

# To Achieve Equality, First Lady Wants to 'Shake Things Up'

Africa's future lies with women who run businesses, girls who attend university and "leaders like you," U.S. first lady Michelle Obama told young Africans attending the Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders Summit in Washington.

"Leadership is about creating new traditions that honor the dignity and humanity of every individual. Leadership is about empowering all of our people — men, women, boys and girls — to fulfill every last bit of their God-given potential," she said to the gathering of Africa's future leaders.

"When we commit to that kind of leadership across the globe, that is when we truly start making progress on girls' education. Because that's when families in small villages around the world will demand equal opportunities for their daughters. ... That's when countries will willingly and generously invest in sending their girls to school," she stated.

The first lady noted that girls who are educated earn higher wages, are more likely to stand up to discrimination and abuse, and have healthier children who are more likely to attend school themselves.

She recalled that while neither of her parents had gone to university, "they had the courage and foresight to push me to get the best education I could."

"That's what should drive us all — the hope of raising the next generation to be stronger, smarter and bolder than our generation. ... So many of you are already doing that."

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The first lady called on the men at the summit and others in the YALI Network to tell all the men they know "that a truly strong, powerful man isn't threatened by a strong, powerful woman. Instead, he is challenged by her, he is inspired by her, he is pleased to relate to her as an equal." She implored them "to keep modeling that behavior yourselves by promoting women in your companies, passing laws to empower women in your countries, and holding the same ambitious dreams for your daughters as you do for your sons."

She called on women at the summit and in YALI — some of whom may have disappointed their families by postponing marriage in order to get an education — to help others to do the same.

Obama told the group that when they face obstacles and resistance in their work goals to remember the words of the man for whom their fellowship is now named — the late South African leader Nelson Mandela:

"It always seems impossible until it is done."

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## [YALI Fellowship Renamed to Honor Nelson Mandela](#)

To the rousing applause of young African leaders meeting in Washington, President Obama announced July 28 that the Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders has been renamed to honor the late South African leader Nelson Mandela.

“This program reflects Madiba’s optimism, his idealism, his belief in what he called the endless heroism of youth,” Obama told the fellows on the first day of their three-day summit. He said the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders program has been so successful that it will double in size to 1,000 fellows in 2016.

Obama launched the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) in 2010 to support an emerging generation of African leaders as they work to drive economic growth, enhance democratic governance and strengthen civil society. During his 2013 trip to Africa, Obama announced the creation of this fellowship, which connects young African leaders to leadership training opportunities at some of America’s top universities.

Obama praised those attending the summit as well as YALI Network members taking part through social media. He said the United States aims to partner with tens of thousands of young people “across the continent, empowering them with the skills and training and technology they need to start new businesses, to spark change in their communities, to promote education and health care and good governance.”

“The security and prosperity and justice that we see in the world cannot be achieved without a strong and prosperous and self-reliant Africa,” he said. He called YALI “a long-term investment” in Africa and its youth “and a future we can build together.”

The Washington Fellows Summit serves as the lead-up event to next week’s inaugural [U.S.-Africa Leaders Summit](#), the largest gathering any U.S. president has held with African heads of state and government. Obama complimented the fellows for drafting recommendations for African leaders to consider during their summit, calling the recommendations “outstanding pieces of work.”

Obama said that through YALI, the United States is investing in the next generation of African leaders and has committed significant resources to enhance leadership skills, bolster entrepreneurship and connect young African leaders with one another, the United States and the American people. Signature aspects of this expansion include:

- four [Regional Leadership Centers](#) in Ghana, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa,
- new virtual resources and vibrant physical spaces for the YALI Network, and
- hundreds of new entrepreneurship grants and mobile incubators.

To the delight of his audience, Obama also said that the annual U.S.-supported Global

Entrepreneurship Summit in 2015 will take place in sub-Saharan Africa for the first time.

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