

**Her Excellency Mrs. Jeannette Kagame's opening speech
at the
Seventh Day Adventist International Women's Congress
August 7th, 2013 Huye district**

- **Honorable Minister of Gender and Family Promotion,**
- **Governor of the Southern Province,**
- **East and Central African Division President,**
- **General Conference women's ministries director,**
- **Rwanda Union Mission President,**
- **Vice Rector National University of Rwanda,**
- **Army and police representatives,**
- **Young ladies and women here present,**
- **Dear brothers,**

Good morning,

I am delighted to be with you at the opening of this Seventh Day Adventist Church's International Women's Congress. I wish to thank the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church in Rwanda for inviting me to be part of this gathering. I could not miss out on such a powerful force for change.

Here, I must mention that the practical side of the SDA teachings has always impressed me. A young Adventist lady once explained to me that the SDA education system is centered on a strong work ethic. On top of attending classes and studying, each student is assigned a job. It is the students who prepare meals; clean the kitchen, dormitories and school grounds; run the library and mark papers; since the students do all most of the work, support staff is lean. Students receive a small compensation for their effort and grow up understanding the importance of hard work

and being organized. This is another reason why when I received your invitation- in true SDA fashion- I had to diligently organize my schedule so that I could join you today.

To our dear guests that have come from far and wide, allow me to warmly welcome you to our country. I hope that you are comfortable and that we can offer you the best of what Rwanda has. We are pleased that you have come all the way from your respective homes to participate in this meeting. Who would believe that - 19 years after the genocide when our country was destroyed and women suffered horrors beyond human comprehension and the world abandoned us in our hour of need – a day would come when humanity and sisterhood would be revived. We thank you for that! We want to extend our love to the other ladies who could not make it here today.

We have come together this morning to begin a reflection process on how we as women and young girls, can ignite the spark that will awaken the fire and untapped potential we carry in us. Indeed, there must be something rare, distinct, and special about those that have been “*Chosen to Make a Difference*”. This is a very rich theme and I know that you are planning to explore it in depth during the remaining days of the congress.

My dear sisters,

For the purpose of our theme, it is a happy coincidence how each letter in the word CHOSEN stands for an important biblical virtue. Allow me to talk about these 6 virtues: *Character, Humility, Obedience, Servanthood, Enlightenment and Nobility*. Some of these virtues are so essential that we see the need to re-emphasize them whenever we have the chance.

Starting with the letter “C” “*Character*” is surely one of the best-kept secrets to being an exceptional woman. I liken it to a compass, a guiding light that helps us stay the course; it is also what separates a woman of substance from one of just form or an empty shell.

Speaking of substance, in our culture women are considered the heart of a home. In fact, in Kinyarwanda we say ‘*umugore ni we mutima w’urugo*’. We nurture, inspire and encourage those around us, and whether we realize it or not, we set the foundation for character building.

Apart from being the heart of a home, our societies expect a lot from us as wives, mothers, sisters, professionals and individuals. Someone once said that a woman is like a teabag, you will never know how strong she

is until you drop her in hot water. I'm sure I do not need to expand on this since every time is teatime for many of you here. This vividly illustrates a woman's 'silent strength' and her true worth.

But we should not be mistaken; it necessitates a high level of organization to wear all those hats and be successful. We should be aware of the reality that the role of a woman is important yet complex and difficult to quantify. We have to compete with men out in the workforce and at the same time assume our roles in the home. Successfully juggling multiple responsibilities, as many of us must do, is no walk in the park.

What I am saying may paint a picture of a human being with super powers; but, realistically we are not perfect and we should not even be worried about that. What is important to remember as girls and women is that there is a season and reason for everything. So we should take it in stride and see each step as one chapter in the book of our life.

The next virtue is "*Humility*" and Christ is the best example of this; although he came from heaven to earth to show us the way, he humbled Himself amidst his followers and became a servant leader. One might think humility is incompatible with being extraordinary, or see it as a sign of weakness; it is a sign of greatness and a recognition that

everyone is equally important. Being humble comes with living a serene life.

Let me emphasize that those around us are the ones who elevate us; we do not elevate ourselves. As David McCullough rightly put it: “Climb the mountain not to plant your flag, but to embrace the challenge, enjoy the air and behold the view. Climb it so you can see the world, not so the world can see you.”

The third virtue is “*Obedience*”; which comes in many forms – obedience to God, obedience to our parents, especially for you young girls. James 1: 22-25 says that “Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

“Servant hood” is a virtue that has to do with sacrificing for the greater good of humanity and for your nation. It might be hard to imagine but it is all about using your position to serve others, putting others needs before your own.

“Enlightenment” is about light and truth. It means that you have a deep understanding and knowledge of all things internal, external, and to some extent, eternal. You should use this knowledge to stand for what is right. This virtue is especially challenging but very rewarding.

Finally *“Nobility”* has to do with being honourable and having a high moral standing in society. Nobility is not necessarily the sole preserve of monarchs, but should be found in those of us who have high moral qualities. You cannot leave Rwanda without learning at least one Kinyarwanda word. We have a special term that sums up the idea behind being noble and this is – *imfura* or *ubupfura* – I would wish to believe that you are all *imfura*.

Distinguished guests,

Making a difference is a call to each and every one of us. It is a call to leave a legacy. With the help of our brothers, we have reclaimed our place in society so we should not lose this chance. We are slowly becoming conscious about the space we occupy, we have been given our place but what are we going to do with it? How are we going to make a difference? It is one thing to have it but what do we do with it? I don't want to pre-empt the upcoming discussions, but I want to leave you with some homework to think about what you are going to leave behind for the next generation of young women and girls.

Let me conclude with the high hopes that this congress will come up with inspiring solutions that will guide us all. I want to leave you with a word of encouragement from Phillipians 4:13 which says: “I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me”. And with that, I now declare this congress officially open.

Thank you for your attention.