

SPEECH BY H.E. HON. MWAI KIBAKI, C.G.H., M.P., PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA ON THE OCCASION OF JAMHURI DAY CELEBRATIONS, NYAYO STADIUM, 12TH DECEMBER, 2009.

Fellow Kenyans,

I wish to begin by saluting all Kenyans on this occasion in which we observe the 46th Jamhuri Day. On this day, forty six years ago, Kenyans watched with pride as the new flag of a fully independent Kenya was hoisted for the first time.

Since Independence Day on 12th December 1963, we have, as a nation, faced both good and difficult times. We thank God that in spite of the mixed fortunes, we have remained a strong sovereign and independent nation. We can, therefore, say with confidence that the independence we won forty six years ago is secure, and will endure to the end.

I say this, fellow Kenyans, because we have undergone one of the toughest and most difficult years since independence. The recent drought was probably one of the severest in living memory.

This was accompanied by a very challenging year for the national and global economy, at a time when our country sought to entrench and accelerate political reforms. The good news is that in facing these challenges, we have done much better than what was expected.

Indeed, despite the difficult economic times, the Government mobilized its scarce resources to minimize the impact of severe drought by feeding over 4.5 million people at a cost of over 2 billion shillings per month.

We have also distributed over 10 million kilograms of seeds, worth 1 billion shillings, to 1.5 million small-scale farmers; reduced fertilizer prices by half and expanded irrigated food production by 45,000 acres at a cost of 1.9 billion shillings. Irrigation schemes at Hola, Mwea, Ahero, West Kano Perkerra and Bunyala have been rehabilitated.

We have also begun an ambitious investment plan to increase our water storage capacity by distributing water tanks, building boreholes, dams and pans in rural areas, and providing more reliable water supplies for Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Kisumu and Kakamega.

At the same time, we have taken decisive measures to conserve the five main water towers of Mau, Cherangany, Mt Kenya, Mt Elgon and Aberdares. Our aim is to ensure that forests and water catchments are properly conserved.

To enable all Kenyans access adequate water and other environmental services, the Government is currently implementing a "Trees for Jobs" programme in 46 districts that has so far employed nearly 16,000 young people, and will have over 65 million tree seedlings available for reforestation. Members of the armed forces will also be expected to take part in this aggressive tree planting campaign.

Indeed as the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Program, Kenya will continue playing a leading role in regional environmental conservation. The government will also be appealing to World leaders meeting in Copenhagen to strengthen UNEP into a World Environmental Organisation that Kenya stands ready to host.

Fellow Kenyans

Despite the challenges associated with drought, we have continued to record major achievements in various sectors of our national life. In the social sector, for instance, the infant mortality rate has fallen from 77 to 52 per 1,000 live births. Under-five mortality is also down from 115 to 74 per 1,000 births between 2003 and this year.

We have also been able to contain the re-emergence of polio and measles, as swift measures are taken to respond effectively to the cholera and swine flu outbreaks through public health education and encouraging Kenyans to observe higher standards of personal hygiene.

With regard to education, the country continues to implement the free primary and free tuition secondary education policies, which have greatly expanded access and opportunities for our children. The transition rate is now at over 60 per cent from primary to secondary schools.

Government bursaries coverage in technical and vocational institutions has risen from 5,000 to 15,000 needy students in the last two years. With regard to university education, the country is on course to increasing the number of students enrolled in local universities to about 450,000 by TWENTY FIFTEEN.

However, we are yet to attain the Government's objective of ensuring that every child has the opportunity to access twelve years of basic education. We must, therefore, continue to expand our facilities through the constituency development fund and other resources so that by TWENTY TWELVE, we should have over 90 per cent transition rate from primary to secondary school.

Beyond health and education, we have taken steps to ensure vulnerable members of our society have a source of income. In this regard, we launched the Kazi kwa Vijana initiative in March this year. The scheme has employed nearly 298,000 youth at a cost of about 5.6 billion shillings.

A cash transfer programme for elderly people, providing each household with 1,500 shillings will be operational next month, and cover 33 districts. In the same spirit, the orphans and vulnerable children cash transfer programme that supports vulnerable households with 1,500 shillings in 47 districts will be up-scaled from the current 45,000 to 90,000 households.

In addition the 22 billion shilling economic stimulus programme is currently being implemented. This programme is creating growth and development in sectors such as agricultural production and food security, improvement of access to education and health by poor households, and development of rural markets and environmental conservation.

Fellow Kenyans,

The Government is facilitating the realization of mass employment through increased investment in infrastructure and the implementation of key VISION TWENTY THIRTY flagship projects. So far, we have seen a very significant improvement in the quality and quantity of physical infrastructure.

