

SPEECH GIVEN AT THE 8th NATIONAL CHILDREN'S SUMMIT
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Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Rwanda
Honourable Vice President of the Senate, Honourable Ministers, Governors,
Members of Parliament

Dear Children

Good morning. This is the second time I have had the chance to address a Parliament session in Rwanda – and on both occasions I have had the honour to be talking to a Chamber Of and For Children. It's not every country that has this kind of gathering in this kind of auspicious venue, and we applaud it and welcome it.

One of the many things I love about the Children's Summit is that it produces results. Last year, standing right here, and thanks to one of the themes of the Summit, the Prime Minister made a commitment to get children out of orphanages and into families. And it is happening. And as important is that it is happening as part of a bigger process to reform the child protection system.

Dear children, you speak and Rwanda listens. The National Children's Commission exists today because YOU asked for it and your President heard you and acted upon it. Children with disability are now elected members of district forums because of a recommendation YOU made and that was listened to and acted upon.

Dear children – this year you have chosen to talk about some very important issues. Your overall theme is dignity and you want to interact with leaders and activists on some very important questions around keeping healthy and how you can prevent alcohol and drug abuse; about supporting every child to grow up in a loving family; and how we can all be well nourished, healthy, hygienic, and happy.

A dignified childhood is about getting the best possible start in life: surviving; thriving; being safe, healthy and protected; being well fed; going to school and learning and developing to your full potential.

A dignified childhood is growing up in a loving, family environment, having the space to play, and to learn about all the wonders that life can bring. And it is about learning to protect yourself, and knowing what is right from what is wrong.

Every child should have the protection and support of a loving family. Children who end up on the streets are having their childhood their dignity taken away from them. We all have a responsibility to help vulnerable children to have the dignified childhood that **every** child has the same right to, no matter who they are, where they come from or what they've been through.

Let me reiterate. Every child has the right to grow up in a family environment. A home is an empty shell if we do not protect the children who live within it, and provide for their basic needs and rights - the right to survival, to development and

protection. Children cannot live, grow and develop if they are not given nutritious and diverse foods. Children cannot thrive if they are abused or violated in anyway, forced to live on the streets, or consume drugs and alcohol. Children cannot prosper if they do not receive timely and proper medical treatment when they are sick. As parents, it is our responsibility to ensure that all of our children are cared for. And children and young people, you have a role to play too.

Dear Children,

We want you to be confident, responsible, healthy, well educated and the best you can ever be.

Isuku ni isoko y'ubuzima. Maintaining clean personal hygiene is dignifying. And you too have an important role in this. It is your responsibility to remember to wash your hands before eating, and after using the bathroom. Wear clean clothes and bathe with soap and water each and every day. When you feel good about yourself, often others feel good about you too.

I ask you to read about drug abuse, talk about it with your friends, discuss it with your parents. Drug use is a dangerous habit and is becoming one of the biggest threats to children and young people. Drug abuse has several disastrous consequences. It can damage your brain, your body, and your future. Keep your dignity by staying away from drugs. Do not take drugs or alcohol to impress other people. Respect yourself, and other people will respect you.

My dear children, you are the future of Rwanda, and what you do today will affect your future, and the future of your children. Take advantage of the opportunities you are given now for a better, brighter, dignified future. I would like to congratulate you, and thank you, for all that you are doing to ensure that this happens.

I would like to thank the Government of Rwanda for enabling this unique forum for children to happen and for seeing how the dreams and recommendations of children expressed can become reality. **For we are dreamers and we are do-ers.** And this Children's Summit has always produced results.

Let me end by just recalling that the idea to bring the Children's Summit to the Parliament last year, **for the very first time**, came from the late Minister Inyumba. She moved it out of hotels and into this chamber. She was a true Champion of Children. She believed that as citizens and future leaders the children of Rwanda had every right to be airing and sharing their views in this special chamber. And she was right.

I know she is looking upon us and smiling today as we take one of her many legacies forward.

Dear children, let me end by saying...

Ejo hazaza ni mwe - the future is yours. Murakoze cyane