

SPEECH BY H.E. DR WILLIAM SAMOEI RUTO,
CGH, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA
AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF KENYA
DEFENCE FORCES, DURING THE LAUNCH OF
THE NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR ACCELERATED
FORESTRY AND RANGELANDS RESTORATION
ON 21st DECEMBER 2022.

1. I am delighted to join you this morning as we launch an exercise that goes deep into our shared experience as residents of our common home, the earth, and our duties to one another as well as our obligation to future generations to preserve and enhance their liveability.
2. We have all witnessed the viciousness with which climate change has unleashed various calamities on us. We are all affected by the effects of droughts, flooding, unpredictable rainfall patterns, outbreak of diseases and infestation of pests.
3. The devastating disruptions occasioned by these hardships on our lives, livelihoods and infrastructure have not only become the constant feature of our existence, but also continuously undermine our progress and aspirations for economic development. Our health systems,

transport and communications infrastructure, farmland and food production systems, local and international supply chains have all been affected, thus imposing an extra burden on already overwhelmed peoples and nations.

4. To a considerable extent, these adversities are the direct and indirect consequences of human failure to observe its ecological imperative. Instead of preserving the integrity of the planet's vital systems to enhance the earth's liveability for all of creation, we have embarked on thoughtless exploitation and the insidious pursuit of prosperity in ways that do not take environmental costs into account.
5. Apart from causing oppression, cruel exploitation and yawning inequality which consigns billions of people to a poor, marginal universe of limited possibilities, this oblivious definition of industry and enterprise has also led to climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity.
6. It is time for civilisation to reconfigure its most fundamental values and principles in our time. It is time for humanity to step up and live up to its most basic mandate: To protect life on earth, the integrity of our planet's vital systems and make the world more, not less liveable. This is our obligation to one another in our time, and our debt to future generations.

7. Our gathering here today, therefore, is part of our commitment to secure our common future, to enhance harmony between humanity and the planet, Kenyans and their environment.
8. Our government's pledge to achieve a cleaner and safer environment is going to be actualised through the intentional placement of environmental conservation and landscape restoration at the centre of our socio-economic transformation agenda.
9. To many, our commitments to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, halt and reverse deforestation, biodiversity loss and land degradation may seem ambitious. These commitments are not only consistent with our constitutional obligations, and the strategic objectives of our development agenda, our national position of global leadership in environmental protection and sustainable development, but they are also expressions of Kenya's commitment to multilateralism.
10. Article 42 of the Constitution commits the government to discharge the obligation invested in it by the citizens' fundamental right to live in a clean and healthy environment, and to have it protected for the benefit of present and future

generations by implementing the mandates set out in Article 69.

11. I invite you to note our collective obligation under Article 69 (2): To cooperate with State organs and other persons to conserve the environment and ensure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources. It is a moment of unity of purpose and collective action, directed at the most important good.

12. The Kenya National Vision 2030, as well as the Constitution, mandates us to maintain at least 10 per cent national tree cover.

13. Under the United Nations Climate Convention, we have committed to restore and conserve all forests and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We are also committed to restore 5.1 million hectares of deforested and degraded landscapes under the African Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100).

14. As a member of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, we have also pledged to restore degraded terrestrial and marine ecosystems in line with the Global 30-by-30 commitment, under the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity.

15. These and other obligations form part of the commitments that we take seriously and are determined to discharge sooner rather than later.

16. Apart from the innumerable benefits connected with these commitments, it is useful for us to cherish and devote ourselves to the environment as an end in itself. It is just good for us to restore our affirmative relationship with nature.

17. Forests and rangelands sustain the productivity of other economic sectors. Forests and trees regulate temperatures and water flows. They also conserve biodiversity, provide habitats for wildlife and enhance the resilience of communities to climate change. Their potential to serve as carbon sinks offer tremendous climate change mitigation capacities.

18. The urgency of our ecological imperative is graphically captured in stark statistics: 70 per cent of Kenya's livestock and 90 per cent of our wild game inhabit our rangelands. At the same time, over 90 per cent of the country's landscapes are, regrettably, undergoing one form of degradation or another. Of these endangered landscapes, 61 per cent face high intensity degradation, while 27 per cent are under severe degradation.

19. Trees make up the forests and rangelands that offer tremendous possibilities to heal the earth, return our development agenda to a sustainable trajectory and save ourselves from a climate catastrophe.

20. Planting a tree is, therefore, the first and most critical step in our journey towards ecological restoration, resilience enhancement and sustainable development. Planting a tree should be the most urgent task for each one of us today. Planting trees has to be the project of the highest importance every day throughout the rainy season, and for the rest of our lives. To change the world today, plant a tree. Then do it again and again. There is no need to stop because there will never be a time in our life when trees do not make sense.

21. Again, there will be no reason to stop, because the government has launched a programme to distribute 1,000 tonnes of seeds to 18 seed centres established by the Kenya Forestry Research Institute throughout the country. The centres will produce 15 billion seedlings between now and 2032. The seedlings will be grown on 10.6 million hectares of degraded forests and rangelands. This will take our total national tree cover beyond 30 percent, surpassing all our present obligations and

placing us firmly on course to restoring ecological integrity.

