



Jeannette Kagame Shares Rwanda's Journey to Orphanage-free Society

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(c) The First Lady Jeannette Kagame joined some of the invitees for the Global First Ladies Alliance, which was held on the margins of UNGA

The First Lady Jeannette Kagame has told her counterparts from across the world that reintegration of thousands orphans into foster or adoptive families was a success thanks to country's tradition to recognize a child as a product of the whole society.

The integration happened in the wake of 1994 Genocide against Tutsi where over a million Tutsi were killed in three months. Parents left behind 75,000 devastated orphans that needed urgent support of society.

"At the end of the Genocide, my country was left with the overwhelming responsibility to tend to the broken hearts, the injured bodies, and rebuild the destroyed institutions," Mrs Kagame said at the Global First Ladies Alliance in New York.

Global First Ladies Alliance, a platform that supports first ladies, individually and collectively, in their efforts to advance positive change in their communities and around the world.

Mrs Kagame said in Rwandan traditions, "no institutions had ever been created for the sole purpose of taking in children that had lost their parents: they were automatically the responsibility of their extended families, and communities."

Building on this culture, the government puts in place mechanisms to integrate the children into either foster and/or adoptive families.

Two important events in 2007 will be memorable in Rwanda, as far as protecting the vulnerable children is concerned.

In 2007, a holistic approach in protecting the children was put in place under the National Strategic Plan for Orphans and Vulnerable Children.

The same year, Imbuto Foundation, an organization chaired by the First Lady initiated the network of '*Malayika Murinzi*', which means 'Guardian angels', to create a protective environment for children without appropriate care, by promoting adoption and foster care.

Currently, Rwanda has more than 3,000 Malaika Murinzis, the adults with remarkable compassion and fiercely protective love, in taking care of abandoned children.

"We made the decision to publicly recognize these men and women for their acts, in order to encourage others to do the same, and reignite the cultural flame of responsibility towards children and the most vulnerable," said the First Lady.

Another national move, the Strategy for National Child Care Reform in 2012 phased out orphanages, to make Rwanda an orphanage free country.

The move, said Mrs Kagame, intended to "reintegrate children into sustainable family-based care, as an entry point to building sustainable child care, and protection systems."

Results speak volumes. So far, 2,909 out of 3,323 children living in institutions have been reintegrated into families; and 21 out of 33 surveyed institutions-orphanages- managed to reintegrate all their children.

"As a nation that lived through the most extreme failure of humanity and had to rebuild itself from the ground up, we found ourselves having to use unconventional, and at times, unpopular, methods to