



*Embassy of the United States of America
P. O. Box 28
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PRESS RELEASE

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Four Rwanda Girls Won Full Scholarships to Top U.S. Universities

KIGALI – In July of 2011, Open A Door, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping talented young women from Rwanda gain access to university scholarship opportunities in the US, and then return home to become agents of change in Rwanda, organized a competition to get future young women leaders into their program. Fifty Rwanda girls applied. Today we are celebrating that 4 of those girls won full scholarships to top US colleges. Each scholarship is worth approximately \$225,000. Open A Door was able to leverage a small pool of money donated from friends and family into scholarships valued at almost \$1M.

The four girls are: Rina Ntagozera, who will be going to Haverford College in Haverford, Pennsylvania; Sharon Damas Batamuriza, who will be going to Bennington College in Bennington, Vermont; Charlotte Mugisha is going to Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington and Denyse Niwenshuti, who will be heading to Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

The program involved conducting a thorough interview process to find the best and brightest young women. Candidates were nominated by FAWE, Imbutu Foundation as well as other organizations. After selecting the girls, Open A Door provides them with SAT and TOEFL training preparation classes and then matches them with US mentors who help them navigate the college application and financial aid process. Mentors also negotiated scholarships and will provide emotional support, when the students are in the US.

The US Embassy, through its EducationUSA Advisor: Richard Karubente provided certification services as well as access to more TOEFL, SAT, and AP testing material. Each student continues to have access to additional material on studying in the US through free membership to the Information Resource Center located in the US Embassy.

This year OAD will accept a second class of Rwandan women in the program who will apply for the 2013 school year, and will also send a US-ESL trained teacher to Rwanda in July and August to prepare the new OAD students for the SAT and TOEFL entrance exams as well as help them fill out US scholarship application forms. Interested students can contact Open A Door through their website at www.openadoorfoundation.org or through the US Embassy Information Resource Center.



In this photo: (from left to right) Melanie Edwards, APAO, US Embassy, Barbara Bylenga, Founder, Open A Door, Charlotte Mugisha, Rina Ntagozera, Sharon Damas Batamuriza, Denyse Niwencuti, and Susan Mbabazi, Program Director, Open A Door.

Who are the winners?



In photo: (from left to right): Charlotte Mugisha, Rina Ntagozera, Denyse Niwencuti, and Sharon Damas Batamuriza.

Rina Ntagozera, 19, Kigali



- Lives with her mother and sisters, has a brother studying in Canada
- Wants to study IT and Economics
- Scored 37 out of 55 on National Exam in mathematics, chemistry and geography
- Captain of National Rwandan Cricket Team

Sharon Damas Batamuriza, 21, Kigali



- Lost both parents, lives with her sister
- Attended Apred Indera Secondary School
- Scored a 55 out of 55 on National Exam: focused on History, Economics and Geography
- Wants to study International Relations and Gender Studies
- Currently working as a translator for Ubushobozi Project www.ubushobozi.org

Charlotte Mugisha



- Lost both parents in the Genocide, was supported through school by her uncle who raised her along with her 7 siblings and his 4 children
- Studied at Lycee de Kigali funded by Solace Ministries, an organization that helps Genocide Orphans
- Received a perfect score on the National Exam: 55/55 in History, Economics and Geography
- Wants to study International Relations or Women& Gender Studies
- Currently Volunteers at OLPC: One Laptop Per Child

Denyse Niwencuti: 19, Kigali



- Lives with her mother, father and 4 siblings
- Are survivors who lived in Busegera during the Genocide
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- Attended Lycee Notre Dame De Citeaux, partly funded by a Presidential Scholarship, partly funded by Search for Common Ground
- Scored 52 out of 55 on National Exam focusing on Physics, Chemistry and Math
- Wants to be a civil engineer
- Has hosted a radio show with Search for Common Ground since 2008
- Is the Assistant Commissioner of Girl Guides (Girl Scouts)
- Denyse Niwenshuti's merit based scholarship is called the Botstiber Scholars Program and is awarded by the Botstiber Foundation. As a Botstiber Scholar she was one of 3 students who were selected this year from around the world. The scholarship includes airfare, a computer, stipends and settling-in funds. The program ensures their scholars are successful through a special coordinator, and are exposes them to new innovations in science through retreats and events.

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