

- **Excellencies, Dearest Sisters**
- **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good afternoon,

We have made significant progress in the fight against HIV/AIDs. And although important challenges still remain, we have seen the worst of the severe public health crisis that HIV/AIDs embodied at the end of the 20th century.

Advocacy has played a big role in this work, and we need to continue to raise awareness, as we work towards the goal of no new infections. We must do the same for polio. Today, we join the call of the African Union, to ensure that all polio vaccination campaigns in 2015 reach every last child.

The only way to achieve a polio-free Africa is to prevent infection – **relentlessly** – by immunizing every child, until transmission stops.

Rwanda has worked with the World Health Assembly's *Global Polio Eradication Initiative*, since 1988, and maintains routine immunization coverage, which now stands at 97%.

The Government of Rwanda fully finances vaccinations which given in four separate doses, in the first 14 weeks of a newborn's life.

In addition to surveillance of symptoms associated with the polio virus, health officials also carry out supplementary immunization, with additional doses of oral polio vaccines to children under five years, regardless of their vaccination history. These mass vaccination campaigns aim to reach the most at-risk children, with enough doses of vaccines, to ensure their immunity.

As a result, there have been no confirmed cases of polio for more than 20 years, and Rwanda was certified free from wild polio in 2004. This drastic decrease of polio, as has been seen in many African countries, should be a stepping-stone towards full eradication.

As First Ladies and mothers, we have the responsibility to act without hesitation to make polio-free Africa a reality. Therefore, let us commit to participating in polio immunization campaigns in our countries while mobilizing opinion leaders and stakeholders, to do the same.

Let us commit to engaging our communities, including the media, to spread the news, to keep track of developments in new WHO-approved polio vaccines.

Let us consistently promote a strong routine immunization structure, a critical component of a robust health system. This will ensure that we have the capacity to address any current and future public health threats.

We are inspired by the commendable example recently in Nigeria, where the country's polio staff was redirected to address the Ebola threat. The team managed to quickly stop Ebola's progression and the heartbreaking consequences we have seen in three neighboring countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us rise to the occasion to build a healthier future for our children. Starting this year, with a continent free of polio.

Thank you.