



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 ON THE  
OCCASION OF THE AWARD OF CHARTER TO  
THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF KENYA**

**AUGUST 3RD, 2023**

**KONZA**

## **Good Morning;**

1. An undeniable truth that may be said about the people of Kenya without any fear of contradiction is this: regardless of the regional and socioeconomic distinctions that are used to describe us, we all want the same things for ourselves, our families and our nation, and we fiercely believe that we deserve equal access to the means and opportunities to actualize these aspirations.
2. The rigorous nationwide journey of public consultation, which sets out the government's Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda, amply vindicates this truth.
3. This certainty persuaded us to incorporate into the agenda three critical and complementary principles. First, it was a priority for government to develop and strengthen political institutions and cultures, which facilitate effective and inclusive national discourses that enable Kenyans to define and articulate their aspirations in terms of public policies.
4. Secondly, we prioritized the enhanced support for governance and administrative mechanisms that protect rights, guarantee liberty, safeguard dignity and advance well-being at all times. Finally, we identified the urgent imperative for a development agenda, which transforms every Kenyan's fundamental interest, from that of expecting and demanding a share of the national development cake, to one whereby all Kenyans are rallied to join the common enterprise of making a much larger and richer national cake and are guaranteed to partake equitably.
5. The Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda's concern with the connection between productivity of labour and economic transformation is easily understood in terms of job creation, higher incomes, savings and investment as the drivers of rapid economic growth. For people to earn high or rising incomes, they need to possess productive capacity, in terms of knowledge, skills, motivation and capacity to perform tasks which create high value.



6. It is clear that creating a robust institutional framework to impart necessary knowledge and skills to young people is a fundamental mandate implicit in the job creation dimension of our agenda.
7. To accomplish this, we recognised that nothing short of radical disruption would align our national education system with this plan.
8. For decades, our education system consistently fell short of its ideal standard as society's ultimate means of building an equitable society by giving every child, irrespective of background, the chance to fulfil their potential, chase their dream and rise to the highest possible level of achievement.
9. For this reason, we ran the risk of becoming a rigidly entrenched class society divided by inequality and unable to pursue a common vision or articulate any collective aspiration as one nation.
10. Even after implementing free primary education and beginning to undertake free day secondary education, we hesitated when it came to the most critical intervention for developing employable skills: tertiary and higher education.
11. Over the years, millions of Kenyans were left at home after failing to secure admission to tertiary education institutions. As time went by, graduates of these institutions started having difficulties finding employment, and employers began complaining that our graduates lacked skills relevant for modern competitive industries. As entry examinations became viciously competitive on one end, employers were spending billions of shillings re-training graduates to make them suitable for their enterprise needs. In the middle, millions of youths were left with no choice except to flock the informal sector and unskilled work.
12. Our entire university capacity, in 41 public and 37 private universities, admits 650,638 students in total, and remains unable to keep up with the growing demand. Every year, therefore, many eligible and interested young people are unable to enroll for university courses.



13. In the Plan, we identified the setting up of a national open university as a critical intervention to address this crisis. The objective was to increase access while reducing the cost of university education in order to finally deliver 100% transition to higher education.
14. On my first day in office, I established the Presidential Working Group on Education Reforms to thoroughly investigate this crisis, together with other national concerns connected with the education sector, analyse their findings and make recommendations on the way forward.
15. Early findings and recommendations of the Working Group enabled us to establish the institutional framework for the national open university and to lay the ground work for its inauguration by developing, validating and uploading courses and training material online. On Madaraka Day, therefore, I announced to the nation that the national open university would shortly obtain its charter.
16. The magnitude of the transformation is colossal. For long, the term “inclusive” was assumed to be naturally incompatible with the purposes of higher education, while university education was commonly understood to be, by definition, the exclusive privilege of elites.
17. Today, Kenya makes history by flinging open the doors of the university for everyone who wishes to receive the highest level of education at no charge, from the convenience of their home, office, kiosk, farm or other hustles. Those who do not wish or cannot afford to abandon their other interests in order to pursue university education can now enroll on more convenient terms.
18. This is the university of herdsmen, farmers, mama mboga, matatu driver, bodaboda, watchman, domestic employee as well as trained professionals and graduates. Nothing says “bottom-up” better than the Open University of Kenya; it is, indeed, the People’s University. Wherever you are, you are in the university once you log in.



