

By Michael Odeng

The First Lady and Minister of Education and Sports, Mrs Janet Museveni, has been honoured with the 'International Woman Icon Award 2025', for her unwavering commitment to advancing women's empowerment, education and the country's development.

The award was presented to her by the Centre for Women Studies at Binary University, Malaysia, during a ceremony held at State House Entebbe on Saturday.

Prof. Joseph Adaikalam, the founder and chairperson of Binary University, together with his wife, Prof. Rohini Devi, handed over the award to Mrs Museveni.

The award, which celebrates exceptional women leaders and inspires the next generation of change-makers, is conferred to only one person in the World every year.

In her acceptance speech, Mrs Museveni told the gathering, which included ministers and education ministry staff: "The award is a collective effort. It is equally yours as it is mine."

The First Lady said the prestigious award should inspire the young population to lay their own brick on building Uganda.

"May we all be inspired to do our part and weave a beautiful story of progress as we serve and build our homeland," she advised.

Mrs Museveni said in the current electoral season, Ugandans can contribute to nation-building by being instruments of peace and unity, and by exercising their constitutional right to vote.

She noted that doing so will protect the gains achieved under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) administration led by President Yoweri Museveni, and propel the country towards the socio-economic transformation that Ugandans hope and pray for.

Museveni also attended the ceremony.

EXILE HARDSHIPS

Mrs Museveni used the occasion to recount the challenges she faced while raising her children in exile during the 1980s, saying they inspired her commitment to serve humanity.

The First Lady recalled how, while fleeing Uganda, she arrived at Entebbe Airport carrying two of her children, when a man quietly warned her that a ruthless government official known for arbitrary arrests was disembarking from the same aircraft she was supposed to use to travel to Nairobi, Kenya.

She said the man hid her and the children in his office, until the official passed, then

FIRST LADY HONoured FOR ADVANCING

PHOTOS BY MPALANYI SSENTONGO



Mrs Museveni (second-left) accompanied by Museveni (left), receiving the International Woman Icon Award 2025 from Devi, (second-right) and Adaikalam (right) at State House Entebbe on Saturday. (Scan photo using Vision Digital Experience to watch video)



Mrs Museveni receiving a certificate of recognition for her unwavering commitment to advancing women's empowerment, education and the country's development, from Prof. Adaikalam at State House Entebbe on Saturday

ensured they boarded the plane safely. She said this was one of the moments in which God positioned people to protect her family.

Mrs Museveni further narrated that while in Kenya, the Ugandan community there

learnt that the Government planned to force political refugees back home and that her family was top on the list.

"But a lady from the United Nations Refugee Office, whom I did not know, advised me to leave immediately and

secured a safe place and travel arrangements for me and my four children to Sweden.

"The post-independence political strife, religious and ethnic sectarian violence plunged the country into darkness. The foundations

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of our nation had completely broken and our economy had been brought to its knees and put in a state of coma.

"Like sheep without a shepherd, our people got scattered far and wide looking for asylum and many that stayed in the country got murdered in cold blood," she said.

RAY OF HOPE

Mrs Museveni said the ray of hope started to shine in Uganda following the establishment of a new administration for the State under the leadership of Museveni in 1986.

She said HIV/AIDS spread in Uganda in the late 1980s and 1990s, prompting her to start

Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO), a non-governmental organisation.

"So, as a country, we found ourselves faced with an unseen enemy that was decimating the young and old; the vulnerable and resourceful among our people, while leaving in its wake the burden of orphans, widows and child-headed households," Mrs Museveni stated.

She said the organisation rescued, rehabilitated and provided holistic care to hundreds of orphans.

Mrs Museveni said she also started an organisation called, The National Strategy for the Advancement of Rural Women in Uganda, to assist the rural women of Uganda.

Through the organisation, the First Lady said, they started a micro-finance intervention to upgrade women at the grassroots all over Uganda, while teaching and training them in modern methods of farming to upgrade their household incomes.

KARAMOJA DEVELOPMENT

The First Lady said when she became Karamoja minister, people had suffered insecurity due to cattle rustling and she contributed to their social and economic transformation.

As a Minister of Education and Sports, the First Lady said she will focus on ensuring access to education, preferably a holistic education for every

EDUCATION, WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

ACHIEVEMENTS

The state minister for Higher Education, Dr John Chrysostom Muyingo, described the First Lady as a pillar of reform and progress in the education sector.

