

Keynote Address

by

First Lady Jeannette Kagame

**At the African Union High Level Beijing+25 Global
Intergenerational Dialogue**

In commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of
Violence Against Women and Girls

Wednesday, 25 November 2020

Kigali, Rwanda

Excellencies:

- **Ms Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, Vice-President of South Sudan**
- **Ambassador Diop, Chief of Staff – African Union**
- **Ms Kate Hampton, Chief Executive Officer of the Children's Investment Fund Foundation**
- **Ms Aya Chebbi, African Union Commission Envoy on Youth**
- **Distinguished Speakers,**

Dear Youth of Africa gathered here today,

What an honor it is for me to join you at this **High Level Beijing+25 Intergenerational Dialogue**, and for the presentation of the Africa Young Women Manifesto.

Today's event could not be more significant, as it not only commemorates the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, but it also takes place during the Africa Youth Month. I commend the African Union Office of the Youth Envoy for bringing together innovative and brilliant minds, unbound by age, and for producing this Manifesto.

The ten demands spelled out in this unmistakable affirmation on the part of African young women to secure a real change, highlights the universal principles of equality and non-discrimination, and should be clearly integrated within our society and our communities.

We can no longer ignore the existing gaps to improve the health and socio-economic indicators of our continent, gaps that slow down the meaningful engagement of our promising young minds, toward contributing to all political, social and economic processes.

Distinguished Guests,

Critical areas of concern that put African young women and girls at a disadvantage continue to be linked to poverty, inequality of economic opportunity, as well as exclusion from decision-making. It is disheartening to observe that deep-seated negative traditional and cultural practices, including negative social norms, still persist to this day in some of our countries.

A recent UN study found that, half of the world's men and women feel that men make better political leaders, and that men have more right to a job when jobs are scarce, while over 40% feel that men make better business executives. And in the 13 African countries included in the study, the level of bias is even higher.

As a mother and grand-mother young at heart, I feel that this Dialogue today is not only timely; it is essential. We need inspiration from our youth to dismantle these detrimental beliefs and norms, and we must also challenge the fact that gender equality is yet to be achieved.

Why should we, in 2020 — which marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action — continue to accept the facts that:

- (1) globally, women aged 25-34 are 25% more likely than men to live in extreme poverty; that
- (2) men still control more than three-quarters of seats in parliament around the world; and that
- (3) girls and women continue to be subjected to female genital mutilation.

It is our collective responsibility to provide a pathway conducive for women and girls to achieve their full potential on an equal footing.

In the last 25 years, my country, Rwanda, has made a deliberate choice to promote gender equality and women's empowerment as an essential condition for attaining sustainable development. Spearheaded by a sustained political will at the highest leadership level, gender equality and women's empowerment has been the driving force for Rwanda's vision and transformative agenda.

A strong and comprehensive legal and policy framework was set up, in addition to relevant legal reforms. The constitutional guarantee of a minimum quota of 30% of women's representation in all decision-making organs, has resulted in women holding 50% of cabinet positions, 60% are parliamentarians in the lower chamber, and 38% in the Senate.

These concerted efforts have in turn influenced the design and implementation of policies, laws, and programmes in all sectors to become more gender responsive. In addition, the institutionalisation of gender responsive budgeting has enabled us to ensure that public institutions, especially, use public resources in a manner that benefits men, women, boys and girls equally.

Young Ladies and young Gentlemen,

This year, our continent has not been spared from the unprecedented global health emergency brought about by COVID-19. I want at this juncture, to congratulate the Office of the Youth Envoy and the African Youth Front on Coronavirus, for their tireless work during 2020 to produce the Africa Youth Lead Policy Paper: a Recovery Roadmap on COVID-19.

This paper highlights the key challenges our young people are facing on the continent, which have been aggravated by the virus. It also outlines recommendations formulated by them, as a pathway to achieving a better Africa.

Dialogue such as this one today, provides the opportunity to draw inspiration on how to review and rethink our strategies. For example, before the pandemic, youth were at the frontline advocating for jobs, for universal healthcare, for gender equality and for intergenerational co-leadership. But the COVID pandemic has emphasized the extent of inequality and injustice in our societies, and in some cases, has even deepened them.

Through Rwanda's experience, we have learnt that you have what it takes to accelerate the advancement of gender equality, and it is our obligation as parents, elders and stakeholders, to provide you with the platforms and support to play your crucial role in voicing your opinions and ideas.

At continental level, the African Union, under the leadership of His Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, has placed gender and youth issues at the heart of its priorities, thus allowing you room to trace your future, and challenge social norms that influence gender progress in each of your countries, by fully participating in national development.

In Rwanda's case, the National Strategy for Transformation has integrated as one of its critical components, a national skills development and employment promotion strategy. And it has mandated the Rwanda Development Board, to provide effective oversight and coordination in the skills development and employment promotion of our young population, with a view to promote capacity development strategies and actions to respond to public and private sector needs. Thus, addressing the issue of youth unemployment.

In addition, through our Youth Mainstreaming Public Policy, youth participation is promoted and has been essential to our success. Almost 45% of public servants are under the age of 35, and 79% are under the age of 45; in addition, 38% of public servants under the age of 30 are young women.

Young Leaders of tomorrow,

We are conscious that more than ever, we need your voices, your expertise and innovative minds. We need you to advocate and promote financing for response and prevention initiatives, to leverage available technology, and to continue and initiate new dialogues as means to educate, shift mind-sets, and disseminate potentially life-saving information, including relevant laws and rights.

It is without doubt, that this pandemic has had an impact on many of your lives, amplifying some of the challenges you face today. However, rest assured, that we are working alongside key partners to provide you the room and resources to come-up with solutions to the issues that matter to you most.

You are the backbone of our continent !

And your demands shall be our commands.

Je vous souhaite tous une très bonne continuation !