

SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY, HON. MWAI KIBAKI, CGH., MP., PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA DURING THE 23RD SESSION OF THE GOVERNING COUNCIL/GLOBAL MINISTERIAL ENVIRONMENT FORUM AT UNITED NATIONS COMPLEX GIGIRI, 21ST FEBRUARY, 2005

Mr. President,

Honourable Ministers,

The Executive Directors of UNEP and UN Habitat,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to join you today for the opening ceremony of the Twenty-Third Session of the Governing Council and Global Ministerial Environment Forum of the United Nations Environment Programme.

First of all, I welcome all of you to Nairobi and to Kenya. I encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity to visit other parts of the country and to enjoy yourselves as you interact with Kenyans and even with our wildlife.

I wish to commend Dr. Klaus Topfer, the Executive Director of UNEP and his Secretariat for the excellent preparations for this Session, and to assure you all of my Government's continued support as you continue to execute the mandate of UNEP.

This session is an important opportunity to consider the work programme for the next two years, especially as we seek to achieve the internationally agreed goals of eradicating extreme poverty and ensuring sustainability of the environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The last century witnessed tremendous technological innovations that transformed the world into a global village. Today, an event taking place in Bangkok or Rio De Janeiro, can have far reaching impacts in Accra or Johannesburg. Nowhere is this truth more real than in situations of natural calamities.

In the last few years humanity has had to contend with major earthquakes and floods. These events have time and again demonstrated that the world is one, we are one people and that the only effective way of addressing the challenges we face is to respond together as one community.

Indeed, the international response to the recent Tsunami disaster in Asia has demonstrated that the world must stand together in facing environmental challenges. Let me again on behalf of my Government and the people of Kenya convey our heartfelt condolences and support to the governments and families affected by the recent Asian Tsunami disaster.

The deaths, destruction of property and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people caused untold human suffering across the affected countries. We share the grief and join the international community in the recovery efforts.

This last Wednesday, the international community demonstrated great courage by effecting the Kyoto protocol after seven years of negotiations. The coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol is indeed a historical step for humankind. It opens the way for addressing global warming which has been blamed for rising world temperatures, melting glaciers and rising sea levels.

I congratulate all the nations of the world that have taken this brave step. I also encourage those who have not yet made a final decision to ratify the protocol, to do so for the sustainable development of this planet.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here in Kenya, we are sensitive to environmental issues. After all we have experienced frequent cycles of drought that have afflicted us over the years. Kenya is in the process of finalizing a Sessional Paper to create the necessary legal framework for proper management of the environment.

In this regard, we take great pride in the global recognition of our Nobel Laureate, Honourable Professor Wangari Maathai.

Apart from her international campaigns and work, her mobilization of grassroots communities to plant trees and conserve the environment, have made a big difference in our rural areas.

Her international recognition is an inspiration to us a country, and to environmentalists globally.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In adopting the Millennium Development Goals five years ago, world leaders resolved to implement various measures to address the greatest threats to humanity such as poverty, hunger, HIV/AIDS and environmental degradation. Whereas there has been some level of achievements, extreme poverty, high mortality rates, increasing numbers of slum dwellers and limited or complete lack of access to clean water and basic sanitation, especially amongst rural communities are clear reminders that the world must do more to reverse this worrying situation.

The challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals are enormous for developing countries. For us to realize the 2015 target, there is need for renewed global commitment. We, therefore, call for concrete measures at all levels in order to strengthen national development policies and strategies. Moreover, international cooperation is crucial for the implementation of these goals.

It is my sincere hope, therefore, that the forthcoming Review Summit in September will strengthen this commitment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A major problem facing developing nations today is the rapid growth in the populations of our cities. This growth has not been complimented with adequate expansion of infrastructure and other essential services such as health, water and sanitation. Consequently, basic services such as collection and disposal of garbage have become grossly inadequate. For example, plastic which is an innovation that seemed to make life easier only a few years ago, has now become a serious environmental concern. In our major cities, plastic bags are used in large quantities at the household level. However, these bags are not disposed of in ways that ensure a clean environment. My country welcomes initiatives to address this problem.

**As we address the problem of plastics, we also need to look at the broad issue of chemicals and the potential damage of these to the environment. We recognize that chemicals have become part and parcel of our modern society. However, clear policies and proper planning should guide the proper manufacturing, use and disposal of chemicals. There is need, therefore, to integrate chemical safety in our national development strategies. **

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, there are only four United Nation Centres globally, located in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi. Kenya feels greatly honoured to be the home of the only United Nations Centre in the developing world.

We are glad that the international community is focused on recognizing and strengthening the role of developing nations, and especially Africa in the global arena. The United Nations Centre in Nairobi bears testimony to this commitment.

It is therefore imperative to strengthen the financial base of UNEP in order to ensure effective execution of its mandate. I am encouraged by the progress made so far in the implementation of the pilot phase of the indicative scale for contributions. I urge all member states to increase their contributions towards the Environment Fund.

Furthermore, consolidating the scientific base of UNEP is equally important. We therefore support the ongoing efforts aimed at establishing and strengthening national, sub-regional and regional capacities for disaster management, assessment, monitoring and early warning systems on the state of the environment. In this regard, I call for greater involvement of scientists, research institutions and centers of excellence from Africa in this process.

In conclusion, the protection of the environment is no longer a matter of choice. The survival of the human race depends on the decisions and actions that we adopt today to make the Planet Earth a habitable place for both current and future generations. We need to make protection of the environment part of parcel of our everyday lives.

Indeed, we should instill a respect and sensitivity to environmental issues in our children at an early age. For example, environmental conservation and its place in development should be a topic of discussion and even study in our school curriculums.

Finally, I would like to reiterate Kenya's commitment to providing all the necessary support to the United Nations offices here at Gigiri, Nairobi. I am confident that this Session will contribute to the advancement of the environmental agenda in a manner that fulfills the vision of the Stockholm Conference.

Thank you.