Seoul Peace Prize Acceptance Remarks

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Thank you so much. I am deeply honored to accept the 2026 Seoul Peace Prize and deliver these remarks on behalf of CAMFED, the Campaign for Female Education in Africa. Let me join our CEO — and my CAMFED Association sister — Angeline Murimirwa, in voicing our gratitude to the Board of Directors and the Selection Committee of the Seoul Peace Prize Cultural Foundation.

Together, we're proud to represent our unique pan-African movement, born out of the first graduates supported by CAMFED to go to school in rural Zimbabwe. Today, as Angie said, there are more than 355,000 of us across Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe - girls' education leaders who were once at the very margins of society, and who now spearhead CAMFED's programs at every level.

All our colleagues, our community champions, our supporters and our sisters in the CAMFED Association are with us in spirit today, because our movement is strong, it's global, and it's providing a blueprint for community-led change.

We know from our lived experience that for an individual girl, education changes everything. It's her right, and it unlocks her power to choose who she will become and what she will do with her life.

For the world, girls' education can change our entire future. It has been proven time and again to advance health, gender equality, social justice, economic development, and even our ability to tackle climate change. All of these pillars of human progress play a vital role in creating and maintaining stable, peaceful societies, where everyone can thrive.

Yet only 5% of the most disadvantaged girls in rural Africa complete secondary school.

Girls face a complex web of financial and social challenges — from the cost of fees, uniforms and transportation to the fact that rural schools are often under-resourced and

unable to respond to girls' specific needs — including support to overcome the poverty-related pressure to marry at a young age.

Even those who manage to complete school, graduate into an abyss - a lack of jobs, opportunities, and female role models.

Girls' exclusion from education results in women's exclusion from decision-making at every level, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

Angie spoke about the deep commitment of CAMFED graduates to our families, communities, and the next generation.

The first 400 of us were determined to be the role models and mentors that girls in our villages needed. And that determination, coupled with the financial resources our local and global donor partners are providing, has grown into a development model like no other, led by young people who know what it takes for girls to learn and lead.

CAMFED's proven 3-level model helps girls to thrive in school, and equips them with the skills and community support they need to succeed as young women.

Level 1 is all about girls

We provide girls with individualized financial and material support to go to school. And we build a nurturing support network around them, made up of parents, teachers, traditional leaders, local authorities and young women who were so recently in their shoes.

Level 2 is all about young women

Most of you will be aware that a raft of global studies have shown a strong positive correlation between women's participation in leadership and long-term peace and societal stability.

The young women I mentioned who are part of the support network around girls are CAMFED graduates who have lived the challenges girls in their communities face, and are the true experts in what it takes to support them to succeed. They've chosen to join the CAMFED Association, our rapidly growing leadership network of women committed to mentoring each other, as well as the next generation.

As trained Guides at every stage - in school, immediately after graduation, and as young women embark on entrepreneurship and other careers - they provide critical social

support, life skills and wellbeing information, and equip graduates with the skills to transition to further education and fulfilling work, including in climate-smart agriculture.

Most importantly, we're seeing graduates step into leadership positions in education, health, business, policy and the law. As role models and mentors, they are safeguarding vulnerable children, tackling harmful gender norms, and creating jobs and opportunities in their communities and beyond.

The "Multiplier Effect" created is phenomenal. Our donors help grow a movement where each graduate in the CAMFED Association financially supports, on average, 3 more girls to go to school, and mentors many more.

Level 3 of CAMFED's approach is about whole generations of children

Our collective goal is to transform education systems to better serve the needs of ALL children by focusing on the most marginalized girls.

Through partnerships with Ministries of Education, Youth and other relevant areas, we have been convening government and fellow civil society organizations to identify how components of CAMFED's "Guide" model can be deployed across national education systems. This scale-up of youth-led mentorship is happening across five African nations as I speak, benefitting millions more children.

But what does this look like in practice?

Let me introduce you to just three of the hundreds of thousands of women leaders who exemplify CAMFED's 3-level model.

There's Eliza Teleka in Malawi. Supported through her secondary and tertiary education by CAMFED, today she is a teacher, entrepreneur and social innovator. She founded an agro-processing business making peanut butter, peanut and corn snacks.

Through her business she provides healthy foods to her community, and uses some of her profits to fund the education of more children. She has also equipped 60 young women with the skills to start and grow their own businesses. Her work has earned her national recognition as the founder of one of Malawi's top youth-led enterprises, and she served as the elected National Chair of the CAMFED Association in Malawi for three years, heading up a network of 37,000 CAMFED graduates. She says, "*At the school where I teach, I talk to the students about how my business works and have shown them the whole production process from start to finish. I hope I am able to inspire them to venture into entrepreneurship*."

