

**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY WILLIAM RUTO, CGH; PHD; PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE KENYA DEFENCE FORCES, WHILE DELIVERING HIS NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE TO THE NATION AT STATE LODGE NAKURU, ON DECEMBER 31, 2023.**

1. We are now in the final minutes of 2023, an eventful year for individuals, communities and for us collectively as a nation. We navigated through major difficulties, faced significant challenges and celebrated numerous triumphs. Our nation is the sum of our lives, experiences and aspirations. Like most of us, our country has lived through an eventful year and made encouraging progress across many sectors, in the midst of daunting setbacks. The impact of global economic dynamics adversely affected us, compounded by the war in Europe, rising interest rates in America and the unfortunate effects of climate change that occasioned the most severe drought in 40 years. All these factors slowed down our economic performance, resulting in increased commodity prices. Fertilizers and cereals experienced significant price hikes, contributing to the rise in food prices and the overall cost of living.
2. To manage, moderate and overcome these difficulties, this became the year of a complete paradigm shift in the handling of our national

issues. We collectively summoned the courage to make bold, decisive, far-reaching and long-term decisions to once and for all put our country on the path to attaining its full socioeconomic potential. The choices we've made over the last year were neither easy, populist, nor convenient: they were however meaningful, appropriate and necessary. **On the short-term painful, but on the long-term gainful.**

3. 2023 is the year we decided to stop wastage and extravagance, instead opting to live within our means. **We decided** to cut expenditure by up to KShs. 400 billion so as to reduce our borrowing. **We decided** to enhance our tax revenues by KShs. 600 billion to fund our programs and development, so as to safeguard our sovereignty and independence. We certainly cannot be independent if we are enslaved by monumental debt, as has been the case.

4. We take pride in the strides we've made as a nation. We have triumphed over the threat of economic stagnation and are now in secure space with regard to our sovereign debt obligations. Inflation has reduced to 6.8% and our GDP is growing at the rate of 5.4%, placing Kenya as the 29th fastest-growing economy globally.

5. In 2023 we decided to get rid of consumption subsidies that not only drove our nation into deeper financial distress, but were also unsustainable, opaque and only benefited middlemen, at the expense of those who truly deserved support. Instead, we deliberately redirected our focus to support production through incentives in our crops, livestock, and fisheries programs. Today, with the blessing of good weather, these interventions have enabled us increase our food production by 40%, at a fraction of the previous cost. **Working with farmers, our foremost patriots,** we shall double our efforts in 2024, until we reduce our Kshs. 500 billion food import bill to zero, and rid our country of the shame of hunger.

6. In 2023 we decided that growing our economy as has been the case in the past, was not enough. Change was an inevitable imperative. As such, we rolled out an economic growth model intentionally designed to be inclusive, deliberately expanding opportunities and creating jobs. **Millions of jobs. All type of jobs, construction jobs, technical jobs, and digital jobs,** as well as entrepreneurial opportunities, both locally and abroad.

7. Our housing program not only provides decent homeownership for millions, including slum-

dwellers who now live in squalor, but it also aims to reverse agricultural land fragmentation and has already created 120,000 jobs, with plans to employ an even greater multitude of people next year. For the first time my mama mboga and bodaboda friends will now have a chance to own a home in our KShs 4000-a-month, 3% interest tenants purchase scheme, as will other Kenyans on our 6% interest affordable housing and the 9% market housing programs. All at single-digit interest rates, which is half the current rates.

8. Our digital Superhighway infrastructure, with 22,000 computers being supplied, is already creating thousands of jobs in our Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, even as we roll out ICT hubs in every ward and constituency in Kenya.
9. Our international jobs program is well on course, having negotiated many bilateral labour agreements to open up opportunities for employment for Kenyans globally.
10. Our collective efforts have not only rescued us from economic paralysis, but propelled us towards a brighter future. We navigated complex debt situations, accelerated economic progress, and invested significantly in our human capital. Recognizing the pivotal role of education, we

increased allocations to the education sector by KShs 127 billion, which enabled us enhance capitation for all learners, bringing us close to the dream of universal education from ECDE to the tertiary level. We also employed 56,000 teachers to improve access to quality education throughout the country.

