

# Young Achievers Awards 2017 Gala

## Acceptance speech by YAA Lifetime Achievement Award

### Recipient

Ali A. Mufuruki

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

My friend Awel and I are constantly engaged in communication with each other, several times a day on some days and by all manner of platforms, the phone, social media, emails, etc. This should not come as a surprise because Awel and I are colleagues at the Africa Leadership Initiative East Africa Foundation, an organization whose work is responsible for bringing the two of us together several years ago. But also we have become friends over the years and this means that our communication is not always about work.

So, when I took Awel's call two weeks back, the last thing I expected was to be told that the Young Achievers Awards 2017 Selection Committee had selected me to be the recipient of this year's Lifetime Achievement Award.

I was shocked, awed and mesmerized by the power of the word "**Lifetime**" in the award citation, not least because it is a big deal.

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I wasn't sure the committee had made the correct judgment and to make you understand why, here are some of the thoughts that were going through my head as I listened to Awel.

Today, as I stand at the doorstep of my 59th birthday, which God willing will be a few months from now, I am keenly aware of the swift passage of time while many of my life's aspirations remain unmet. With every passing day, the race to get all those important things on my bucket list done and ticked off becomes a struggle and the resulting frustration turns into despondence and hopelessness, slowly but surely.

I am keenly aware that through the natural process of aging, my best years are behind me and when I look critically at all that I have achieved; professionally, as a father, husband and citizen; I am not sure there is much to show, certainly not enough to be recognised by young up and coming East Africans as a lifetime achiever.

So I told Awel that I didn't deserve this award and therefore couldn't accept it. But Awel in his calm way persuaded me to take another look not only at myself

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and all that I have done for myself, but to look at those whose lives I have touched along the way and made a positive difference in their lives. He told me it is not up to me to judge myself, because my own eyes cannot see the whole of me, but other people can.

With that, the argument was settled and I knew I had learned something new and important from my former student Awel.

The ancient (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE) Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said this and I quote: ***“A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”***

I am a firm believer in the style of leadership that Mr. Lao Tzu articulated so subtly many years ago. I cherish the principle of doing one's best and moving on, not waiting for accolades or medals, allowing those we lead to fully own their success, accepting the possibility that they would have done it without our help, sooner or later.

It is with this frame of mind that I accept this award, appreciating wholeheartedly its importance, but also

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knowing that I could have done better and will always strive to do better so that I will one day feel and believe that I truly deserved it.

Having said that, I want to thank the Committee for making me feel that my achievements are not only real but they are worthy of such prestigious recognition. Thank you for restoring my faith in me and my work, for giving it meaning and for showing me where to find it every time I am filled with doubt about my purpose in this life. You will never know how much this award means to me, because I cannot put my feelings into words, but I pray and hope that you get my drift as they say.

Let me use this opportunity to thank my family, my wife Saada, our daughters Leila, Zahra and Sophia and our son Abdulrazak; for the high price they have paid for my success, including the winning of this prestigious award. The frequent absences from home, the ever-diminishing amount of quality time even when I am around, are only a few of the deprivations they have endured over the years of helping to make me succeed. I thank them for supporting all that I do and I love them with all my heart.

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I thank my parents for raising me the way they did, for reminding me always that I was not special, just by being me. I thank them for teaching me to find pride and meaning in hard work, discipline and integrity. May Allah bless them inshaallah

Let me conclude by thanking you Distinguished Committee Members once again for finding me worthy of your recognition and for giving me this incredible honour.

God bless you.

Ali A. Mufuruki  
Kampala, 12th August 2017