



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. WILLIAM  
SAMOEI RUTO, C.G.H. PRESIDENT AND  
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE  
FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA DURING  
THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
CELEBRATIONS**

**MARCH 8TH, 2024**

**EMBU COUNTY**

1. It is a great honour for me to participate in this critical event. The commemoration of International Women's Day is a dedicated opportunity for us, as a nation to reflect on the progress we have made in promoting greater inclusion of women in order to realise gender equality and create the necessary conditions for inclusive prosperity and national development.
2. The terms under which we pursued development in the past consigned us to slow, inadequate progress because of the underlying fundamental inclusivity deficit which marginalised regions, excluded sectors and disenfranchised women. Not only did the majority of our people end up poor and deprived of opportunities to change their prospects, but structural and systemic discrimination also guaranteed that women inevitably fell among the most vulnerable people in all societies.
3. It is difficult today to take seriously any growth and development strategy which deliberately leaves anyone behind, let alone 50% of our communities and national family. Yet we realise with clarity that historically, this is what happened with all development initiatives which did not proceed on the basis of inclusivity and equality.
4. Unemployment denied women the opportunity to participate in production, and through archaic institutions which denied women equality, women who worked hard were deprived of the fruits of their contribution. As a result, they were not only marginalised but also perpetually vulnerable to much greater exploitation, violence, insecurity, conflict, ill health and every other adversity to which our societies were prone.



5. Even today, there are many parts of our country where the mental image of wealth, power and status is still male, while that of poverty and suffering is female. It is highly self-contradictory for a society to aspire for rapid economic development while sustaining structural conditions which exclude half of its people, and yet that is exactly what failure to implement full inclusion of women and gender equality does.
6. Under Article 10, our Constitution requires us to observe and actualise human dignity, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, non-discrimination and the protection of the marginalised as national values and principles of governance, which must define both the processes and outcomes of every economic, social, cultural and political endeavour.
7. Under Article 27 (3), the Constitution stipulates that women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres.
8. To ensure that inclusion remains on the agenda of the national renaissance, the Constitution mandates the State to take legislative and other measures, including affirmative action programmes and policies, to redress any disadvantage suffered by individuals or groups because of past practices. More specifically, these measures should implement the principle that not more than two-thirds of members of elective or appointive bodies shall be of the same gender.



9. Our blueprint for radical national transformation must therefore be underpinned by the imperative to facilitate the full engagement and robust participation of women in every dimension of our development agenda. The Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda thus recognises the unprecedented radical power in facilitating the full contribution of all of our people in every sector, rather than just half of them: Twice as many opportunities will be created and exploited and twice as much productivity will be unlocked.
  
10. In our Plan, we recognise the need to change the prevailing situation where female participation in key economic sectors remained minimal, with a vast majority of those women who participate being consigned to low-income employment and enterprise and under poor working conditions. Generally speaking, women remained excluded in decision-making within our governance and political institutions, while millions suffer or are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence.
  
11. Moreover, health services have been inadequate for the needs of women and remained inaccessible and unaffordable. Environmental degradation, pollution and climate change have complicated the lives and livelihoods of women, increasing their responsibilities in unpaid care work and thus accelerating poverty, early marriage, childhood pregnancies and other disadvantaged conditions.



12. Through highly intentional actions, our Bottom Up Economic Transformation Agenda prescribed a pathway to transform the conditions, contribution and participation of women in national development by deliberately eliminating every cultural, political, social and other excuse for treating women unjustly.
13. To achieve this, we recognised that we would have to direct unprecedented levels of investment to promote inclusion and affirmative action in the socioeconomic sectors. Specifically, we undertook to provide financial inclusion and capacity building for women through the Hustler Fund in women-led cooperative societies, chamas, merry-go-rounds and table banking initiatives, and to take measures to protect them from predatory lending.
14. We also resolved to be highly intentional in actualising the constitutional gender inclusion principle, or the "one-thirds" rule, through various strategies, including at the party policy level for elective representative positions.
15. Our agenda also committed to confronting the issue of violence against women more directly, including through the deployment of increased personnel at the gender desks in our police stations, and enhanced funding for the anti-female genital mutilation campaign, as well as upholding the dignity of girls and women, especially in learning institutions by providing menstrual hygiene products free of charge.



16. The impact of this investment has been radically transformative. As I explained yesterday during the launch of the G7 Caucus Strategy, women have remained consistent in the uptake of various financial inclusion funds and affirmative action facilities. Women form about half, or 10.1 out of 21 million borrowers of the Hustler Fund, and 8.8 million of them have borrowed a total of KSh23 billion of the KSh47 billion cumulatively disbursed by the Fund.
  
17. At the same time, we have disbursed KSh942 million to 1.4 million women who are members of 53,000 women groups that are already accessing affordable financial facilities through the Women Enterprise Fund.
  
18. Our approach towards investing in inclusion to accelerate progress has been literal, direct and significant: We have put our money where our words are, and the impact has been inspiring.
  
19. Similarly, our measures to enhance the participation of women in governance and political leadership have borne impressive results in the first instance. Again, as I pointed out yesterday, the last election was a transformational watershed in the women's movement for a greater say in our politics and governance. Each elective category witnessed a surge in women entrants as well as successful candidates. The most impressive of these was in the number of counties which elected women to lead as governors, which rose from 3 - Bomet, Kirinyaga and Kitui - to 7: Kwale (Fatuma Achani), Machakos (Wavinya Ndeti), Kirinyaga (Ann Waiguru), Embu (Cecily Mbarire), Meru (Kawira Mwangaza), Nakuru (Susan Kihika) and Homa Bay (Gladys Wanga).



20. The plan is to sustain this exponential leap in women's participation, both in the number of leaders and the quality of leadership and governance. For this reason, I have committed to support measures to accelerate the growth of women's leadership and participation in elective positions through proactive strategies at the political party level. In appointive positions in the public sector, I have committed to raising the number of women through greater vigilance and attention to quotas in the ministries, departments and agencies of government.
  
21. As pertains FGM and gender violence, I wholeheartedly support the commitment to zero tolerance. This should not be a serious discussion in 2024, and we should not be engaged in debates about the need to treat women respectfully and with dignity. There has been concern that, aside from these menaces, gender-based violence has reached the level of femicide. This is unacceptable. We should be evolving into a kinder, gentler, less violent society, and not escalating into a cruel and violent one.
  
22. Let us all promote peaceful coexistence, effective communication and the rejection of violence as a method of resolving disagreements or pursuing objectives, whatever they may be. We must embrace communication, tolerance and respect for the dignity of every person and do our part, as men and women, to prevent violence against women. We must live up to the sacred commitment in the preamble of our Constitution to nurture and protect the well-being of the individual, the family, communities and the nation. For us, at this point in our history as a nation, this must begin with visible actions to protect the dignity, wellbeing and security of women, and to invest in their effective inclusion in the economic transformation of Kenya.

**Thank You.**

