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## Parliament Gets Female Speaker

The New Times (Kigali)

### NEWS

7 October 2008

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By Felly Kimenyi  
 Kigali

Little known Rose Mukantabana yesterday joined the small group of women Speakers of Parliament when she was elected to lead the Second Parliament that had just been sworn in.

A woman representative from Kigali City, Mukantabana has been an advocate for the rights of vulnerable groups like children and women and this is her first term in the House which 56 percent are female.

She replaces Alfred Mukezamfura third highest ranking personality after the President of the Republic and the Senate president.

She made history being the first woman in the Great Lakes Region to become Parliamentary Speaker, the sixth in Africa and 31st in the whole world, according to the Inter Parliamentary Union.

African countries that have women Speakers are Gambia, South Africa, Swaziland (Senate president), Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

Mukantabana won a landslide victory over her opponent, Abbas Mukama after she was elected by 70 of the 80-seat House.

For the first time since the elections were held two weeks ago, President Paul Kagame commented on the world record women representation that Rwanda realized in these past elections.

"This means a vote of confidence that Rwandans gave to women and this was mainly because they have contributed much to the country's development in the past few years," said the President while presiding over the swearing in of the MPs.

He urged the lady parliamentarians to use the opportunity to promote the rights of women especially in fighting gender-based violence.

"The fact that Rwandans elected the majority of their representatives in parliament as women illustrates that any form of discrimination has no room in this country," he said.

President Kagame said that the foundation laid by the First Parliament was 'very firm' urging the new entrants to build on it and bring more innovations in line with the country's development agenda. He also lauded Rwandans for their large turn up at the elections.

98 percent of registered voters turned up at the different polling centres across the country to elect the new Parliament. Also elected shortly after the swearing-in ceremony were the first and second Deputy Speakers; one in charge of laws and inspection of government activities while the other is in charge of finance and administration of the parliament.

To that effect, Dennis Polisi retained his position as first Deputy Speaker while the immediate former Minister of Health, Dr Jean Damascene Ntawukuriyayo became the second Deputy Speaker, replacing Yvonne Mukayisenga.

In her inaugural speech, Mukantabana specifically thanked President Kagame for the opportunity he has accorded women to contribute to the development of the country.

"My pledge to Rwandans is that this second parliament will play its role in the development of our country we shall of course build on what our predecessors had achieved," she said shortly after being elected.

The general elections saw 53 parliamentarians elected from different political organizations. The elections were swept by a coalition led by Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) which won 78 percent representing 42 of the 53 contested seats.

Runners-up were the Socio Democratic Party (PSD) which got seven seats and the Liberal Party (PL) four seats.

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The elections were also conducted indirectly by interest groups that included women.

The new parliament immediately resumed its activities that very afternoon.

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