

**First Lady Mrs Jeannette Kagame's
remarks at the
"Smart Africa Women's Summit"
during the Transform Africa Summit**

Kigali, 12 May 2017

**Excellency Vice President of Zambia,
Excellencies First Ladies and Dearest Sisters,
Honourable Executive Director of UNWomen,
Honourable Minister of Gender and Family Promotion,
President of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics
Engineers (IEEE),
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Good Morning.

Allow me to start by expressing my appreciation for our gathering on this day, for the Smart Africa Women's Summit, through this exciting platform given to us by Transform Africa Summit, to continuously learn how to further embrace, and promote smart technologies, in the course of the sustainable development of our continent.

Through today's important conversation, we, as citizens of the world, are called to leverage our diverse positions to join governmental, and non-governmental, efforts for the

inclusion of our women and girls, in the heart of the current ICT revolution.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate everyone here, who played a role in the finalization of the Africa Smart Women and Girls declaration, which is now set for implementation, and look forward to everyone's full engagement in the journey to bridge the gender divide and ensure women and girls in Africa, actively participate in the digital economy.

Distinguished Guests,

We have seen through time how technology offered itself as a unique way to connect the four corners of this world, and in the process, forever changed the way we communicate, the way we work, but most importantly the way we started devising new strategies to improve livelihood in our communities.

So much so that in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognised ICT as a *‘key enabler of development’* and an *‘essential component of transformative solutions to meet today’s development challenges.’*

However, modern society or the digital age as we know it, continues to show a great digital divide not only between nations of the North and South, but also from a gender standpoint, as women significantly have lower access to these technologies.

Honourable delegates,

This Summit provides us with another opportunity to learn from one another, and set the way forward in narrowing the gender digital divide, by joining our voices and strengths, to push forward for the inclusion of our women and girls in ICT.

In Rwanda, our relationship with ICT, is fuelled by the necessity to contribute to the world’s constant need to

innovate and create solutions, and therefore remain relevant in these new economies.

Thanks to the visionary leadership of this country, and its understanding of the place ICT should occupy in our society, Rwanda continues to further invest capital and human resources into this field.

It is in this line of reasoning that my country embraced with a keen interest HeforShe, the UNWomen-led campaign championed by President Paul Kagame, who committed to *‘bridging the gender digital divide and attain parity in ICT access, usage and innovation by 2020’*.

Our drive to use ICT as a central engine in the transformation of Rwanda into a knowledge-based economy, has led us to adopting different programmes, such as the *“One Laptop Per Child”*. Launched in 2007, this programme has provided over 270,000 laptops to primary school children, and has afforded them the opportunity to discover and strengthen their computer skills.

Recognising the power of ICT to improve livelihoods, through increased access to information, products, and services, we simply could not ignore the need for platforms that celebrate, and encourage more women and girls, to pursue that field.

For instance, my Foundation, Imbuto, conducts a yearly *Best Performing Girls* campaign, as part of the *Promotion of Girls' Education* project, through which, girls who complete their secondary education with the highest academic achievements, are rewarded with laptops and an ICT training, which teaches them how to use and fix computers.

Through Imbuto, we also reward great professional accomplishments by Young Rwandan Achievers, including innovative technology platforms, that changed the digital landscape of our country.

This edition of Transform Africa Summit has also highlighted the *Ms Geek* initiative, which through an annual

competition gives young women the opportunity to showcase their ICT-driven solution to a challenge they witnessed in their communities, and through this process, inspires other young women to pursue a career in this field.

Other initiatives such as the investment-centred '*Rugori Fund*', which will be presented today by the Rwandan chapter of *New Faces New Voices* – the Panafrikan organisation working for the financial inclusion of women – is another innovative approach using digital tools for the economic empowerment of women and girls.

Distinguished Audience,

Looking forward, we can see that ICT empowers our women and girls to realise that they too, have something to contribute for their communities to fully thrive, while beautifully challenging them to design culturally-relevant solutions.

However, this path towards total elimination of the gender digital divide will only be made possible if we are able to learn from each other's successful initiatives, while fostering 'enabling environments', characterised by a better access to, and affordability of technology; the development of our women's digital skills – even for those with less formal education; and the promotion of women in the STEM fields.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I conclude my remarks, I would like to emphasize once more that we must continue to advocate for ICT to be adopted as a tool for true gender empowerment and equality, whether through new approaches like the Africa Smart Women and Girls Initiative, which is unveiled today; or by adopting resolutions from diverse high-level international forums on the question.

Together, let us stay the course for better ICT inclusion at all levels of our society, so members of our communities, regardless of age or gender, can fully benefit from the impact of these new technologies.

Together, let us ensure that no one is left behind in this exciting fourth industrial revolution we all should be a part of, as it holds great promises for all communities to raise global income levels, while improving quality of life around the world.

I thank you for your kind attention and again, wish us all to find ways to implement lessons learned through the enlightening conversations of the past few days, and carry them with us, well beyond this Summit.