For instance, most trunk roads have either been improved or are undergoing major rehabilitation. In the last one year, the submarine fibre-optic cables landed in Mombasa, while most of the country's regions are now linked by land-based fibre-optic cables.

We are now pressing on with plans for construction of the standard gauge railway from Mombasa to Kampala, the establishment of Special Economic Zones, and the construction of Lamu Port and second transport corridor to Southern Sudan and Ethiopia. I direct the relevant ministries and agencies to complete all the preparatory works so that each of these projects will be launched within the next six months.

To facilitate infrastructure development, we are diversifying the financing of infrastructure investments. For instance, three successful and oversubscribed infrastructure bonds were floated by the Government and public agencies this year.

I urge everyone to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by improved infrastructure, irrigation schemes, economic stimulus, Kazi kwa Vijana programmes, and the VISION TWENTY THIRTY mega projects to invest in greater production of goods and services across the economy. Our farmers and livestock producers should adopt the most productive technologies,

while our large companies should aim to grow into regional champions.

Indeed, I challenge local and international investors to take advantage of the bright future that lies ahead for Kenya and the region through the East African Community Common Market protocol that we signed last month. This common market will allow free movement of labour, capital and investments within Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi, and takes effect this coming July.

Therefore, from next year, investing in Kenya is investing in East Africa, a market of over 125 million people. With the discovery of oil and gas in the region, substantial transport and communications connectivity and one of the most strategic locations in the globe, East Africa is set for economic take off as the economic powerhouse of Africa with Kenya as its hub. I appeal to Kenyans to embrace this spirit and become true citizens of East Africa.

Fellow Kenyans,

Our journey to political transformation has made enormous progress this year. The committee of experts on the Constitution review released the Draft Constitution last month. We are now in the period of public comment and input into the document, before it is finalized. I urge Kenyans to study the document thoroughly and make constructive contributions that will enable us have a constitution that will stand the test of time.

I urge Kenyans to keep in mind that every item under Agenda Four of the National Accord is covered in the draft constitution. Therefore, let us work together at every level to realize a constitution that will accelerate our political, economic, and social development.

We want a constitution that will provide the foundations for highly accountable and effective government, a highly productive and competitive economy, a society that provides equal opportunity and access to each of its people, and a united and cohesive nation.

We have waited for a new constitution for nearly twenty years, let us ensure that this time we conclude the matter, and give this generation and all future generations of Kenyans a new constitutional dispensation.

As a government we are determined to give our country a new constitution next year. I and the Right Honourable Prime Minister Raila Odinga, are committed to finding consensus and common positions on matters of national importance. Once we are agreed on a course of action as a Government, we must put all our efforts to ensure its realization for the benefit of all Kenyans.

Fellow Kenyans,

On the matter of the fight against corruption, the Government will not relent on its efforts to create a corruption free society. We shall demand the resignation of top officials facing credible charges of corruption or abuse of office. I direct permanent secretaries and accounting officers to sanction all corrupt officers in their ministries and departments.

To curb corruption in the use of public finances, the Government is automating its financial systems to ensure electronic procurement for goods and services by the Government, as well as electronic payments to vendors by end of next year.

I am also directing that lands and business registries be converted into electronic records. I direct the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Ministry of Lands, the State Law Office and the e-Government directorate to ensure that these systems are in place and fully operational in the next eighteen months. I also urge the judiciary to ensure the establishment of an electronic court registry and electronic recording of court proceedings within the same time.

Fellow Kenyans,

With regard to security, the Government will not relent in its fight against cattle rustling and criminal gangs. The Government will build more police posts and provide greater logistical support to the police force.

I once again appeal to members of the public to wholly embrace community policing. The Government will also undertake a comprehensive disarmament programme in affected areas. This will be combined with regular branding of livestock by provincial administrators to deter theft and allow easier identification of stolen animals.

In concluding my remarks, I wish to express my concern at the unnecessary loss of lives through road traffic accidents. We are also losing millions of man-hours from traffic jams that are largely caused by poor planning and driving habits.

I direct the Police and Ministry of Transport to ensure that careless drivers and unroadworthy vehicles are eradicated from our roads. This should not be a short term operation in the run-up to Christmas, but a permanent campaign that will make our roads safe for all users. In the meantime, I urge everyone to drive carefully and thoughtfully to avoid unnecessary loss of lives.

Finally, fellow Kenyans, I wish all of you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. As you take time to enjoy this festive season with your families, I urge you to share the spirit of Christmas with the less fortunate members of our society.

Thank you and God bless you all.