11. We have equally made immense progress in promoting financial inclusion and dignity of Kenyans at the lower economic echelons. The Hustler Fund and the new NSSF contribution model exemplify our dedication to inclusive economic growth, financial well-being and social security for all. We have made affordable credit available to millions of Kenyans who for years were alienated and underserved by financial institutions. The Hustler Fund has disbursed over KShs 42 billion to Kenyans in just one year, making it the largest financial inclusion program, and most importantly, over 7 million Kenyans are now regular customers, transacting, and doing business, freed from the bondage of shylocks and predatory lenders. Kenyans who would otherwise not make it beyond the watchman at a financial institution, now access KShs 100m from the Hustler Fund every single day. We shall continue to improve and expand the range of products offered under this revolutionary intervention.

12. Similarly, our Universal Health Coverage program has set in motion a transformative approach to healthcare delivery. With 100,000 community health promoters actively contributing to the betterment of our nation's health, we are witnessing the tangible impact of our dedication to the well-being of our people. In the new year, we continue our healthcare transformation at the secondary and tertiary levels of care, emphasizing the need for a fair contribution system for social health insurance, as the previous setup disproportionately burdened and alienated low-income earners from accessing health care. For the first time, every Kenyan, without exception, will have health insurance and all Kenyans will access treatment including for notorious chronic conditions like cancer, hypertension and diabetes, without discrimination.

13. These are only brief highlights of the work done and progress made this year. I acknowledge that we do not have a strong history of commitment to positive transformation, or a culture of consistent promise-keeping in our political leadership. This may explain why many anticipated that this administration would abandon the commitments we made under the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda. It is in this context that I understood the invitation by some for us not to honour our commitments on

account that they were too onerous and therefore unattainable.

**14. For the record**, we are breaking new ground and charting a new **political culture** for Kenya. Instead of excuses to abandon our nation's transformation, I invite the skeptics, opponents, and the indifferent to change their perspective and embrace our new paradigm shift to pursue inclusive growth, with a sense of urgency, **where leaders say what they mean and mean what they say.**

**15.** Yet as we celebrate all the achievements made so far, a number of our policies, programs and other strategic interventions aimed at delivering necessary and urgent interventions of the Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda have been delayed, obstructed and hampered by various challenges, including persistent litigation. There is nothing wrong with challenging policy and holding government to account and, in fact, the national interest is best safeguarded in an environment defined by the competition of progressive ideas, where a good proposal gives way to a better one. We all have a duty to make sure that the best ideas always prevail in enhancing the well-being of the people and making this nation prosperous and powerful; **that is what our democracy exists to achieve.**

16. Having said this, you will agree with me that there is something fundamentally wrong with opposition, without any viable alternatives, whose only purpose is division, conflict, and anarchy; **and litigation, sponsored by hostage-taking vested interests, with the sole aim to delay, derail and sabotage the delivery of public programs and defeat public interest.**
  
17. Time and again, Kenyans have clearly and manifestly demonstrated their devotion to pursuing opportunities for progress by voting for progressive policies. Kenyans are ready to propel their nation forward to greatness. What has held them back is a leadership invested in the status quo, which excludes the majority to benefit only a few, a politics comfortable with keeping millions in want and indignity to preserve the illegitimate privileges of a few, and a resultant institutional system, in which the disenfranchisement of ordinary people is the yardstick of public policy. **This should and must change. A new paradigm must be negotiated.**
  
18. There is an inevitable clash of ideologies at the moment that goes beyond a mere conflict over choices. It extends to a disagreement between us, as to who between the few who wield power in the executive, legislature, and in the judiciary, and



everyone else without distinction, are the legitimate targets and beneficiaries of public policy.

19. We are at a moment of reflection that calls us to revisit the first principles of our civil and political understanding, re-evaluate the terms of our social contract, and place Kenyans, the ones we sometimes call ordinary, at the center of all national discourse. As we do this, we must appreciate one indisputable fact: freedom is our lifeblood and identity. We are a society defined by opportunity, founded on free enterprise and democracy, where competition and merit are underpinned by compassion, inclusivity, and a strong sense of collective interest. Public policy must, therefore, respect, uphold, and promote this fundamental character, enhancing our aspirations by ensuring that **everyone, I repeat, everyone, must be seen and heard, and that no one and I repeat, no one, is left behind.** For us to remain a viable nation-building project, every Kenyan must be represented at the decision making table.

20. The public interest is safeguarded by our constitutional dispensation, providing for the implementation of state policy for the benefit of **all citizens, not some citizens.** This includes the implementation of social and economic rights, a progressive economy creating jobs and wealth, fighting corruption, controlling wastage,

supporting public institutions, and protecting freedom and the rule of law.

