WELCOME SPEECH

FOR

RICHARD THOMAS

REVISED

Hello everyone and welcome to this year’s awards gala for the Harik Foundation. I want to thank each one of you for being here tonight, not only to share in the festivities and acknowledgements; I want you to know that we are all honored and humbled by the interest and curiosity you have demonstrated for our organization as well as your commitment to the well being of others. Anne Frank once said, “No one has ever become poor by giving.” I actually believe that’s quite the understatement. The more you give of yourselves, your precious resources, your passion, and your wisdom, the richer you become in ways far more profound than monetary gain. As I look around the room tonight, I am overwhelmed at the collective generosity, resilience, power and sheer humanity represented by each one of you.

The theme of this year’s celebration is “When Charity is not a Pastime But Responsibility,” and in this new age and new world we live in, there is no way we can hide from or avoid or ignore that mandate. We know too much. We see too much. We are too connected to plead ignorance or apathy any longer. We encourage you to consider that as you reflect on what form your own unique participation might look like, remember this: if we could find the way to get education, awareness and self-sufficiency to those who need it the most, they in turn, will be encouraged to demonstrate their own responsibility to humanitarian causes. The potential ripple effect is limitless. Also keep in mind that knowledge and education yield power and freedom. Nelson Mandela taught us, “For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” We are all in the struggle for human dignity for all.

Every single one of our guests here tonight represent critical segments of society and whether you are involved in politics, government, business, or the humanities, your influence has the potential to have an incredible and positive impact on the fate of the this planet’s most indigent populations. I believe that your stature in the world is a direct result of your ability to access your core compassion, conscience, and inner strength. I know your effectiveness comes from your innate determination and we appreciate your support of that same determination of our honorees and the work we do at this foundation.

This year’s award recipients represent all walks of life. From Senators and State Governors to education activists, from chairmen of multi-national organizations to film writers, musicians, and fashion designers, the impact you’ve had in your chosen endeavors so far is no less than awesome! And in the middle of all of the celebrants, we are proud to honor an incredible representative of the future. At twelve years of age, Ms Malala Yousafzai began a journey that risked her future and her safety to dare and tell the truth. At only **TWELVE years old!!** Her life has been in danger but her spirit has not been dampened. Her act of courage shed light on children’s rights to education. She has inspired a generation with her determination and we are in awe of her accomplishments. (**If you want to make a little joke you can say**) If this is how she is in her mid teens, watch out world! This girl has some serious practice in making a difference! (**Wait for the laugh**). Ms. Malala’s courage and actions embody the words of the former President of Ghana Dr. Kwame Nkrumah when he said, “We face neither east nor west. We face **FORWARD**.”

Our other honorees have made priceless contributions to the needy as well (**Name 3 of the awardees and a brief sentence about what each one did)**. We are proud to honor \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ who showed incredible \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. We were all moved beyond words to learn of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_’s work with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. And the inspirational work that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ has done with \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ truly exemplifies what it means to give.

Kofi Annan has said so many things to inspire and empower, but one thing that has stayed with me is this: “Education is a human right with immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.” **Sustainable human development**. That’s why we’re here and that’s why we do what we do at this foundation. We can no longer think that self-sufficiency for all is just a “good idea.” It’s up to each one of us to declare ourselves and our willingness to support those who desperately need to find the way to an acceptable level of well being. The Harik Foundation was founded in memory of my late mother, Mrs. Hannah Thomas and was established in 2013 as a tribute to her memory. This organization was forged on the core beliefs that regardless of one’s perceived stature in the world, it is really those who have learned the power and impact of sincere and selfless contribution to others that have the capacity to experience life’s deepest and most authentic purpose and the joy of fulfillment. By connecting, inspiring, and demonstrating true leadership throughout the world, we actually save all of us.

