**For Immediate Release**

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**MindLeaps and Misty Copeland Launch Girls Program in Africa**

**New York, November 10, 2015 -** Misty Copeland, who recently made history in being named the first African American female Principal Dancer with American Ballet Theatre, will be sharing her talents with children in Rwanda as an ambassador of the International Artists Fund -- a platform for celebrity performers to bring awareness to the needs of Rwanda’s street youth established by the humanitarian nonprofit MindLeaps. Coming to Rwanda on November 12th, Misty will launch the MindLeaps Girls Program and award a top performing dance student the “The Misty Copeland Scholarship” to attend boarding school.

The announcement was made by Rebecca Davis, MindLeaps Founder and Executive Director.

“In the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide, survivors have struggled to provide for their children. In many cases, youth flee to the streets because they lack a safe place to sleep, regular food, and access to education,” Davis said. “MindLeaps transitions these street children into formal education through a catch up program that develops critical learning skills. We are absolutely thrilled to have Misty as an advocate for these children. They deserve a voice and her voice will do them justice unlike any other on the world stage. ”

With the International Artists Fund, MindLeaps brings select artists to travel to Rwanda, learn about the country’s history and see first-hand the impact of investing in Rwandan children through the arts and education.

Coming from a very challenging background, 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 is now bringing 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. She hopes to raise awareness in the U.S. about the current situation of these street children and their daily fight just to survive.

“MindLeaps program centers on dance, but it goes further by using that as a means to help these children prepare for formal schooling,” said Misty. “Through my own experience, I understand how dance can change your life and help you to follow your dreams. It teaches you discipline, perseverance, teamwork, and confidence. It helps you believe you are worth something.”

While in Kigali, Rwanda, Misty Copeland will officially launch the MindLeaps Girls Program aimed at out-of-school girls who are suffering from extreme poverty. MindLeaps will be raising funds for The Misty Copeland Scholarship and the MindLeaps Girls Program through the [International Artists Fund](http://igg.me/at/mindleaps).

Misty will also maintain a vblog of her work and journey in Rwanda. Reaching out to her almost one million social media followers, Misty will become a conduit for her fans in the USA to learn about children in Africa while also serving as a real-life success story for the youth in Rwanda.

Please find more information on the International Artists Fund here:

International Artists Fund video - <https://youtu.be/21saRAGicGE>

Misty Copeland & MindLeaps Help Girls in Africa - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OChdOSMj0Lw>

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

**About Misty Copeland:**

Misty Copeland is the first African American female principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre. In 2008, Copeland was honored with the Leonore Annenberg Fellowship in the Arts and was named National Youth of the Year Ambassador for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America in 2013. In 2014, President Obama appointed Misty Copeland to the President’s Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition.  Misty Copeland 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 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.

[www.mistycopeland.com](http://www.mistycopeland.com)

**About MindLeaps:**

MindLeaps is a 501(c)3 organization based in the United States and working in post-conflict and developing countries to permanently decrease the number of street children. MindLeapscombines a dance program to improve cognitive development with vocational training to prepare youth for a stable life in school or in the workplace. MindLeaps currently operates in Rwanda, Guinea and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

[www.mindleaps.org](http://www.mindleaps.org)