

- **Our dear hosts, the George W Bush Institute and World Vision,**
- **Fellow First Ladies here present,**
- **Representatives of different foundations and corporations,**
- **Distinguished Guests,**

I bring you warm greetings all the way from Rwanda.

What a lovely afternoon it is to be joining you for this roundtable session. Allow me to thank our gracious hosts – the Bush Institute and the World Vision – who have invited us to share our passion for changing the world, by transforming our own communities.

Rwanda has undergone an incredible journey of transformation. Sometimes, we hear people say that Rwanda is known for 4Gs. These are the gorillas, good governance, gender and genocide. Today I am here to tell you more about our story and what we want to stand for.

It all started with the need to define a clear future for ourselves as a country. A few questions were asked:

- What transformations were needed to emerge from a deeply depressing social and economic situation?
- How would we go about constructing a united and inclusive Rwandan identity? To mention a few.

Our Vision 2020 addresses these very questions; the vision is held up by 6 important pillars. One of them, which is the comprehensive human resource development for knowledge based economy, is most relevant for my message today.

My foundation is trying to complement public service, which is quite effective. I together with a sisterhood of caring and committed women, created the Imbutu Foundation. Imbutu in our language means seed and our credo is *'a seed well planted, watered, nurtured and given all the*

necessary support successfully grows into a healthy plant - one that reaches high and stands tall.'

Our mission is '***to support the development of a healthy, educated and prosperous society***'. As our mission suggests, we started taking care of families infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. We started when HIV was a major concern. We were involved with the Family Package project, which builds on PMTCT and takes a comprehensive approach to fighting the disease.

We looked at ways to provide everything these families needed to live their lives as normally as possible. African First Ladies, based on the concept that the community cares for all its children, created OAFLA which created a continental campaign "Treat Every Child as Your Own".

Then we moved on the youth. Here we started providing scholarships to brilliant yet disadvantaged children, as we were working on empowering girls, who excelled at primary and secondary school.

We however realized that a child needs more than formal education to achieve true success. So, we organized forums where we mentored students; influenced them to work on character formation - things that are not offered in a regular curriculum. We challenged our youth to learn how to set goals, how to live their lives based on Rwandan values while fitting in the global picture, and how to confidently express themselves. We have worked in health, education and economic empowerment, slowly narrowing our focus on the youth.

As you may know, just last month, Rwanda held its parliamentary elections. Women now hold 64% of the seats, a steep increase from 18% before 1994. We have more than doubled the 30% constitutional requirement. While these parliamentarians go about executing their work, we at the Foundation are playing our part to make this progress sustainable and keep the cycle going. That is why we are investing all our energy in the youth. Just to give you an idea of our work over the last 10 years we, have:

- Awarded secondary school scholarships to over 5,000 disadvantaged boys and girls,

- Publicly recognized over 3,000 girls for excelling in primary and secondary school. We bring female role models to share their success stories with the girls and further inspire them,
- Developed an integrated community based Early Childhood Development and family center for cognitive stimulation of 0- 6 year olds,
- Promoted the culture of reading and writing for primary students by conducting 9 Reading Day campaigns nationwide.
- Organized 19 youth empowerment forums to inspire youth towards excellence, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Rwanda is serious about change and transformation. In a recent op-ed by our President he described “the Millennium Development Goals as a floor, rather than a ceiling.” This shows that we are convinced that improving is a non-stop process. We want to do more, we want to do it now, and we want it to last.

Let us join forces to repair this world.

Thank you for your attention.