



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**REMARKS BY H.E. HON. WILLIAM RUTO, PHD.,
CGH., PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA
AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE
FORCES, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF
THE KENYA URBAN FORUM**

JUNE 14TH, 2023

SAWELA LODGE, NAIVASHA

- **Representative of the Country Director, World Bank**
- Ms. Ragini Dalal,
- **Executive Director, UN-HABITAT, Maimunah**
Mohd Sharif,
- **Distinguished Guests,**

Good Morning,

1. Last week, at the launch of the 2nd session of the UN-Habitat assembly, I participated in a forum that reflected at great length on the urgency, challenges and opportunities in connection with Sustainable Urbanisation. I am encouraged by the number of highly engaged, major stakeholders in the area of human settlement and urbanization that I have been able to engage with before and today.
2. Clearly, urbanization as a defining trend of the next phase of socioeconomic development, is a matter that should occupy us immensely, because sustainable solutions are urgently needed to enable our countries govern effectively and serve efficiently.
3. Urbanisation is a general human trend at all times. However, rural poverty and underemployment is driving increasing numbers of people to urban areas in search of opportunities. In our part of the world, urban centres have historically developed only limited capacity and cannot serve large populations adequately. Even before the current tide of runaway urbanization got underway, our urban authorities were already struggling to provide for comparatively modest populations.



4. At independence, Kenya was a rural nation of 9 million people. Only 8 percent of this population was urban. Now, Kenya is urbanizing at an annual rate of 5%, and 34% of our population is urban. By 2050, 50% of all Kenyans will live in urban areas.
5. Rapid urbanization, coupled with low growth of essential housing, water, energy, transport, sanitation and other infrastructure has intensified demand, leading to such manifestations of unbearable pressure as unplanned and unsafe developments, poor sanitation and hazardous pollution, crowded and unsanitary housing and poor access to other goods like education, healthcare and security.
6. The unprecedented growth of our urban areas is therefore of an unplanned, uncontrolled and unsustainable type. Over 50% of urban residents inhabit informal settlements, and this has serious negative implications for human dignity, security, safety, and health. As a result, our commitment to sustainable development goals is undermined, most of all sdg number 11 (sustainable cities and communities).
7. It is time to take radical measures to bring our urbanization under control in order to enable urban institutions and authorities to significantly improve livability in Kenya. Urban areas must be transformed from spaces where it is difficult for authorities to provide services, and for citizens to obtain them. In other words, we must, with great urgency, steward the transformation of our urban areas into well-planned, adequately managed, well-governed and sufficiently resourced spaces.
8. The future is urban. We cannot, and must not argue with this inevitability. Our role is concerned with how, rather than whether, future urbanization will unfold. Our primary



mandate is to facilitate an expeditious transition to Kenya's desired urban future.

9. As a starting point, the constitution provides a robust institutional foundation for sustainable urbanization by mandating national legislation to provide for the governance and management of urban areas and cities under Article 184. The legal framework governing urbanization and urban governance is also in place, in the form of the Urban Areas and Cities Act, Cap 275, and the policy framework set out by Sessional Paper Number 1 of 2016 on National urban Development.
10. The primary barrier to the implementation of our urban governance and management framework lies in the need to harmonise it with the County Government Act, as well as Physical and Land Use Planning Act, together with the review of the Urban Development Policy. There is no reason for further delay in undertaking this harmonization.
11. The advent of devolution has greatly accelerated urbanization in the country. County governments and the location of the county headquarters are significant catalysts of urbanization. Counties therefore have an important role to play in promoting orderly management of urbanization.
12. In economic development terms, urbanization is a tremendous factor. Towns and cities are important economic nodes contributing significantly to the national GDP. Nairobi alone accounts for 21 per cent of Kenya's GDP. On the other hand, towns and cities are major consumers of resources and drivers of environmental degradation, leading to climate change. Demand in towns and cities can distort the supply chains of important goods, affecting prices and dictating the cost of living.



13. Environmental malpractices like the discharge of untreated effluent and poor disposal of solid waste pose serious risks while toxic palls of smog from industries often engulf megacities. We must take all these possibilities into account as we ponder the next course of urbanization during deliberations in this forum’.
14. The Kenya Urban Forum assembles stakeholders and strategic partners into a coalition that collaboratively and innovatively tackles the most salient issues and fundamental dimensions of the urbanization phenomenon, with a view to generating sustainable mechanisms for transition from haphazard urbanization to livable towns and cities. It is important to appreciate all of them for their goodwill, commitment and solidarity. Your support inspires us to do even better, and we do not take it for granted.
15. Our urban development agenda has benefitted from partnership and collaboration with the World Bank, French Development Agency, Swedish International Development Agency and UN-Habitat, among others.
16. The World Bank’s support for the Kenya Urban Support Programme, now coming to an end, has contributed significantly to the development of urban institutions. Consequently, 70 municipalities have been established, while more are being set up by county governments. We look forward to further engagement with our partners with a view to extending the partnership to enable Kenya establish functional, efficient, and sustainable urban institutions.
17. Although much commendable progress has been accomplished in promoting sustainable urban development in the country, much more remains to be done to maximize urban livability. I am persuaded that a dedicated urban



development fund is a vital vehicle to navigate Kenya's transition to a desirable urban future. It is time to bring the National Urban Development Policy, 2016 into operation to facilitate the creation of this fund. Similarly, I urge county governments to do their part by devising innovative approaches for generating revenues to finance urban development.

18. We have integrated affordable housing as a critical pillar of the national bottom-up economic transformation agenda, not only to deal with the affordable housing supply gaps but also as a means of creating employment for millions of young Kenyans. For the sustainable urbanization imperative to materialize, it must translate into an affordable housing programme at its core.
19. You have convened for the purpose of rigorously exchanging views in order to form a fuller appreciation of the state of our urban affairs, and then develop strategic pathways towards inclusive and sustainable urbanization. I urge you to use this important opportunity to develop a robust roadmap that will guide our overdue transition to sustainable urban futures.
20. I wish all delegates fruitful deliberations and convey the Government's commitment to our shared agenda. For this reason, I look forward with great anticipation, to receiving a report of your proceedings.

The Kenya Urban Forum is now officially opened.

Thank you.

God bless you.

