

**Your Majesty the Queen of Sweden,  
Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary - General on  
Violence Against Children,  
Director General of UNESCO,  
Nobel Peace Prize Laureate,  
Distinguished executives and members of the academia,  
Esteemed ladies and gentlemen,  
All protocol observed.**

**Good morning.**

We are here today because of our most precious little humans. Having inherited hundreds of thousands of orphans from the genocide, this issue has a very particular resonance with Rwandans.

It is therefore with hope and optimism about what the future holds, that I choose to speak from this platform today.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Our humanity is defined by the way we treat the most vulnerable in our communities. And history will be the harshest judge of what we have failed to accomplish in that regard.

Having experienced the worst and seen the wiping out of whole generations, we are determined to go above and beyond to offer these children a safe haven.

With parent-less children, emotionally and physically affected, we had a big problem at hand and were operating in crisis mode with barely any resources. The village had to find ways to raise the children.

Children, like Paci who at 6 years old was raising her younger siblings, finding ways to feed and shelter them while ignoring her own pangs of hunger.

Children, and young orphaned boys like Jean-Marie, who after being offered a shelter decided to give it to their orphaned sisters because they knew too well the girls' greater vulnerability.

We had to find a solution, and find one fast.

### **Distinguished audience,**

As a mother of four and a concerned citizen of the world, I continue to be appalled when looking at the numbers of abused and exploited children worldwide.

Figures show that among adolescent boys in low and middle-income countries, at least 1 out of 4 boys has been a victim of physical violence since the age of 15. And about 1 out of 10 girls in the world, has been subjected to some form of forced sexual acts, before the age of 20.

These figures should be a wake-up call for all of us, especially when considering that the perpetrators may include friends, parents, and teachers, reminding us that often, those who pose the most dangers to our children, are not always strangers, but can be the people entrusted with their care.

Every situation is complex and requires a tailored approach. One that is sensitive to the cultural realities of the community facing these kinds of abuse, yet consequential and decisive.

**Your majesty the Queen,**

We can learn from the many projects under your organisation, the World Childhood Foundation, which has now over 100 projects and is present in 17 countries.

**Esteemed guests,**

During the Genocide against the Tutsi, targeted rape was used as a weapon of war. In its aftermath, Rwanda was faced with the trying task of healing wounds, while bringing to justice perpetrators of crimes against humanity. And as in most post-conflict societies, the most vulnerable – children and women – were the ones struggling to have their rights protected.

In 2001, we passed major law reforms. One of them, the law for the *Rights and Protection of the Child against Violence*, was closely followed by the establishment of the *Child and Family Protection Unit* in the National Police system. The support of government institutions such as

the National Commission for Children was crucial in the fight against child abuse and went hand in hand with strong community mobilization.

**Distinguished guests,**

It is also in 2001, that I founded what is known today as Imbuto Foundation, catering to the most fragile groups. One of our campaigns inspired by the notion of treating every child as your own, was called 'Malayika Murinzi' or Guardian Angels.

These Angels were recognized by the community for having adopted and taking in fostered children as their own, to spare them the pain of living without some sort of sanctuary.

Today, this successful programme is being scaled up under the leadership of the Rwandan National Commission for Children.

This Commission is an independent body created in 2011. It is overseen by the Prime Minister's Office to ensure the mainstreaming of children's protection and rights is reflected in all government policies and programs.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Other national strategic reforms focused on the reintegration of children who lived in orphanages or on the street, into families. With 1% of children being orphans and almost 10% heading households, this

strategy was a necessity. Today, about one third of our orphanages have reintegrated children in family homes, and over 3,000 street children have been rescued, rehabilitated, given vocational training, and reintegrated into society.

In addition, an integrated approach led to the establishment of the Isange One Stop Centres across Rwanda. A place where victims of sexual violence can seek free services, ranging from medical treatment, psychological and legal counselling as well preliminary criminal investigation.

The successes of these centres can be attributed to the joint efforts between our ministry of health, national police and development partners.

In the same spirit of collaboration, the government and civil society have also ensured that parents do not feel alone in bringing up their children. An example of such a program is “Umugoroba w’Ababyeyi” which loosely translates to ‘Parents’ Evening’. It is a village roundtable, where parents essentially discuss and exchange concerns regarding children and their well-being.

These reforms and programmes, show that concerted efforts between government and non-governmental institutions are vital. Combined with widespread community mobilisation, they hold the power to effectively raise awareness about this noble cause, at all levels of society.

**Honourable ladies and gentlemen,**

As members of this global village, it is our duty to ensure we reach this sustainable development goal of “ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children.”

In the case of Rwanda, we have been able to achieve many and sometimes surpass the Millennium Development Goals with limited resources. We have every intention of doing the same with the Sustainable Development Goals, especially when it comes to the protection and safety of our children.

Children embody the best part of who we are. It is therefore our responsibility to create a safe and sound environment for them to flourish.

At Imbutu we believe that if a seed is well planted and nurtured, it grows into a healthy plant, one that stands tall and reaches high.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you fruitful discussions.