Muyingo said the award reflects her steadfast leadership and transformative reforms that have reshaped the education ministry and the country at large.

According to him, Mrs Museveni's tenure has registered key milestones, including reviving stalled projects, such as the Uganda Teacher and School Effectiveness project that constructed 140 primary schools, and overseeing the construction and commissioning of over 200 new seed secondary schools in sub-counties countrywide.

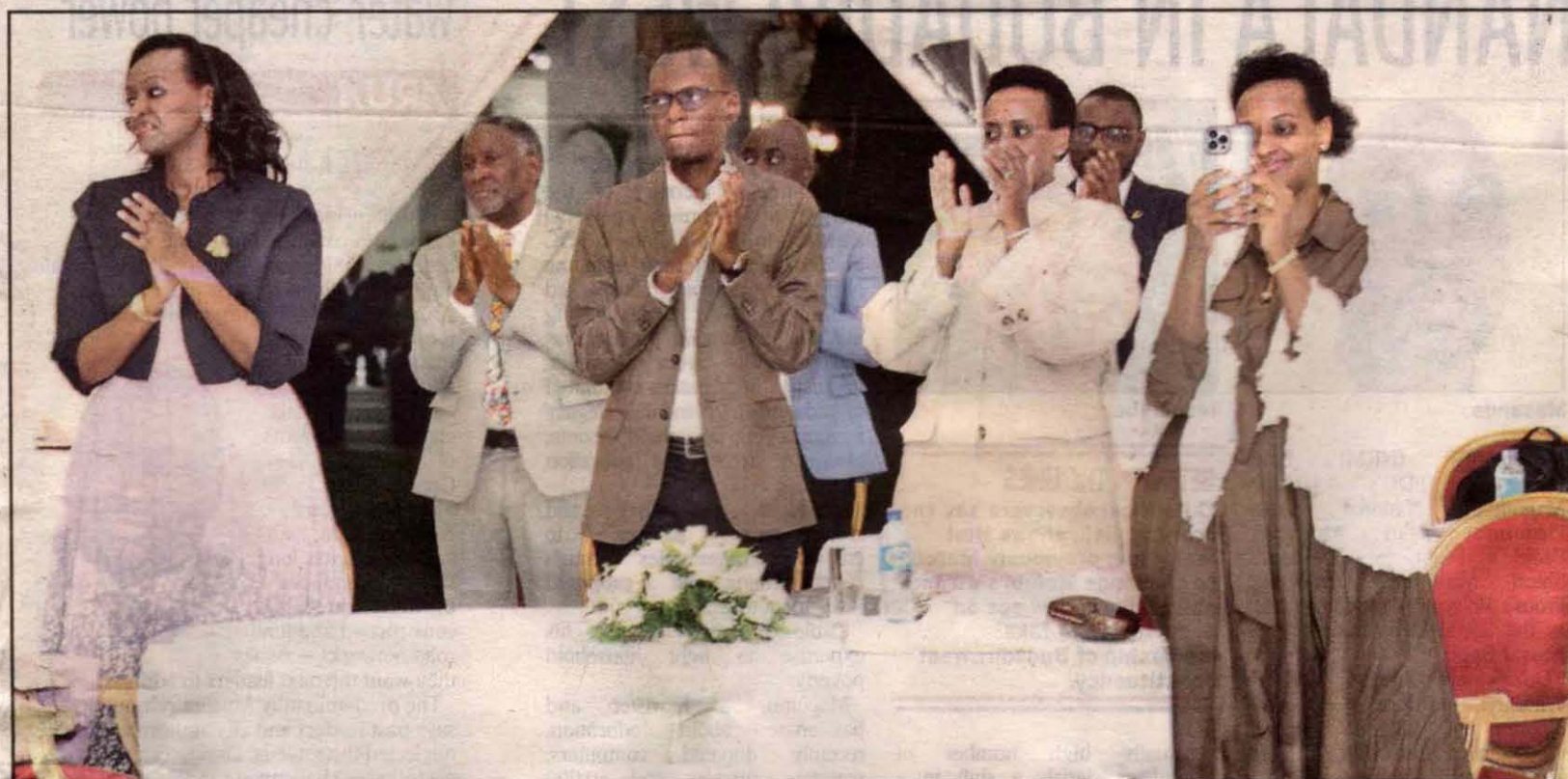
He revealed that the First Lady gave the nation a revised lower secondary school curriculum that is competence-based and has stirred young people to get interested in hands-on skilling.

