

**Honourable Ministers,
Director General of ICT in the Ministry of Youth & ICT,
President of Girls in ICT Rwanda,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

Good afternoon.

Allow me to start off by thanking the Girls in ICT Rwanda for this Outstanding Leader Award. I am humbled by this recognition, and believe it speaks directly to the successful mobilization within our communities, to empower our girls and women to reach their full potential.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to be with you all, as we celebrate the achievements of these inspiring young women present here today, who have succeeded at advancing imaginative solutions to some of the challenges found in our communities. From health, agriculture, employment, to urbanization necessities, these young women thought of a creative way to fill the void they saw in them, using technology.

It is truly admirable, to see an increasing number of platforms like this one put in place by Girls in ICT Rwanda,

that create the right kind of opportunities for our young women to explore the ever-expanding STEM universe.

The celebration of Ms. Geek, should be seen as an important movement; which through its increasing supporter base, one year after the next, shows that content is everything! Beyond the looks and styles one chooses to adopt, we should always remember that true strength and beauty, ultimately lie in the brainpower of the curious minds of our daughters.

Seeing such a big and diverse audience here today, is a powerful testament to how much we need more girls, and women, to embrace fields, that have been missing their personal touch, for too long. So yes, I too think that ‘geek, is the new cool.’

Esteemed finalists,

Let the trainings that have brought you to this day, continue to propel you forward, to make even more exciting discoveries that will ultimately make this world a better one, by bringing to life the theme **“Expanding horizons and changing attitudes”**.

It is my sincere hope that you will inspire countless more young girls and women to go out and seize the many opportunities that have been unlocked, thanks to gender-

sensitive policies and mindsets that support gender equality and holistic empowerment of girls.

Remember to take full advantage of strategies like the HeforShe Campaign, and I take this opportunity to, again, plead with you to sign your support to this campaign. The campaign that our President supports and which clearly states as one of its goals, the bridging of ‘the gender digital divide, and parity in ICT access, usage, and innovation’, within 5 years.

That is my hope, because after all, it is an entire society that will benefit from the contribution of an educated population, one that is free to conquer new territories, not feeling restrained by certain gender roles, or expectations.

Honourable guests,

Everything put in place to level the playing field is but a small reminder of our collective responsibility to support both our boys and girls, with more attention to the most vulnerable, not because they are less capable, but because they have been for so long considered so.

Yet, times like today, we prove that we are more than capable, and that we can mature into go-getters and well-accomplished individuals, who are making an impact in the field of their choice.

For instance, the past years have showed us impressive accomplishments by young women who have designed IT solutions to address different needs in their communities. These young women learned to use the different resources made available for them to grow, and are now inspiring more girls at the international level. It is this attitude of turning a challenge into an opportunity to create something new, and culturally relevant, that we must continue to nurture.

The pace at which our world is evolving does not allow us to slow down our own development, whether it relates to our education, health, agriculture, economy, or even, our political systems. We must therefore keep up with this 'Fourth Industrial Revolution', which undeniably reduces distances between people, and gives a new meaning to the concept of a 'global village'.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to congratulate all the 2016 finalists and once more, encourage them to build on their successes, and challenges, to soar to even greater heights.

May today serve as an inspiration for our young women, to continue seeking knowledge from platforms like this one,

and never doubt that they too, belong to this STEM world,
which will never be complete without them in it.