

Excellency First Lady of the United Nations,
Excellency Executive Director of UN Women,
Excellencies First Ladies present,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,
All protocol observed.

Good evening.

What a great pleasure to be here this evening, as we celebrate the historical adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 5 and look forward, with much anticipation, to the immense potential this breakthrough holds for the attainment of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls around the world.

Your Excellency Executive Director of UN Women,

Thanks to the pioneering role of UN Women and its constituents, a stand-alone goal on gender equality beyond the sole area of education was included in the post-2015 development agenda. What an achievement. With this milestone, the goal of full gender equality by 2030 is a dream we dare to envision.

Distinguished guests,

Advocates for the true empowerment of women and girls know how challenging it has been and continues to be to convince some governments and policy makers, of the centrality of gender equality to development. In the case of Rwanda, the

question of whether or not to adopt gender equality as a key principle of development was not optional. It was a self-imposed imperative. Culturally however, women have always been seen as a quiet force. It was therefore another one of our home-grown solutions to have women partake in the rebuilding and transformation of our nation.

Today, Rwanda is one of the leading examples worldwide in implementing gender-responsive strategies. We began from the foundations: adopting the 30% quota for women in leadership as mandated by our constitution. And now, we are the only country in the world with 64% of female legislative representation.

Esteemed guests,

While government support is fundamental for nations to evolve towards true gender equality, those efforts need to be accompanied by initiatives from a multiplicity of partners, including the civil society.

As such, Imbutu, the Foundation I set up, has initiated various programmes promoting and highlighting the power women and girls can have, in uplifting their communities. One such initiative is the Promotion of Girls' Education, which holds an annual campaign rewarding the Best Performing Girls for their excellence in school.

These rewarding ceremonies held within the community are led by women leaders who are role models, thus inspiring a cycle of excellence. Over 4,200 girls have been awarded since the inception of this programme.

Distinguished audience,

As we take the first steps into the SDGs, we must stand in sisterly solidarity to advocate more vocally for their full implementation, and the allocation of sufficient resources to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women. But we know that our united voices are increasingly being heard. As stated by the He for She Campaign: “the movement for gender equality was originally conceived as a struggle led by women for women. In recent years, men have begun to stand up in addressing inequalities and discrimination faced by women and girls”.

There is still work to do. However, with men on board, let us be bold and believe that the dream is halfway realised.

I thank you for your kind attention, and wish you a great evening, in celebration of this great moment for women and girls everywhere.