REMARKS OF HER EXCELLENCY MRS JEANNETTE KAGAME

UNICEF RWANDA 40TH ANNIVERSARY AND WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY CELEBRATION

Kigali Convention Centre, 20 November 2026

Honourable Ministers,

UNICEF Regional Director,

UN Resident Coordinator,

ONE UN Family,

Distinguished Guests, Partners and Friends,

And, most importantly, the children of Rwanda,

Good afternoon!

- It is a joy to join you as we celebrate 40 years of UNICEF Rwanda and mark World Children's Day, a day that reminds us of the importance of putting every child first.

- Join me in wishing a happy World Children's Day to the children of Rwanda and beyond. **Umunsi Mpuzamahanga w'Abana mwiza!**

- Since we are celebrating, it is fitting that we give a shoutout to the artists. When people who have known tragedy can create with so much joy. That is not just art. That is healing.

- Forty years ago, UNICEF made a promise to Rwanda. A promise that every child, no matter where they were born, no matter their family, no matter their circumstances, would have the chance to survive, to thrive, and to dream.

- Today, we are here to celebrate that promise kept.

- When I look around this room, I do not just see 40 years of programmes. I see 40 years of partnership. Children who lived because they were vaccinated. Children who were protected because someone spoke up for them. Children who are now mothers, fathers, teachers, doctors, leaders, because someone believed in them when they were small.

- That is what impact looks like. It has a face. It has a name. It has a future.

- Rwanda's story and UNICEF's story have grown together. From the darkest moments in our history, to the rebuilding, to the Rwanda we see today - a Rwanda where child mortality has fallen dramatically, where nearly every child goes to primary school, where girls stay in school, where stunting is being fought village by village, where children are no longer invisible.

- That did not happen by accident. It happened because of partnership. Government, UNICEF, civil society, communities, parents, and the children themselves. Each one playing their part.

- And today, I wish to honour one partnership that embodies that spirit so beautifully, the long-standing partnership between UNICEF and Imbuto Foundation.

- For over two decades, Imbuto Foundation and UNICEF have stood side by side, with a shared belief: that no girl should be left behind, no child should be denied

education because of poverty, and no young person should be denied the chance to reach their full potential.

- Together, we have kept girls in school. Together, we have supported adolescent mothers to return to education and rebuild their dignity. Together, we have championed early childhood development, youth health, mentorship, and the fight against teen pregnancy - not with pity, but with belief in the power of young people.

- Imbuto brought the heart, the community trust, and the deep understanding of Rwandan families. UNICEF brought global expertise, resources, and evidence. Together, we brought change that neither could have achieved alone.

- That is what true partnership looks like. Not just signing agreements, but standing together, year after year, for the same children.

- To UNICEF, thank you for trusting Rwandan leadership and walking with us.

- But this day and celebration is not only about looking back. It is about looking forward with honesty.

- Because children's rights are not a finished project. They are a daily promise.

- So let me say this **To the children** here in this room, and to children across Rwanda listening.

- You are not just the future. You are the present.
- Your voice matters now. Your education matters now. Your health matters now. Your safety matters now. Your dreams matter now.

Bana Bacu,

- Namwe reka ngire icyo mbasaba. I ask you, in return, to do **YOUR** very best, to move through this world with confidence, to be generous to yourselves and to one another, and to give yourselves permission to be ambitious.
- We shall never stop believing in you. You are our pride, our purpose, and our greatest gift.
- And to all of us adults in this room, our work is not done until every child in Rwanda can say: I am seen. I am safe. I am learning. I am loved.
- As we celebrate 40 years, let us make a new promise for the next 40.
- A promise that no child will be left behind because of where they live, because they are a girl, because they are poor, because they have a disability.
- A promise that we will listen to children, not just speak for them.

- A promise that we will invest in children, not just as a moral duty, but as the smartest investment any nation can make.

- Forty years ago, UNICEF came to Rwanda to stand with children.

- Today, Rwanda stands with UNICEF to say: Thank you. Thank you for 40 years of showing up. Thank you for believing in our children when belief was hard. And thank you for reafirming that a nation's greatness is measured not by its buildings, but by how it treats its youngest citizens.

- Let us celebrate children and recommit ourselves to the children who are still waiting.

- Because when we protect a child, we protect a family. When we educate a child, we transform a nation. When we believe in a child, we change the future.

- Happy 40th anniversary, UNICEF Rwanda. May the years ahead bring every child in Rwanda closer to the future we pledged for.

- Thank you. Murakoze cyane!