"Mrs Museveni has also reviewed the primary school level and A'level curricula to make them competence-based."

Muyingo also said Mrs Museveni has overseen the establishment of over 25 new vocational training institutes and expansion of five technical and vocational education and training colleges into centres of excellence in vocational training.

Prof. Joseph Adaikalam, the founder and chairperson of Binary University, said they celebrated Mrs Museveni as a woman whose compassion, integrity and lifelong dedication to education, family welfare and national development have touched countless lives. He said Mrs Museveni's work stands as a shining model of service.

Binary University Malaysia focuses mainly on entrepreneurship, promoting investment, and has nurtured hundreds of young entrepreneurs. It mainly focuses on producing graduates who are not only academically smart, but also industry ready.



Front row: Diana Kyaremura Museveni, Edwin Karugire, his wife Natasha Karugire and Patience Rwabwogo during the ceremony



Adakalam (left), Muyingo and the Honorary Consul of Malaysia to Uganda, Haji Habib Kagimu, during the ceremony

child of school-going age.

"If a child leaves our schools more disciplined, skilled, ethical and hopeful, then I will have done my duty," she noted.

MUSEVENI SPEAKS OUT

On his part, President Museveni said the First Lady deserved the award in recognition of her contribution to the country.

He noted that during the struggle, women freedom fighters did not focus on philanthropy, saying it was the role of the state to support citizens, yet the state did not

have the necessary resources.

Museveni, however, stated that the First Lady went on to pioneer a culture of philanthropy in Uganda and later became a political actor, "without seeking cheap popularity".

Museveni recounted that when the First Lady joined active politics, she approached leadership with firmness.

"If she wants something done, she does not engage in cheap politics of pleasing people; she insists on what is correct."

The President said the First Lady practises politics in an

idealistic and enlightened manner, rather than indulging in what he called "politics of massaging mistakes". He also described her as a committed prayerful leader.

The President said Uganda's international profile has grown since the First Lady assumed the leadership of the education ministry.

"We have done a lot for sports, including constructing a number of stadiums, such as the one in Hoima," he said.

Museveni also recognised Maama's contributions, saying she has played a central role in his life, noting that her support

BETWEEN THE LINES

● Mrs Museveni said in the current electoral season, Ugandans can contribute to nation-building by being instruments of peace and unity, and by exercising their constitutional right to vote.

has helped him establish an enduring legacy.

He recalled that during his time in the bush war, Maama Janet shouldered the full responsibility of raising their children, guiding and protecting them as a sole parent.

"Beyond that, she is a very gifted home builder, she knows how to do things to build houses. She's so detailed and sees what I can't see. I do farming, but she is very good with homestead and I salute her for that," Museveni added.

The President also described the First Lady as a philanthropist, whose compassion and humanitarian work continues to touch different lives.

"She is a philanthropist. The state should have been the one to take care of the people, but it might not have the resources in time, so that's how they came up with UWESO, but they did a wonderful job, which the Government was unable to do. She started a movement with

her colleagues."

He also commended the First Lady for being a prayer warrior, adding that this has encouraged him to start praying.

"I don't disturb God so much, I pray once in a while, but Maama prays all the time. Now I also pray every day under her command. We pray every night and, of course, prayers work," Museveni said.

He added that these prayers have played a very significant role in uplifting sports in the country.

"Because of those prayers, the sector of sports in Uganda is now a big name internationally. For sports, we had not done a lot, we had a few stadiums, but in her time, we have come up and we are shining, this is partly because of Maama's prayers, together with her team," Museveni remarked.

She praised the First Lady for being resilient and accepting to go to Karamoja as a minister, adding that she changed a lot of lives during her tenure.

Others who attended included Kasule Lumumba, the Minister in charge of general duties in the Office of the Prime Minister and Alice Kaboyo, the state minister for Luwero triangle and Rwenzori region. Also, permanent secretaries; Dr Kadrace Turyagyenda (education) and Aggrey Kibenge (gender) were present, among other education ministry staff.