Science had shown that an HIV positive life in dignity, as a productive and autonomous member of society, as

Sage Semafara has shown, was perfectly attainable.

Nous le devons aux Rwandais.

La graine fut notre vision et notre fondation son outil; conçu par des membres et des partenaires dévoués, et façonné par la confiance de nos bénéficiaires.

L'autonomie que le Gouvernement du Rwanda nous a accordée, nous a permis de choisir nos combats, et de concevoir nos propres solutions.

Cette liberté a créé les conditions idéales pour que notre graine germe et fleurisse.

Namwe bayobozi muri hano,
turabashimira ubushishozi
n'icyerekezo mwatweretse.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Family Package, our first project, saw the light in 2002, in Kacyiru, not far from here.

Challenging as its implementation seemed, it was merely *an inspiration* to the many diverse initiatives that have since stemmed from Imbuto.

The vision behind our shift from PACFA to Imbuto was simple: a harmonious model that can cater to the different stages of the life cycle.

Our DNA is our ability to re-invent ourselves and adapt to an ever-changing landscape. But our soul remains intact.

Imbuto strives to **engage, educate** and **empower** our communities.

Esteemed Guests,

20 is quite the milestone, even to those of us that have had many more birthdays. For our youth, it is fresh adulthood. For the progress of developing nations, it is a lifetime.

And for Imbuto, it has been a *voyage* of much greater numbers:

- The 5,000 Best Performing teenage girls rewarded and mentored over the past decade and a half, are now valued contributors to our society, and some have become part of our backbone, working for the Imbuto mission as full-time staff members.
- Over 60,000 children aged 6 and younger have been enrolled into model and home-

based ECD and Family centres.

- Dozens of Youth Forum Series have housed crucial conversations among thousands of future trailblazers.

Mais les chiffres les plus significatifs, chers amis, n'ont pas encore été réellement enregistrés, car ils constituent nos futures victoires. Ces chiffres reflèteront l'impact de nos efforts sur le

développement durable de notre pays.

Distinguished guests,

Tonight, in partnership with the Ministry of Youth & Culture, we are also recognizing the accomplishments of a new cohort of CYRWA and YouthConnekt awardees, who join the ranks of other inherent go-getters.

Looking at the mountains our beneficiaries have moved thus far with your help, reversing trends of poverty and lack of education, to become accomplished, militant professionals, that enhance various Rwandan industries, I see no limit to their potential. But to allow this potential to bloom in the decades coming, your help is needed.

So **Ladies and Gentlemen**, I request this of you tonight, in all the humbleness that being blessed with this successful journey has granted me: keep believing in us. Invest in us. Partner with us. Return to us with the knowledge you have acquired along your academic adventures and social discoveries. Water our garden, and it will remain a haven for Rwandan communities, for as long as God allows it.

I welcome the UN Family to garden our Foundation.

Words might not do justice to my elation in celebrating these 20 years with you, but I will try this verse by the late Maya Angelou:

“We need joy as we need air. We need love as we need water. We need each other as we need the earth we share.”

Esteemed guests, I invite you to share my joy tonight.

Batumirwa bahire, mbifuriye
gukomeza kugira umugoroba
mwiza!

Demain nous construirons, et ce
soir nous dansons.

Let's celebrate tonight!

