

'It started with a \$20 Walmart Dress': Miss Universe Rwanda on Achieving Her Dreams

From a \$20 Walmart Dress to Miss Universe Rwanda: Humanitarian Leader Solange Keita Shatters Age Limits and Champions Global Inclusion

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Humanitarian leader, global speaker, and entrepreneur [Solange Tuyishime Keita](#), 42, is set to make history as the first woman to represent Rwanda at the Miss Universe competition. Her participation heralds a new era for the organization, symbolizing her lifelong mission to redefine beauty, leadership, and inclusion across all global stages.

A mother of three and a devoted [UNICEF](#) Canada Ambassador, Solange embodies the Miss Universe Organization's recent shift to remove age limits. Her journey to the world's largest stage is an eight-year-long dream and a powerful testament to the idea that "Dreams are valid, even the ones that take years."

The \$20 Dress and a Historic Win

Solange's path to pageantry began not with designer gowns, but with a deeply resonant story of perseverance and authenticity.

In 2004, as a young immigrant and former refugee, she was invited to compete in her first pageant. Worried that she didn't have the means to afford a beautiful gown, she ultimately made a last-minute decision to compete, following a promise she had made to her 11-year-old self to live a meaningful life.

She packed a dress and shoes purchased from Walmart, wearing an outfit that represented the bare minimum she had once lived with. In that defining moment, she became the first woman of



Miss Universe Rwanda, Solange Tuyishime Keita

color to win the Miss New Brunswick title, and later the first woman from New Brunswick to win Miss Canada International.

"In that moment, when the audience went quiet, I realized, 'Oh, they saw me,'" Solange recounts. "That was it. It was a platform where I felt seen, and I was inspiring people to make the world better in a beautiful gown—in my mind, it was beautiful"

Redefining Beauty, Leadership, and Philanthropy

Solange's mission today is driven by her belief that "more women and girls need to shine their light in this world and have a seat at leadership tables across all sectors".

As Miss Universe Rwanda, she will dedicate her platform to delivering hope, healing, and inspiration to women and girls globally.

Humanitarian Impact: For the past 15 years, Solange has used every title to advance humanitarian efforts. Her philanthropic work has raised more than \$3.4 million, impacting 2.3 million children and women. Her advocacy has provided access to clean water for 4.3 million households.

Leadership Advocate: She is the CEO of [Elevate International](#), an organization dedicated to advancing women's leadership and economic empowerment.

Inclusion Champion: Competing at 42, after re-entering pageantry following the birth of her four children in 23 months (including identical triplets), she serves as a celebration of persistence and possibility for women of all ages and statuses.

Solange's journey is a powerful call to action: "Let's make sure our beauty, intelligence, leadership, and philanthropy travel on the same journey"

Please Donate to Solange Tuyishime Keita & UNICEF Canada's Unstoppable Girls

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