

**First Lady Mrs Jeannette Kagame's
Keynote Address at the**

Young Leaders Conference

**organised by the Rwanda Leaders
Fellowship**

Golden Tulip Hotel, Nyamata

9 January 2016

Chairman of the Rwanda Leaders Fellowship,
Distinguished delegates from the National Prayer Breakfast,
Conference organisers,
Emerging leaders,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am pleased to be joining you today, for the first **Young Leaders Conference**, organized as a prelude to the 2016 National Prayer Breakfast.

It is a fact that conferences like this one, align with the concerted efforts of the government and civil society, to build platforms that encourage our youth to embrace the leadership roles they are destined to fulfil. The coming together of Rwandans from different generations, faiths and professions, who are intent on seeing the emergence of a young leadership that excels at its craft, is the perfect opportunity to discuss the 'sowing seeds of excellence' in today and tomorrow's leaders.

And so, I look forward to hearing about the diverse and enriching perspectives that you will share; about ideas and views, that will forge exciting new paths to the standards of excellence that have been laid by your elders, the leaders that preceded you.

Distinguished guests,

Present-day Rwanda has been praised across the world for many achievements in the fields of education and health; ICT and gender representation; or reconciliation and security, to name only a few.

Let me borrow from what Lambert Bariho said, 'We thank God for being seen now as a nation, despite our history.'

We must remind ourselves that these achievements were neither accidental nor sheer luck, but the fruits of careful choices, policies and strategies, aiming to create a wealth of opportunities for Rwandans. You all have in mind **Vision 2020** and **EDPRS I and II**, which have been major building blocks for our social and economic development.

But now, how do we make sure that you – the younger generations – are ready to carry the torch and lead the nation through future challenges? Well, the shaping of strong and visionary leaders is the first answer that comes to mind. Common sense would have suggested it, but more importantly, our own recent history has taught us that how much impact that can have.

Esteemed audience,

After the Genocide against the Tutsi, our leaders saw the possibilities of this land and inspired Rwandans to turn them into real achievements. They saw the people's eagerness to get back up and

stand tall again, and channelled this powerful drive into a successful and reconstructive journey for the country.

But what is at stake when poor leadership is exercised, is just as crucial. In 1994, we saw first-hand how power structures could be built to break down social cohesion through hatred and discrimination brought by political and economic greed. As a friend, Padiri Mundendeli said at one of our forums at Imbuto Foundation's event, the Genocide against the Tutsi happened, because every leading institution, from the smallest at the family level, to the largest at the Church or State levels, abdicated their responsibilities to treat every life as sacred.

As the saying goes, divided we fall. The good news though, is that, united we stand. Rwandans are a collective people at heart and we like to be full participants in the making of our society. Rev. Dr. Antoine Rutayisire, in the last Prayer Breakfast also said that we all have the same mission – the State, the Church, Civil Society Organizations, and individuals. It is therefore up to us – as a people – to define how we can best fit together to build that nation. And excellent leadership is that glue that will hold all these parts together; it is that coordinating hand that keeps the vision and goals in focus.

Emerging leaders,

The liberation of this country and continuous efforts to lead us all towards the defined future we deserve, were carried out by countless people, of all walks of life, who understood their purpose, and

demonstrated resilience, strength of character and selflessness in fulfilling their God-given mission. For these liberators, failure to achieve these objectives, was simply not an option.

Today, I encourage you to learn from those who have paved the way for you and maximize from the many opportunities availed to you, the precious sons and daughters of this land.

As builders of the future Rwanda, remember that the choices you make, will define how your community perceives you. Be aware of new practices and lifestyles appearing in the society, in order to always be conscious of what deserves your attention and the rules you live by.

Be mindful of the discipline you set for yourself. This will not only determine how far you go, but how well you will do in sustaining the positive impact you have on the many lives around you. This discipline should also extend to a strong sense of self-awareness, and auto-criticism. If you know who you are as an individual, and are not afraid to confront your own shortcomings and correct them, you will grow into a more confident and mature individual person. One that is better fit to be a leader.

Ultimately, we want you to cultivate positive values that will inspire others to walk in your footsteps. Values that include speaking up against injustices and defending one's rights, to not being afraid to stand out from the crowd, and making unpopular decisions when needed for the good of the community.

Young people,

You make up more than half of our country's population, so a lot rests on you to fulfil the many responsibilities of our nation. Whenever you feel overwhelmed, be reminded that 'to whom much is given, much is expected'.

We expect a lot from you because those whose shoulders you stand on, fought hard so that you could grow up in a free and fair country. But remember that we – the older generations, those who are growing grey hair, like the Reverend said – are always standing by your side, aware of our responsibility to share our skills and experience to empower you, in order for you to effectively preserve the legacy of the last 20 years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to thank the organizers for bringing together our nation's young leaders and their elders, to bridge this generational gap, and ensure that the country's future will remain in good hands.

Recent events in our lifetime showed the power of religion and faith to either bring people together or divide them, on the basis of perceived differences. The lesson we must draw from it all, is that 'icyo dupfana kiruta icyo dupfa'. As such, we should consistently reinforce our commonalities and confidently build a nation of united and empowered people.

As leaders of today and tomorrow, we urge you to challenge yourselves, to preach by example and inspire others with the values that guide you. Engage fearlessly with the world, and reflect the *Agaciro*, the dignity of your culture wherever you go, while always standing your ground when serving the best interests of your community.

Do not be afraid to be uncompromising even when the stakes are high; do not shy away from taking a tougher stand and hold your ground, for fear of unknown consequences. Keep in mind, that leaders are defined by the tough choices they make in the face of great adversity. Your decisions may come with a fair share of challenges, but you will find the determination to overcome them, by staying focused on what you're trying to achieve, for your country, for your community. Your vision should always be your true compass, not paralyzing fear.

As you walk on this path of good leadership, always remember that you do not have to be the hostages of these theories proclaiming that prosperity and progress are reserved for a few selected civilisations. After all, we are all children of God; we are all equal in the eyes of God.

So, let's should aspire to great things and nurture this fighting spirit in you, and its flame will guide you to even greater heights.

As a new dawn has risen on our nation, I wish to encourage us all to keep moving together in the same direction and fulfil our bright destiny, as described in Job 17:9 "The righteous keep moving

forward, and those with clean hands become stronger and stronger”.
(New Living Translation)

To you, young leaders, should we trust you are the ones we have been waiting for, we need your commitment, we need to hear this from you.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you a blessed day.