22. Today, therefore, I am here to rally the entire government, both national and county, our communities, the private sector, philanthropies, non-governmental organisations, and educational and religious institutions to mobilise the people of Kenya to participate in this noble endeavour. The Kenya Forestry Research Institute, Kenya Forest Service and Kenya Wildlife Service shall be spearheading the programme. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry shall provide robust coordination that optimally engages all actors.

23. I appreciate our partners for their support, and urge them to walk with us by providing financial, technical and technological resources for the programme. As we scale up activities, we shall look to you to come through in a big way. Together with the United Nations Development Programme and other UN agencies, we have established the Tree Growing Fund to pool all resources mobilised for the programme.

24. The Special Presidential Programme on the Accelerated Restoration of Forests and Rangelands also provides opportunities for the participation of youth and women in the tree growing campaigns. Over the next 10 years, 320,000 direct jobs will be

created in seedling production, tree planting and maintenance, thinning and pruning, maintenance of forest roads and fire breaks, community scouts, forest rangers and foresters. I encourage you to join this movement for a green Kenya.

25. Speaking of youth, it is my hope that we have learnt our lessons from the World Cup, especially the final match. As you know, I took the unprecedented step, at the heat of the moment, and placed a bet with a close relative and friend. I lost the bet. Even though I look okay, deep down, I have been struggling to pay. After intense negotiation, the First Lady agreed to commute the payment to a personal undertaking on my part to plant 47 million trees over the next month. This is supplementary to the effort we are launching today.

26. I have accepted these terms and will be planting a million trees in every county, starting this Christmas. I will be calling on my friends of all ages and walks of life to come to my rescue and chip into this effort. I urge young people to give betting a break and focus on the opportunities in this programme and in the rest of the government's bottom up agenda for economic transformation. Be part of our national green league.

27. Kenyans, the media and the First Lady must be eager to know: How do we know that the tree planting story is real? How do we establish that, indeed, these trees are going to be grown as stated? Well, today we are launching an innovative and effective system that uses ICT to monitor tree growing and conservation activities, track them over time and report on performance.

28. I will shortly be launching the #JazaMiti application, one that every Kenyan or institution will use to document their tree planting. The app will help to monitor, over time, the growth of trees. We would like to monitor the growth of the trees in the journey to reach the 15 billion target in 10 years. I have instructed the Cabinet Secretary for Environment to make 'Mission 15b #JazaMiti campaign a truly tree growing campaign.

29. Today, I have also commissioned a test-run of biodegradable potting tubing bags at the Ministry of Environment. As you may recall, Kenya led the world in banning the use of plastic bags. Today, we shall begin the journey to phase out plastic tubing bags in our tree-growing campaign. This is in line with the plastic pollution resolution adopted by the United Nations member States during UNEA 5.2 in Nairobi. That meeting was hailed as the biggest achievement for the environment since the Paris Agreement. If we were to plant 15 billion trees potted in plastic

bags, it would mean 15 billion pieces of plastics in our environment, a nightmare of huge proportion. I, therefore, urge the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Forestry to oversee a process, through NEMA, towards a plastic potting tubing-free environment and give way to biodegradable materials.

30. The Ngong Hills Forest exemplifies the way in which human activity, urbanisation and industry have depleted gazetted forests over time, and demonstrates the urgency of the restoration agenda. Demand for pasture, fuel wood, quarry and construction material for infrastructure and real estate projects has denuded 29.2 per cent of the forest. Encroachment, fires, dumping of solidwaste and the discharge of sewage, among other illegal activities, continue to threaten the forest.

31. I am aware that restoration of the ecosystem and environmental protection work best with incentives. Article 10 of our Constitution sets patriotism and sustainable development as part of our national values and principles. I have, therefore, instructed the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Forestry to issue Certificates of Green Conduct to Kenyans, organisations, companies, institutions, embassies and other partners who surpass targets set out in the National Tree Growing Restoration Campaign. We will then progressively use the certificates as a policy tool to give incentives to patriotic Kenyans

and corporations who contribute to sustainable development.

32. This forest is a critical biodiversity hotspot and an important watershed. It hosts a variety of animals, including buffalo, wild pig, porcupine and dik-dik. The Kibiko block hosts the source of River Mbagathi, which flows through Oolua Forest to drain into the mighty Athi. The Ngong Hills block is the source of the Kiserian stream which also drains into the Athi.

33. We have come to this place to take a stand. We are here to stop the deforestation and pollution of our forests, rangelands, rivers and other ecosystems. We are also here to take the first step towards the restoration of a measure of integrity to our critical ecosystems.

34. This tree-planting exercise is the beginning of a national campaign in all counties, with the constituency as the operational focal point. It entails an all-of-government and all-of-society effort to mobilise the support required to accomplish our ambitious target.

35. The exercise is going to kick off here, and simultaneously in each of our 47 counties. We will grow the first 5,600 seedlings on 5.6 hectares of the Ngong Hills Forest Block, and 560,000 hectares cumulatively across the country.

36. Let one and all arise and, with hearts both strong and true, green all of Kenya together.

37. It is my pleasant duty to officially launch the National Tree Planting Campaign under the Presidential Programme for the Accelerated Restoration of Forests and Rangelands

God bless you
G o d b l e s s
Kenya