



'Excluding Women is Shortsightedness'

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President Paul Kagame has said that for a country to exclude women, who form a big percentage of nations' populations, is shortsightedness and a waste of human resource. The President was giving his acceptance speech after receiving the African Gender Award 2007 during a lively ceremony held on Wednesday at the Daniel Sorano Theatre in the Senegalese Capital, Dakar.

The award is granted every two years by Femmes Africa Solidarité in conjunction with the Pan African Centre for Gender, Peace and Development in recognition of the most gender-sensitive Head of State on the African continent.

"Prohibiting more than half of a country's population from engaging in productive socioeconomic activity amounts to shortsightedness - and is without question, a waste of human resources. "Therefore a nation that promotes women is not doing women a favour but, doing the nation itself a favour," Kagame said as he took his hosts through the roadmap which helped Rwanda forge a gender-sensitive society. Ads by Google

Kagame noted that the current Rwandan gender-sensitive policies were inspired by experience gained during the liberation struggle to create a better Rwanda in the early 1990s when women and men together mobilized, managed resources and fought side by side.

"If there was any doubt on the part of our male colleagues about women's ability during the early part of our struggle, it proved baseless. This is what solidified our belief and practice in "ability" as the single most important determining factor in the role of individuals - men or women," the President said.

Kagame, who was presented the biennial award by Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, explained Rwanda's progress in promoting equality between men and women.

"We put in our Constitution a provision of a minimum 30 percent of women's participation in all national decision-making institutions. As you have been told, 49 percent of the Rwandan deputies are women," he said.

"Also 42 percent of the Supreme Court judges are women, including its president. I must add that they are doing a very good job," he added.

The President elaborated on the three strategies which saw the country turn a new page in women emancipation, considering that past regimes did not only promote ethnic and regional discrimination but also sidelined women in socioeconomic and political activities.

He mentioned the three strategies as creation of women advocacy network at all levels, removing gender insensitive laws and third, "facilitating access to education for women and girls in order to equip them with a basis for pursuing equal opportunities in all aspects of national life."

The President also talked about braindrain, encouraging African governments to create the right environment to retain "our most talented daughters and sons - and to even go further and draw the best from the rest of the world."

The award-giving ceremony took place at the end of an African Gender Forum, which among others, discussed migration of Africans to the west.

Also awarded were two Rwandan women organisations, Profemmes Twese Hamwe and Banque Populaire pour la Promotion de la Femme, which won the Civil Society award and Private Sector prize, respectively, since both are from the Award-winning country.

The Vice-President of Liberia, Joseph Boakai, handed the prizes to Profemmes Twese Hamwe's president Therese Bishagara, and the bank's president Henriette Zimulinda.

Kagame becomes the third Head of State to win Africa Gender Award, which was inaugurated in 2005, when Presidents Wade and

South Africa's Thabo Mbeki, shared it then.

And Kagame could not fail to salute the former recipients. He told Wade: "I am greatly honoured to join the club with you and President Mbeki. The two of you are leaders not only in promoting women's equality but on many other issues on our continent - so I am very happy to be joining you."

President Wade said of Kagame: "This is a wonderful day for Senegalese people because they have the opportunity to receive one of the Heads of State of Africa who fights for the continent and also supports women."

The colourful and animated award-giving ceremony featured performances by Senegalese and Rwandan troupes as well as South African singer Yvonne Chaka Chaka.

Kagame's award was announced earlier this year in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, by a selection committee chaired by Ambassador Gertrude Mongela, the president of the Pan African Parliament.

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