Eliza takes every opportunity to advocate for girls' education nationally and globally. She told us, "I have seen the community's mind-set towards women and girls completely change. People are amazed and say 'A woman can do great things even before getting married and without her parents!' Both men and women come to me for business ideas and advice, I am a motivator and am a role model for many."

I also think of Esnath Divasoni, a CAMFED graduate from rural Zimbabwe, who made it her business to revive Indigenous farming techniques. She supports smallholder farmers, especially young women, to become more resilient to climate shocks, so that they can keep growing the food we all need for our children to thrive.

Esnath knew what hunger felt like, and dedicated herself to becoming an expert in sustainable agriculture through her university studies. She then led the development of our award-winning Agriculture Guide program. These Guides are CAMFED graduates who draw on the knowledge they gained at secondary school — like creativity, problem-solving and leadership skills — and combine it with technical expertise to equip local farmers with affordable techniques for soil conservation, irrigation, fertilization, pest management and agroforestry. They build on and extend Indigenous knowledge of the interaction between local species, local climate, and the larger ecosystem.

Esnath was also instrumental in the development of a new approach to in-school climate education, launched by CAMFED with ministries of education in Zimbabwe and Zambia. She now works in our Enterprise team to support young women's businesses, especially in agriculture, the life blood of our communities.

Esnath accepted CAMFED's UN Climate Action Award at COP25 and regularly joins high level discussions on sustainable futures. She says, *"Together with my CAMFED Association sisters we are showing that inclusive, quality education — in the classroom and beyond — is key to the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals, from gender equality to climate action, from zero hunger to poverty eradication."*

Esnath's commitment touches every level of CAMFED's work - ensuring students understand the cause and consequences of climate change and develop the agency to build resilience together; supporting young women to set up climate-smart businesses and become leaders on food security; and engaging with ministries and global partners to create a more equitable world.

Finally, there's Diris in Tanzania, who, like the majority of the girls we support, faced extreme hardship. Having lost both of her parents, she and her siblings relied on community support to see them through. She told us, *"I visited various neighbors,*

orphanage centers, church leaders and teachers to ask for contributions to my bus fare and other school costs. Even with their support I struggled, but I knew that education would be my path to change my life and help others." Diris never gave up on her dream of going to university.

This is where she met CAMFED, which supported her studies in political science and public administration. Diris joined our sisterhood, the CAMFED Association, and became a trainer of CAMFED Learner Guides - the peer mentors working in schools. She says, *"We understand intimately that extreme poverty means a lack of choice and control — over your body, and your future — so most Learner Guides go beyond the call of duty. That way we can also be a great help to teachers, as we create the link between families and schools. Parents are proud when they see retention and exam results improve."*

Diris worked closely with our Community Development Committees - which are made up of district officials, teachers, parents, social workers and CAMFED graduates - to support young women's transition to positions of leadership and influence. This included supporting graduates to get their businesses licensed, and to apply for special interest-free loans CAMFED offers to our Learner Guides in return for volunteering.

She worked alongside other Community Champions to form Parent Support Groups, a key element of CAMFED's holistic support for vulnerable children. These groups set up money-making ventures that allow them to buy basic school supplies for more children, as well repairing school infrastructure, growing food in school gardens, and providing nourishing school meals.

During school closures amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Diris worked with colleagues and district committees to support students' learning and wellbeing via radio and TV sessions. She appeared alongside the government's social welfare officer to address issues such as child protection, and COVID-19 safety measures, as well as leading radio-based life skills sessions usually delivered by Learner Guides in classrooms.

Today Diris works in CAMFED Tanzania's national programs team, applying her expertise to the deployment of our youth-led mentorship model at scale. Her work is grounded in lived experience and deep community and government partnerships. Diris' journey from a child seeking support from her neighbors to a woman advising the government on delivering programs at scale, speaks to the transformative power of education.

Within this decade, CAMFED's goal is to provide eight million adolescent girls with holistic financial and social support. This audacious target is only in reach because of

the leadership of an ever-expanding network of young women like Eliza, Esnath and Diris.

Fuelled by donor partners across the globe, they are using their education and experience to change gender norms and mindsets while transforming lives well beyond their communities — creating sustainable businesses, jobs and opportunity, leading with joy and compassion, and providing hope for a better future through action.

It all starts with sending a girl to school today, so she can lead a movement for change tomorrow. We are delighted that the Seoul Peace Prize community is part of this movement now. To each and every one of you: Thank you again for this honor, and for being here with us today to celebrate the power of investing in girls' education and women's leadership. Now is the time - because the actions all of us take today will shape the world we live in for generations.

Thank you.

