

- **Madam Speaker of Parliament,**
- **Right Honorable Prime Minister,**
- **Dear partners,**
- **Mrs. Cherie Blair,**
- **School representatives,**
- **Bakobwa beza, Inkubito z'Icyeza,**
- **Distinguished panelists,**

Good morning,

Fortunately I have not seen anyone on crutches today; so let me hope there were no broken bones from yesterday's football game! Is it a surprise that the team with the army and the Minister of Sports and Culture won the game? Once again, congratulations to the champions and thank you to all the ladies who participated and played good games. We hope you are more energized to further support girls' education.

Imbuto Foundation is honored to host you to this special event, celebrating 10 years of inspiring Rwandan girls to excel at school. Just a few years ago, the numbers painted a bleak and worrying picture. To use one indicator as an example: in 2005, the primary school pass rate for girls was a mere 39.1%. Due to prejudices from the past, education and thus full participation of girls and women in the Rwandan society was restricted.

We made a choice to focus on improving the performance of schoolgirls at primary and secondary level. We felt this approach would contribute to solving other challenges faced by the education sector such as access, retention and transition. Performing well in school implies that a girl is able to attend, remain in school and transition successfully through the different levels of education.

Because the government of Rwanda is committed to providing education for all, this made our campaign easier to conduct and the communities more receptive to the message. Each year, armed with bright tee shirts and a strong message, we traverse the country awarding all the top performing girls at sector, district and provincial level.

We intend to reach as many members of the community to raise awareness and build a partnership base to support girls - from parents, teachers, civil society, local leaders and most importantly the girls themselves. We are convinced that the best way to overcome the obstacles facing girls is to influence different environments where a girl finds herself – the home, the school and the community.

Today we look back on the seeds we planted 10 years ago with pride. We marvel at how the young girls we nurtured and supported have grown and become inspiring role models in their own right. Among the 4,000 girls we awarded, most are still in school and continue to

excel. The girls who have completed school have chosen impressive careers – some are university professors, engineers, medical doctors, media professionals, agronomists, civil servants, just to mention a few. Some have started their own families and are now responsible for nurturing future generations.

As of 2014, 54% of girls were passing primary school exams; this positive trend shows that – together with other partners – we have made a difference. At this milestone, we reflect on key lessons we have learned from the campaign.

1. A little encouragement goes a long way

It is beautiful to see potential leaders emerge at every awarding event. If a girl knows there is someone who believes in her, in her abilities, this goes a long way in preparing her to be a leader or role model. The idea of holding award ceremonies in a community setting creates a sense of pride, for the girls and even the communities they come from. Girls are motivated to compete, work harder, and are more confident. Given the right environment and encouragement girls continue to succeed all through their lives, making excellence a habit.

2. There is power in networks

After the girls are awarded, they carry the special title of **BPG**, or best performing girl. BPGs become part of a larger network organized into girls' clubs (which we call IZIFE clubs). The members decide on how to give back to the community, or other ways to make a difference.

Some of the clubs mentor younger girls as a way to spread this sisterhood of brilliance. Our wish is for the network to grow strong and for all the girls to remain connected. Imagine what a force of 4,000 smart, focused and disciplined girls can achieve?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All these girls you see here and the others we have awarded, are a testament to the synergy between many partners. Join me in thanking these Champions for Girls Education – the Ministry of Education, local authorities, the ONE UN family particularly UNICEF, Tumba College of Technology, Cisco, RDB, teachers, parents, all those who represented us as guests of honor and the role models that have been an inspiration to the girls – we salute you and celebrate you. This is as much an achievement for you as it is for Imbutu Foundation.

I would also like to recognize Mrs. Cherie Blair - our special guest and a strong advocate for women's empowerment. Thank you Mrs. Blair for honoring our invitation and for all the work you do to support Rwandans.

Although today is a chance for us to take a moment and celebrate, let us also think about the girls who are still struggling or are low on hope, because we have not yet reached them. For their sake, we should ask ourselves what more we can do. The latest assessment of our campaign shows us that there are plenty of opportunities to do just that. The assessment indicates that we need to examine these dimensions of exclusions more closely.

Some are:

- School drop-out due to poverty,
- Reaching more girls and more communities with messages on girls education,
- Expanding our partner base to achieve better and deeper impact.

As one author said, it takes 10,000 hours to master anything. This thinking inspired our theme of the day: **“10,000 steps to success”**. How many more steps do we need to take to find solutions for the remaining challenges? Do the steps we have taken and what we have achieved together give you confidence that we can do it? I truly hope so.

As I end my remarks, I leave you with this quote:

“We need women who are so strong they can be gentle, so educated they can be humble, so fierce they can be compassionate, so passionate they can be rational and so disciplined they can be free” Kavita Ramdas

Thank you for being here with us today and Happy 10th anniversary!