**21.** This perspective radically increases the number of possible winners and dramatically diminishes likely losers. Yet every new way of doing things can threaten the privileges of a dominant minority and alienate the beneficiaries of an unjust system. Whenever this happens, their associates can attempt to hijack national institutions, turning them into anti-people weapons for a select privileged few and saboteurs of inclusive transformation for the majority. **We are, unfortunately, at such a moment in our national history, and the question is; how do we proceed from this point?**

**22.** The people of Kenya have made great sacrifices to immensely facilitate us, their leaders and all public servants for us to do the very best we can in making this country work for everyone, and in making sure that our institutions protect and increase opportunities for wealth and employment creation for all. They have also invested in providing us, their leaders in all arms of government, with generous welfare and other benefits, including medical and housing benefits that they can only dream of, in the expectation that we shall, in turn, safeguard their opportunities to access commensurate, if not similar benefits.

23. We must recognise the extraordinary privilege that has been bestowed upon us to serve this nation, as members of the cabinet, the civil service, the security services, parliament, county governments, the judiciary or in the commissions and independent offices. Accordingly, we are under solemn obligation to dedicate all our time, energy and abilities to the advancement of the people's aspirations and the improvement of their well-being. In other words, the very best of our professional, moral and intellectual capacities must be summoned in the service of the nation, and as trustees of the people, we are duty-bound to exercise public authority and deploy public resources to the best of our judgment and discretion, and with the public interest in mind.

24. Our understanding of public interest must be aligned with the imperative to enhance the social contract, and be connected with an urgent need to increase opportunities and transform the landscape of possibilities. Let us therefore reflect very deeply about the ways in which we act and speak in the name of the constitution. **We must ensure that institutional independence does not mutate into impunity and avoidance of accountability. We must** be cautious, lest our professed pursuit of constitutionalism and obedience to the law, turns into an empty ritual and hollow vanity for the

majority of citizens. **We must** take abundant care that our claim to protecting or advancing the people's rights does not deny them legitimate opportunities, or make a mockery of their struggles and aspirations.

**25.** This is what happens when a public servant, enjoying a house mortgage at a 3% interest rate, makes decisions that frustrate the housing program, robbing millions of youth of employment prospects and denying millions of Kenyans the chance to own a home like them.

**26.** This is also the case when a public officer, who benefits from unlimited medical insurance, invokes the law to derail the universal healthcare delivery, denying millions of vulnerable Kenyans a health cover like them.

**27.** It is the case when a politician neglects the boundaries of democratic competition: that opposing policy does not permit undermining the nation or sabotaging the national interest or the welfare of the people.

**28.** In conclusion, the last general election was a watershed moment for our nation. We finally came of age and set a new record, confirming to all and sundry that Kenya is a robust democracy. We turned over a new leaf, writing a fresh chapter

in the Kenyan narrative. The era of ethnicity and ethnic political mobilization was well behind us. The anarchy of election violence was firmly relegated to the past and **more importantly the people, not the system, had the final say.**

**29.** This new narrative of a new Kenya is what we have built upon for the past year. We have established a new profile for Kenya, providing regional and global leadership, highlighted by hosting the first-ever African Climate Summit. Nairobi is recognized as the best city to visit in 2024 by the U.S. based travel agency Lonely Planet, and Kenya stands as the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest recipient of remittances, according to the World Bank. Additionally, our country holds the 3<sup>rd</sup> position as a globally attractive destination for foreign direct investment in 2024. Kenya has also achieved the status of the best adventure tourism destination in Africa and ranks 10th globally.

**30.** With our newly crafted global positioning as the Home of Humanity and a visa-free regime, we are poised to double our tourist arrivals, expand opportunities for thousands of hospitality facilities, and create millions of jobs.

**31.** This represents the new branding, the new profile and the new narrative to propel the nation we all love to the next level. I urge all Kenyans,

especially leaders, to build on the Kenya that celebrates diversity and not ethnic bigotry, a Kenya free of anarchy and violence, and a nation not founded on negativity, but a new positive narrative that is gaining momentum globally.

**32.** It is important for us to remind one another of what really is at stake. We have come some encouraging way amid enormous challenges and significant difficulties. **Our path will be easier, our journey faster and our progress smoother, if we all remember that the people of Kenya have interests that dictate our job descriptions and form the terms of our employment.** Let us remember this always, and remember that with the new year comes our opportunity to do much more, and much better.

**Thank you, and I wish you all a Happy and Blessed New Year.**