

H.E. UHURU KENYATTA REMARKS

“ENABLING THE GROWTH OF AFRICA’S DIGITAL ECONOMY”

February 27, 2018

Ladies and Gentlemen, Good morning. Let me say how pleased I am to join you this morning to address this important occasion. I say important because the future of technology and innovation in this country, and the means by which to give opportunity to our young people, is what will make a difference on our efforts to build a prosperous Kenya.

I am informed the event today falls under the theme, "Digital Drivers, Enabling the Growth of the Digital Economy in Africa", recognizing that innovation and a strong ICT market are critical components of competitiveness, both in themselves, and in the industries and concerns that they catalyse.

Now, previous industrial revolutions have passed us by. This time – now that we might all experience the Fourth Industrial Revolution, driven by digital transformation – this must be different.

This time, our ingenuity and innovation must reap its full reward. This time, the riches of Africa must serve the needs of Africans.

All of us – government, industry and academia – are called upon to work together, so that this opportunity doesn't escape us.

Of course, we know we can draw upon the global knowledge, expertise, and creativity within and without our sectors, to meet and match our unique needs. The point remains that it is up to us to make the most of our opportunity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Jobs are a big focus. Facilitating the growth of a digital economy is an important pillar to realize our vision to transform Kenya into a middle income, knowledge-based economy, and of course, deliver jobs.

Contrary to common belief, I wish to reiterate that technology and automation are not destroying jobs. As a matter of fact, the internet and associated digital trade of goods and services have led up to 10% rise in employment in Africa.

And the potential for so-called “digital dividends” is enormous if we harness its transformational potential by creating the right policy framework, and if we navigate the challenges posed in this new era of hyper-connectivity.

To this end, the Ministry of ICT will set up a taskforce on Blockchain and Internet of Things Technology – because, as a country, we cannot let these opportunities pass us by.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the emerging digital economy presents both challenges and opportunities for us in Kenya, and across the continent.

MPESA, M-Kopa, GroIntelligence, Andela and others, show that we can lead the world with innovations that drive financial inclusion, access to energy, better data to drive our agriculture, and the essential skills required to support the young innovators of the future.

Yet challenges remain. The pace and scale of change have opened gaps between policymakers, innovators, and the citizens who stand to benefit most.

We need to better understand the opportunities for Blockchain Technology, the risks of cybersecurity and the essential education and skills that our young people will need to make new technology work for them.

This is not just a task for policymakers alone: leaders from across the private sector, academia, the tech community and civil society, we must come and work together to build this inclusive digital society. The better we can do that, the more effective we will be at building prosperity for every Kenyan.

And when I say prosperity for all, I mean it. In December, I outlined my Big Four plan for growing our economy and ensuring that growth makes a difference to the lives of our people.

These four priority areas are access to affordable healthcare, affordable housing, ensuring food security and nutrition, and growing manufacturing.

Technology is a critical enabler of each one of the “Big Four”. To achieve the ambitious goals that we have laid out, we must optimise connectivity and Internet access, ensuring that we are giving young people and our workforce the skills necessary to succeed, and leveraging the data to drive greater access to services and opportunities.

Let me take some of the priorities I mentioned and offer examples of where digital will play an essential role in our economy.

To enable access to affordable healthcare, technology can drive access to information, better financing, stronger training for our health workers, and, ultimately, broader access to services. To support our efforts to increase food security, data and technology play an essential role in agricultural value chains, whether through better access to inputs, more reliable weather, and crop information, tracking of counterfeit inputs, more transparent access to markets and fair pricing.

Digital also underpins a range of agro-financing services that are essential for equipping smallholder farmers across the country.

And finally, manufacturing. In December, I spoke about the Blue Economy, Agro-Processing, Leather and Textiles. Then, as now, I said that technology remained essential for designing and deploying more resilient value chains, increasing productivity and opening access to markets.

But to achieve these goals, we need now to be certain that we are actively investing in both the infrastructure and the ecosystem to support these innovations.

This digital infrastructure will be founded on three critical elements: 1) access to connectivity; 2) access to the skills necessary to prepare and equip our young people to define the workforce of the future and 3) leveraging the data that we have and can develop to power us into the future. Across each of these, the digital economy is allowing us the space to leapfrog the legacy infrastructure that we see elsewhere.

Just as we leapfrogged landlines to the mobile, we have the opportunity to start building our infrastructure with the technologies of today, not the technologies of the past. The technology innovations developed, both here in Kenya and around the world, are equipping us to accelerate expansion of our economy and create value for our citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the growth of Kenya's digital economy is not by accident. We are expanding Kenya's digital frontier by spearheading major ICT investments, including the digital literacy programme, constituency digital innovation hubs to support entrepreneurs and

facilitate access to Wi-Fi in all constituencies, embarked on the Konza Techno-city, and heavily invested in the Ajira Digital Programme and the National Optic Fibre Backbone Infrastructure.

I am especially excited about our Presidential Digital Talent Programme, which has the support of several Companies. To date, the Programme has provided over 30 mentors and trained 400 interns on cloud application developer, business intelligence, security intelligence and other courses; and certified 250 of these interns.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the vision behind Konza Technology City is a sustainable world-class technology hub and a major economic driver for the nation, with a vibrant mix of businesses, workers, residents, and urban amenities. We are moving towards fully servicing access roads, water, and electricity, with sufficient capacity and reliability to support the construction and early stages of the project. KONZA will lead to the creation of at least 17,000 high-skilled jobs by the end of Phase 1. This is one area that we welcome you to partner with us.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Kenya's supportive regulatory environment also allows mobile banking to operate side by side with traditional banking. This has seen the level of financial inclusion grow to more than 90%, one of the highest in Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in concluding my remarks, I wish to reiterate that, as a country, Kenya has a robust policy framework that supports these programmes.

However, it cannot be overemphasized that greater collaboration between the public and private sectors is a must. The two sectors must collaborate if we are to tackle the challenges that may undermine our ability to exploit fully the potential benefits of technology. And more importantly, to promote best practices related to the digital economy and digital trade. This is why I am grateful to our Ministry of ICT, US Chamber of Commerce, Microsoft, Strathmore Law School and Dalberg for facilitating this important discussion.

It is a step in the right direction, which we must encourage even in other sectors.

Thank You. God bless you. Twende kazi!