

Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Ferrari,
Heifer International 2015 Honorees,
Heifer International partners,
Distinguished hosts and guests,

Good evening.

I am pleased to join Heifer International's 4th Annual Gala Dinner
'Beyond hunger: A place at the table'.

It is especially uplifting and invigorating to see people coming from all walks of life brought together by a relentless commitment to promote a healthier world. This is a true testament to a growing global consciousness of women challenges and their determination to find their remedy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While tonight offers the opportunity to award the staunchest advocates of poverty reduction in the United States and around the globe, we are

also here to keep the momentum of our commitment to helping vulnerable families.

Distinguished audience,

More than 70 years ago, Mr. Dan West and Heifer International paved the way for many organizations to bring about sustainable transformation in the lives of American families.

They laid a strong foundation for economic empowerment of local communities and planted the seeds of solidarity for greater impact. The *Passing on the gift* model, which gives the first female offspring of a livestock to another impoverished family, is a perfect illustration of this principle of collective engagement for the common good. It exemplifies best the philosophy of *"Paying it forward"*.

Much in the same way, Rwanda works through partnerships with like-minded stakeholders, who understand the importance of our culture when designing local initiatives.

Distinguished guests,

Tonight, I would like to share a few stories speaking to this positive impact we have witnessed over the years. Because the Rwandan experience in lifting over 1 million of our people out of poverty is inseparable from the preservation of dignity, hope and self-reliance all human beings deserve.

For the last 15 years, Heifer has remarkably complemented national efforts. It has operated in every province of Rwanda and has been a lifeline to 45,000 beneficiaries.

Heifer's flagship program also involved the donation of cows. This holds a very special meaning in our culture, because a cow's worth surpasses its economic value. It represents various social **ties** deeply rooted in one of our longest-standing traditions. A tradition that places cows at the heart of cultural celebrations and symbolizes true friendship, prosperity and respect.

For example, a lady with pretty eyes is often complimented and told she has "calf eyes", when a bride is given away her family receives cows to

symbolize the bond between the two families, but most importantly any exchange of cows would signify a covenant between parties.

Mr. Ferrari,

This is why we view the impact of Heifer International as significant, because it looks at a support model that not only makes economic sense but also touches the hearts and minds of the people. Heifer puts customs and practices, in the case of Rwanda cows and milk at the centre of their interventions. As you may know, we so fondly refer to our beloved country as the land of milk and honey.

In fact, let me share with you a very dear and personal story, speaking to the importance of cows in our culture and the place milk holds in it.

Many, many years ago, my husband and I met in Kenya. In the beginning of his courtship, he casually dropped by for a visit, accompanied by a friend. As customary in our traditions, I offered them to have lunch. Which he politely declined! Yes, he did, you heard me well.

Now, even though I was born and raised in exile, I knew that in our culture, whether young or old, a cup of milk is always welcomed with delight and appreciation.

Knowing this, I offered him a glass of milk instead. Now, let me tell you before you draw any mistaken conclusions, even the heart of well-accomplished army-officer melted! And it was just the right touch!

My husband could not turn down this offer, and that is how we became a family of six.

- It is because of this "glass of milk" that I am here today;
- It is in this capacity that I lend my voice to the many Rwandan families that have been impacted by this partnership;
- I am here to testify that this initiative could only be a natural fit in our values;
- I am here to thank you on behalf of the many families that have benefited from this program.

Esteemed guests,

A little over of 20 years ago our country was reduced to ashes. And no group was as victimized as women.

So, in order to heal the country in the aftermath of the Genocide, we re-examined the status of women in our society. And it was blatantly evident that no transformative path would be walked without the participation of women.

Historical reforms were made and today Rwanda has the highest number of women in Congress in the world -above 60%- and it is now a constitutional requirement that 30% of decision-making positions in the public sector, be filled by women.

Ladies and gentlemen,

So while gender equity was recognized as a cross cutting issue, poverty was receiving equal focus and attention with several programs implemented to uplift the most vulnerable.

In 2006, the country's leadership launched a program called *Girinka or 'Own a Cow'* as a response to high levels of poverty and childhood malnutrition. It consisted in the gifting of a cow to families in need, to allow for income generation.

Today, 9 years after Girinka was introduced, over 200,000 cows were given to those in need, many of them being women.

Distinguished audience,

Rwanda's civil society and organizations also added their brick to the foundation of economic development. Of course the one I can best speak about is Imbuto Foundation, which I founded more than a decade ago. We focus on education, health and economic empowerment.

However, as much as I would like to share with all of you here tonight the most recent successes of Imbuto. I will mainly talk about the one program with a striking resemblance to Heifer's *Passing on the Gift* and *One Cow per Family* initiatives.

This program which Imbuto led for many years is called *Malayika Murinzi*, which translates to *Guardian Angels* in English. These Guardian Angels were mostly women, who came from disadvantaged backgrounds but still found remarkable compassion and selflessness to care for vulnerable children in their communities.

We rewarded these women with cows and today these Guardian Angels continue to help those around them by giving off their first calf thus extending the '*Passing on the gift*' model.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As I end these remarks, I wish to reinforce our resolve to keep the momentum. We must not rest until better social justice has been reached.

Mr. Pierre Ferrari and distinguished guests:

Thank you for your relentless efforts in protecting the rights to a decent and dignified life for all.

Enjoy the rest of your evening and once again congratulations to tonight's honorees.