19. I note with great satisfaction that the simultaneous implementation of our Open University and the Digital Superhighway commitments demonstrate the internal coherence of the Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda, and highlights the strategic complementarities between its pillars.
20. We believe that intensifying connectivity in transport and communication infrastructure is essential for higher productivity and more vigorous economic activity throughout Kenya. This applies to traditional economic activity as well as the digital economy. As we continue to enrich our road, rail, pipeline and port infrastructures, we are equally highly focused on laying down the infrastructural backbone of a robust digital economy.
21. We are therefore collaborating with the private sector and other partners to build 100,000 kilometres of fibre-optic cable networks to connect every part of our country to high bandwidth digital networks. To complement this, we are also establishing fully-fledged digital hubs in every constituency and 22,000 wi-fi hotspots at every market centre in every county.
22. What this means is that the people of Kenya will be able to take advantage of nationwide internet accessibility to surmount the barriers of distance and cost to access quality education in their millions.
23. We cannot therefore afford to be lax about quality in administering the curriculum of the Open University of Kenya. The University is our opportunity to provide quality education affordably, equitably and inclusively, while also taking deliberate care to develop a critical mass of digital and technological skills that will endow enterprises in all sectors with a sustainable capacity to be innovative and competitive.
24. I am delighted to announce that the inaugural instalment of courses to be offered by the university are highly aligned to our transformational agenda. Through the courses, we will acquire a formidable national stock of digital skills for our market and beyond. They include Bachelors of Cyber Security and Digital Forensics which, going by recent events in our digital domain, must be in very





31. I encourage all Kenyans interested in pursuing university education flexibly, conveniently and affordably to make sure that they are in class come September.
32. Aside from the university, the Konza ecosystem is benefitting from a greening initiative spearheaded by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry through its lead agencies, Kenya Forest Service and Kenya Forestry Research Institute.
33. Working with the Konza Technopolis Development Authority (KoTDA) on the Greening Initiative, the agencies are among other technical services, providing appropriate tree seed varieties best suited for the ASAL region, as part of the 15 billion national tree growing and ecosystem restoration programme that seeks to raise Kenya's tree cover to 30% by 2032.
34. The initiative will see authority set up a 10 million capacity tree nursery to enable it grow one million trees within the technopolies by 2025, making it a model site in restoration of ASAL landscapes. Excess seedlings from the nursery, that include fruit and nut varieties, are earmarked for supply to communities, public institutions and conservation organizations working in Machakos, Makueni and Kajiado Counties to support agroforestry and ecosystem restoration initiatives. So far, 250,000 seedlings have been propagated ahead of the forthcoming short rains. The capacity of the nursery shall be expanded progressively in coming months in a staggered cycle so as to ensure constant supply of seedlings.
35. So far, authority has been able to grow 30,000 trees and 200,000 shrubs and ground cover within Phase One of the technopolis, and donated 100,000 seedlings to communities, public institutions and conservation organizations for planting within the technopolis 10 kilometre buffer zone in the last one year.
36. Through KEFRI, KoTDA will set up an ultra-modern research and development facility that will become a centre of excellence in restoration of degraded ASAL landscapes by offering training, site-species matching and accompanying technical services to communities and institutions working in these fragile ecosystems.



37. Alongside Greening Konza Initiative, the National Environment Management Authority is assisting KoTDA in sustainable waste management including setting up of Kenya's foremost public e-waste recycling facility on a 2-acre parcel of land. The pilot phase of the project, which is at the core of Kenya's circular economy blueprint, is supported by the World Bank's Global Environment Facility.

Finally, I am proud to deliver an important commitment of our Plan by awarding this Charter to the Open University of Kenya.

**Thank you.**  
**God Bless Kenya.**