We have identified our objectives in three critical areas: **health, education** and the **need for empowerment**. We work in the most needy communities in Africa to improve accessibility to provision of basic health benefits including the treatment of malaria, hearing loss and other water borne illnesses. We tackle issues of substance abuse, drug addiction, and conditions that perpetuate unnecessary human suffering like child sexual abuse and domestic violence. We have recently established the Hannah Mobile Clinic that is a purpose built vaccination clinic, equipped with its own generator and is making strides in the areas of screening and immunization. With regard to promoting education, we provide reading materials through the circulation of mobile libraries, seminars and workshops. We also know that in order to ameliorate poverty, one must build a sense of self-sufficiency, particularly for women, girls, and those with disabilities. We offer programs that address those issues while teaching basic skills as well.

The motto of the Harik Foundation is “Bringing Hope to the World,” but the truth is, our fellow citizens of the world, particularly in areas of Rwanda and Malawi need more than hope- they need practical solutions. Hope is nice and hope motivates us, but action is far more potent. As well as our beneficiaries need empowerment, so do we. Remember, ignorance might be bliss, but we can no longer claim ignorance. We are painfully aware that people are dying. They’re being kidnapped. They’re being sexually abused and they’re being terrorized. It’s time to take a stand and find the way to give communities strength to fight the enemies of poverty and conflict.

I live by the words of Mahatma Gandhi who said, “A small body of determined spirits fired by an unquenchable faith in their mission can alter the course of history.” I live by those words and in my head and my heart I take it one step further. Actually, I would prefer a **BIG** body of determined and kindred spirits to find their unquenchable thirst to make their own difference in this world. We began this foundation with the sincere intention to alleviate suffering and to foster health, well being, and self-sufficiency where it is needed most, and there’s **A LOT** of work to be done.

The renowned engineer Buckminster Fuller used the metaphor of “trim tab” to explain personal empowerment and the impact a small entity can have on a larger mass. Just in case you aren’t familiar with aviation or boating or Bucky Fuller, I’ll explain in his words. “Think of the Queen Mary. The whole ship goes by and then comes the rudder. And there’s a tiny thing at the edge of the rudder called a trim tab. … Just moving the little trim tab builds a low pressure that pulls the rudder around… takes almost no effort at all…. society thinks it’s going right by you… but if you’re doing dynamic things mentally, the fact is you can just put your foot out and the whole big ship of state is going to go.”

How many of you are willing to exercise your ability to be a trim tab? Your efforts and generosity, while probably not requiring too much at your end, have the potential to have an immense impact on those that really need your support. Mark Zuckerberg said, “By giving the people more power to share, we make the world more transparent.” So we have **HIM** to thank for all that we know!! (**Wait for the laugh**). All jokes aside, as I said earlier, we no longer have the luxury to plead ignorance or inability to help. Zuckerberg has taken his concept and has made life too connected and too obvious to ignore. We have our individual and collective conscience to deal with. It’s been said that happiness doesn’t result from what we get but from what we give. We all have the capacity to give more than we think. This year’s honorees are inspirations to all of us and they show us how, as trim tabs, we can set off revolutions of change and positivity.

I want to thank all of our awardees for 2014 and I also want to thank each one of you in advance for your compassion, consideration and generosity. Charity truly is our responsibility. We are all blessed with unprecedented resources and support systems and as it’s been said, “Giving back is the price we pay to be here on earth.” I’d also like to echo the words of the great Obafemi Awolowo, Premier of the western region of Nigeria. “After the rain comes sunshine; after darkness comes glorious dawn. There is no sorrow without its alloy of joy; there is no joy without its mixture of sorrow. Behind the ugly terrible mask of misfortune lies the beautiful soothing countenance of prosperity. So, **tear the mask!!”**  And Mother Teresa challenged us by saying, “I want you to be concerned about your next door neighbor. Do you know your next door neighbor?” Guess what? We’re **ALL** next-door neighbors!! We are **ONE** global community!

I thank all of you for being here and sharing this night with us and I look forward to many years of building on the foundations established in the memory of a woman who was truly committed to her fellow human beings, Mrs. Hannah Thomas. Let’s celebrate!