

For Immediate Release

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Misty Copeland Returns to Africa to Help Vulnerable Girls and Refugees

New York, July 30, 2018 – Ballet superstar Misty Copeland will return to Rwanda from August 16 – 22 to help vulnerable girls and refugee children. Partnering with MindLeaps, an international NGO that uses dance to develop life skills in disadvantaged youth, Misty will share her story to inspire these children while also becoming a voice for them back in the USA through her ongoing work with MindLeaps’ International Artists Fund.

Misty first traveled to Africa in 2015 to launch the Girls Program at MindLeaps. Speaking about it, Misty says, “The dedication and commitment of these young girls is so beautiful It’s such an honor and a privilege to witness something that I know is changing their lives, maybe in ways they are not even aware of yet.” Since 2015, over 100 girls are in, or have been through, the MindLeaps Girls Program and have been sponsored to enroll in formal education through MindLeaps.

Misty Copeland is a strong advocate for providing education for disadvantaged youth and is dedicated to giving her time to work with and mentor young girls and boys. Misty brings her own story of struggle and success to some of the world’s poorest children – and those that love the same thing she does: dance. But her work in Africa goes beyond dance at MindLeaps. The organization draws vulnerable children to safe spaces in urban slums through free dance lessons centered around cognitive/behavioral improvement. As children demonstrate a commitment to personal change, they are enrolled in a range of other programs, including: digital literacy, academic catch up classes, nutrition support, sanitation services, and sexual & reproductive health workshops.

During this year’s trip, Misty will spend time with 10 African dance instructors who have been trained by MindLeaps to run programs for vulnerable children in Uganda, Kenya, Guinea and Rwanda. Some of these instructors also teach in MindLeaps’ new programs working with refugees and are refugees themselves. From this shared experience of dance as a form of healing, Misty hopes to raise awareness in the U.S. about the current situation of these refugees and how Americans can improve their chances of survival in a life-changing way.

Learn more about Misty’s previous Rwanda trip through her vlog series:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsu83aAwS8w&feature=youtu.be>

EDITOR’S NOTE: Media interested in covering Misty Copeland’s visit to Rwanda should contact Rebecca Davis (davis@mindleaps.org) or Gilda Squire (gildasquire@verizon.net) to discuss opportunities during or after the trip.

About Misty Copeland -

Misty Copeland is the first African American female principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre. In 2014, President Obama appointed Misty Copeland to the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition. She is the author of the New York Times Bestselling memoir, *Life in Motion*, co-written with award-winning journalist and author Charisse Jones, published March 2014. She also has a children's picture book, *Firebird* in collaboration with award-winning illustrator and author Christopher Myers, published September 2014. Misty Copeland received an honorary doctorate from the University of Hartford in November 2014 for her contributions to classical ballet and helping to diversify the art form. After her promotion as principal dancer, Copeland was named one of *Glamour's* Women of the Year for 2015; one of ESPN's *Impact 25* athletes and influencers who have made the greatest impact for women in sports; and, by Barbara Walters, one of the 10 "most fascinating" people.

<https://mistycopeland.com>

About MindLeaps -

MindLeaps is a not-for-profit organization working in East and West Africa with street children and refugee youth. MindLeaps uses dance as a way to attract vulnerable children to safe spaces on a regular, long-term basis. Then, African dance teachers follow MindLeaps' standardized movement-based curriculum that develops and measures changes in critical learning skills: memorization, grit, teamwork, discipline, self-esteem, creativity and language. Using MindLeaps [Tracker](#), a data-driven software application, the organization determines when a child is ready to be sponsored to enroll in formal education as a result of his/her emotional stability and school readiness.

Since 2014, over 3,500 youth have completed the MindLeaps program in six different countries: Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Guinea, Mauritania and Bosnia-Herzegovina. MindLeaps currently operates two permanent centers with full-time African staff in Rwanda and Guinea, and manages partnership programs focused on refugee youth and vulnerable in-school children in other countries.

www.mindleaps.org

About MindLeaps' International Artists Fund (IAF) -

MindLeaps' International Artists Fund (IAF) is a group of professional performing artists that serve as ambassadors of MindLeaps' work in Africa. They travel to the field, train MindLeaps' African instructors in Western-style dance technique, and learn about the lives of children affected by war, genocide, and now, the refugee crisis. The IAF raises both awareness of the organization and scholarship funds for children to return to school.

<https://mindleaps.org/iaf/>