



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY HON.
WILLIAM SAMOEI RUTO, C.G.H., PhD,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA
AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE
DEFENCE FORCES DURING THE LAUNCH OF
NAIROBI RIVERS COMMISSION**

KOROGOCHO, NAIROBI COUNTY

22nd FEBRUARY 2023

DEPUTY PRESIDENT RIGATHI GACHAGUA, DISTINGUISHED GUESTS;

1. We gather here today to affirm that we have embarked on a journey and there shall be no turning back. I am grateful to our special guests and esteemed visitors who are here to bear witness to this moment.
2. For far too long, the city of Nairobi has fallen into a state of shameful, hazardous and unpleasant state of environmental and sanitary neglect. Runaway air, water, land and even noise pollution have been so normalised that there are people who have never seen the clean, green, healthy and safe City in the Sun that Nairobi used to be.
3. In other words, commitment to the integrity of the environment is a central feature of political, economic, social and cultural life in Kenya.
4. The Bottom Up Economic Transformational Agenda, the Plan, fully recognises that shared prosperity is guaranteed in our time as long as it is driven by clean green growth.
5. This means that we shall be custodians of the environment in recognition of our generation's twin obligations: As heirs of the generations that came before us and trustees for posterity.
6. The responsible stewardship of the environmental agenda is a matter of inter-generational justice and we shall not be a generation so reckless as to pursue a scorched-earth policy in our quest for prosperity.
7. This commitment is particularly relevant at a time when climate change has subjected the earth to unprecedented temperature increase, leading to rising sea levels, flooding and droughts of huge intensity and long duration.
8. Our obligation to respect, uphold and defend the Constitution entails the full observance of our duties in respect of the environment. The measure of this commitment can only be the

entrenchment of our agenda for clean green growth, the restoration of degraded landscapes and ecosystems, including forests and river basins.

9. Mountains of rotting garbage, innumerable kinds of harmful refuse dumped in rivers and streams, and dust and smog have, over time, become the defining characteristics of Nairobi in particular, and urbanisation in Kenya in general.
10. This state of affairs has led to various undesirable developments. The concentration of heavy metals and assorted toxins in the soil, air and water has reached dangerous levels, putting the well-being of residents in jeopardy.
11. Nothing symbolises the regrettable environmental degradation in our city better than Nairobi rivers, which have become channels of murky and toxic streams and not the fresh, clear, cool waters. Once, the rivers abound with a variety of aquatic life.
12. To put Nairobi and its river basins' ecological crisis in perspective, let us recall that the city is an anglicised pronunciation of 'enkare nyarobe', which in Kimaasai means "the river of cool waters". For the Maasai, a famous pastoral community, this name was not only a fair description, but also high praise for a river basin where morans watered their herds and flocks with absolute confidence that pollution and toxicity were non-existent.
13. Today, no one, not even the most reckless among us, can dare so much as taste the water in any stream in the Nairobi river system. It is discoloured, smelly, often corrosive and toxic.
14. This state of affairs must come to an end and the unsafe and unhealthy environmental situation must be corrected to restore Nairobi to its true identity. We have resolved that the city must not only reclaim its glorious reputation as Africa's green city in the sun, but must also live up to its ancestral identity as the river of cool, fresh and safe water.

15. This commitment is emphatic and unambiguous. Kenya's national development blueprint is categorical that the shared prosperity we must pursue has to be attained in a clean and secure environment.
16. The preamble to the Constitution has made it clear that a shared consciousness of our respect for the environment is our heritage and collective determination to sustain it for the benefit of future generations.
17. For this reason, the right of every person to a clean and healthy environment is affirmed. Article 42 of the Constitution gives the right to protect the environment for the benefit of present and future generations, and also to have environmental obligations.
18. A few weeks ago, I presided over the commencement of activity to restore the Ngong Forest complex, which is the source of many rivers that form the Nairobi rivers basin. Our national programme to plant 15 billion trees by 2032 will restore many river sources and catchments.
19. The work we are inaugurating today advances this restoration and rehabilitation agenda so that the water flowing in rivers may begin to support a profusion of aquatic life again.
20. This portion of the cleaning and greening campaign is of special personal significance to me. My research project for my master's degree documented significant changes in water quality due to pollution of the wetlands in the Nairobi National Park. I, therefore, recommended conservation measures to bring pollution under control.
21. A number of stakeholders have worked hard over the years to do precisely this work. From 2000, UNEP undertook the Nairobi River Basin Project.
22. In 2019, UNEP again collaborated with the Rotary Club under the Adopt-A-River initiative, which is still going on.

23. Likewise, the UN Habitat, in collaboration with the government, undertook the Nairobi River Regeneration Initiative.
24. Finally, the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) has been implementing the Urban Rivers Regeneration Programme since 2019.
25. Despite this commendable work, the Nairobi river basin ecosystem has not regenerated sufficiently to sustain aquatic life and much work remains to be done to turn murky streams into a river of cool water.
26. The Nairobi Rivers Commission represents a fresh, resolute and substantial effort to supplement, complement, catalyse and accelerate all previous efforts to enable Nairobi live up to the promise of its name and recapture its reputation as the clean, green city in the sun.
27. The commission is inclusive, participatory and collaborative and represents collective action on a major scale and with representation from various multi-stakeholder groups.
28. The commission also has an advisory group made up of UN Habitat, UNEP, World Resources Institute, development partners and private sector organisations.
29. With this new impetus, the aspiration to make Nairobi's river basins viable and the water clean is virtually guaranteed to happen very rapidly. The people of Nairobi are finally able to give themselves clean rivers.
30. This event, then, is our forum to demonstrate that clean green growth is not only possible, but also feasible for our generation in a few years from now.

Thank you.
God bless you
God bless Kenya