

First Lady Jeannette Kagame's Remarks
at the
Green Hills Academy Graduation Ceremony

Saturday, 5 June 2021

Kigali, Rwanda

Chairman of the Board of Green Hills Academy — Mr. Faustin Mbundu,
Head of School — Mr. Daniel Hollinger,
Principal of the nursery — Ms. Philistus Mugasiya,
Principal of Primary school — Mr. Jamie Whelan,
Principal of middle school — Ms. Flavia Owambo,
Principal of High School — Ms. Anna Bagabe,
Esteemed Guest Speaker — Mr. Eazi,
Members of the faculty and staff,
Esteemed parents, students, and alumni,
Class of 2021 ‘Indangamirwa’,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon.

You have no idea how happy I am to be here, 'physically', to celebrate this very special moment in the life of 64 students of Green Hills Academy. Being able to, once again, see the graduating class dressed up in their gowns and caps, **‘live’**, brings me so much joy.

This year’s graduates have a unique story to tell, one that will be remembered for decades to come. Your flexibility, and will, to adapt to the strict COVID-19 preventive measures are to be commended. You made it, and are well-deserving to be recognized, as ‘Indangamirwa’.

The fight against this pandemic has especially impacted the education sector in Rwanda, as well as across the globe.

As full-fledged team players to ensure that COVID-19 would be contained, you have taken responsibility, for your daily actions.

This has no doubt, provided you with an unexpected crash course, on what we call 'preparedness', in the lexicon of humanitarian experts, and a glimpse of the unknown, life chooses to measure our character, and resilience against.

You have all adapted so well, and succeeded to trading the comfort, friendliness and security, that comes with being in a classroom, and having constant access to your teachers and peers, to carrying out all your school activities, by facing computers and screens.

Thanks to the commitment, and untiring efforts of our country's health professionals, to respond, track, and treat COVID-19 cases — and all those involved in this life-saving endeavour — you were eventually able to return to school, to finalise your school year.

There is no doubt that the strict pandemic limitations imposed on you, such as team sports and group class projects, have influenced in some ways, the nature and level of your interaction, within, and without the school environment.

And despite it all, you have found ways to support vulnerable communities during these challenging times: Donation of stationery to the 'Groupe Scolaire Rutonde'; monetary support to the Root Foundation Women's group; and donation of school bags, to students at the root Foundation in Kagugu, just to name a few.

More than compassion, you have demonstrated communal solidarity, proving to us, and more importantly to yourselves, the true power of altruism.

Again, I commend you for your resilience, and diligence in the face of these uncustomary times.

Dear Graduands,

In the face of all you have experienced, have confidence that there is a bright future ahead. While some of you have chosen to stay close to home, to take advantage of what Rwanda has to offer, many of you have also secured acceptances to more than one university throughout the world, either in Australia, Belgium, Canada, Lithuania, Netherlands, Spain, United Arab Emirates, UK, and USA.

As you go out in the world — either pursuing your studies or otherwise — keep reaching out, keep using your abilities to bring out the best in those around you, and let them bring out the best in you, as you work towards excellence.

Adapt your ambitions, and passions, to the needs of our diverse communities, and countries. Never forget our history and, driven by the values of unity and development, think critically, and don't let fear stop you, from challenging those that seek to dismantle, what we have collectively built.

Indeed, you have stories, and memories, from your experience in Rwanda: that of sharing the culture of such a resilient people. These precious memories will have made you open, to acquire even more, out of what life has in mind for you.

Esteemed Parents,

Breathe! They have made it!

The support and dedication to your children, and the school, is admirable. This year has, once again, shown us that, without your efforts, the journey towards adapting to this 'new normal', would have been a turbulent one. You are the rock, and foundation, from which these young men and women can grow, to become the leaders that we envision – the leaders, that this country has been preparing for. For this, we are immensely grateful.

Valued Members of faculty and staff,

This is the second graduation during a pandemic, and you are still standing, smiling and giving it your all. Thank you!

The transition from physical classroom learning, to online learning, and once again, to physical learning, is undoubtedly not an easy one. It requires a lot of sacrifice, flexibility, and dedication to pull it off. Nonetheless you did it, and made it look easy.

This is a true reflection of the selfless commitment, that comes through the honourable calling, of being a dedicated teacher. I encourage and urge you to keep this spirit strong!

Class of 2021,

So much was already asked of you, during this very challenging year. But if you allow me, I have one more request: As you embark on this new journey, remember that for any obstacle you find on the way, there are always solutions. And, as we have experienced, the best, often comes out of difficult situations.

Be innovative in your outlook, “think out of the box”, source and resource yourself in seeking guidance from your professors, who will be there to advise you, and stir your way in the right direction.

My deepest wish is that when the time comes, you each will make your respective home country the best it can ever be, for all.

Congratulations once again, and thank you for your kind attention.