

THE ELEVENTH [11TH] PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS ON THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, WEDNESDAY, 26TH AUGUST, 2020 STATE HOUSE, NAIROBI.

On August 26, 2020¹

Fellow Kenyans,

Thirty days ago, on July 27th 2020, I promised to appraise and, where necessary, to escalate or de-escalate the steps taken so far to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

I promised to do so because most of these steps were conditional. Whether they worked or not depended on how we responded to them individually and collectively as a nation and as a people.

Today, I am happy to note that majority of Kenyans have exercised a reasonable level of civic responsibility in observing COVID Protocols. They have embraced the fact that, it is not enough for government to upscale its efforts, if the citizens do not upscale their engagements as well. They understood that, indeed, a challenge like COVID-19 requires citizens to partner with their governments in finding solutions to contain such a challenge.

And because of taking this challenge seriously and more importantly partnering with the government, infections have gotten to a manageable level. In fact, we are reporting more recoveries in some instances than infections. Hot spots like Mombasa and Nairobi have begun to stabilize.

Our experts have indicated that levels of positivity rate country-wide have fallen from 13% in June to 8% in August 2020. This is very encouraging and it means that, if we keep our civic responsibility high, we have a chance to reach the 5% positivity rate recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) for total re-opening. In that regard, as at this morning, the confirmed COVID-19 cases have risen by 213, bringing the aggregate to 33,016. We mourn the 5 lives lost over the last 24 hours.

¹ See <https://www.president.go.ke/>

Amid this tragedy, we remain thankful that we have over the same period, recorded 241 recoveries, bringing our total number of recoveries to 19,296, marking a recovery rate of 58%.

Fellow Kenyans,

We note the good progress we have made so far in fighting this enemy, but, this positive news is no license for us to drop guard and backslide from our path of responsibility.

Indeed, and as I have mentioned in the past, we are fighting a war against an invisible enemy. And as we enter the sixth month of this war, we are also entering a phase known as the 'Fog of War'.

In this phase, the 'combat arena' is foggy. And in this 'Fog of War', the first instinct is that of self-preservation. You fight to propagate yourself, your family and the environment that nurtures you. And in this 'foggy' state, you also become aware that the government CANNOT police the morality of its citizens. In fact, in the 'Fog of War', citizens while maintaining their liberties, scramble for their survival.

In sum, what will save us all in this war is the exercise of civic responsibility. And I must emphasize here again that, there are no unbearable responsibilities in the face of a crisis like COVID-19.

Fellow Kenyans,

Let me be clear; when I talk about 'responsibility' I do not mean "who carries the burden". Responsibility is not a burden; it is a civic duty. Instead of seeing it as something you carry, you must see it as a joyous task.

It is a happy debt you pay to your fellow citizens for being a member of their community; the price you pay to propagate yourself, your family and country.

Fellow Kenyans,

Although we have done well in our attempt to flatten the curve, there are two challenges that have continued to stifle our efforts.

First, while our determination to manage the spread of this pandemic in cities like Nairobi and Mombasa has started to pay dividends, the crisis has however begun to percolate to the counties. The new frontier of this invisible enemy is increasingly shifting to the counties and rural areas.

Whereas there is no doubt, notable expansion of the health sector architecture has taken place in the counties, more needs to be done. And the pace of this expansion should be increased in order to cope with the gradual shift of this pandemic to the counties.

Given this challenge, and the need to anchor Universal Health Coverage (UHC) in the expanding health architecture, I direct the following:

- i. That the Cabinet Secretary for Health, acting jointly with the Chairperson of Council of Governors, shall constitute a National Reference Group on COVID-19, to review the efficacy of our response to this pandemic so far. The group should record Lessons Learnt and feed them back into the sector nationally and in counties.
- ii. The Group should formulate strategies to identify institutional weaknesses within healthcare system at both tiers; recommend ways to increase the representation of the County Governments in the Boards of Healthcare Agencies; and recommend ways in which our national responses to healthcare emergencies can be improved.
- iii. The National Reference Group on COVID-19 should position healthcare as a driver of our manufacturing agenda by ensuring that preference is given to local manufacturers in the procurement of pharmaceuticals and non-pharmaceutical products.
- iv. The National Reference Group on COVID-19 should expand their ongoing work and establish the Kenya COVID Vaccine Consortium, bringing together relevant stakeholders locally and internationally, to

sharpen their focus on the development and testing of COVID-19 vaccine locally.

Following the allegations of impropriety at the Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA), the relevant investigative agencies are fully seized with the matter. Given the compelling public interest on the matter, the relevant agencies should expedite the ongoing investigations and conclude the same within 21 days from the date hereof.

Fellow Kenyans,

In line with our stated public policy on Zero Tolerance to Corruption, all persons found to be prima facie culpable as a result of those investigations should be brought to book, notwithstanding the public office they hold, or their political or social status.

Fellow Kenyans,

The pandemic before us poses an individual crisis, a health crisis and an economic crisis. If the cure for the crisis is civic responsibility, and we have done well in that area; there are some good returns as well from the economic sector.

While this pandemic continues to present us with various unprecedented challenges, we must always remember that Kenya is a work in progress. This is why we must celebrate the good returns even as we continue to battle the challenges before us.

Since March of this year, I have given ten addresses over the COVID-19 pandemic and this is the eleventh one. And in the ten addresses, I have made certain directives to cushion our economy and enhance the purchasing power of our people.

The notable one is the tax cuts we announced in March 2020. These have put 47.8 billion shillings in the pockets of Kenyans, including 14 billion shillings VAT refunds as I directed in March of 2020.

Reviewing the results today, I must admit that we have done better than we expected. For instance, even under COVID, the economy has grown by 4.6% compared to 5.5% last year.

And inflation is lower today at 4.4% compared to 6.3% during the same period last year; the current economic indicators are far better than we anticipated.

But the inspiring successes amongst us have been those that have used the COVID crisis to re-imagine their conditions. The banking sector, for instance, has begun to re-tool and humanize its model. Instead of focusing on profits, it has re-engineered its model to focus on the customer.

Government institutions like Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) have also remodeled their approach. Instead of destroying 1.5 Million Litres of illicit ethanol in their custody, they had it converted into hand sanitizers.

But the most inspiring story of re-imagining your circumstances during this COVID crisis is from a proprietor of a big school that closed. In order to meet his obligations with banks and other suppliers, one, Joseph Kungu, turned his school into a farm, rearing chicken and producing food.

Our exporters too are re-tooling and turning the challenge into promise. For example, our Fruits and Horticulture farmers, saw our horticulture earnings jump to Ksh. 81 billion between January and June, 2020 compared to Ksh. 76 billion for a similar period in 2019. Earnings from fruits alone nearly doubled from Ksh. 7 billion to Ksh. 12 billion.

What these examples of re-tooling business in times of crisis teach us is that: a crisis "...represents both danger and opportunity". And those who horrify themselves with the danger, will NOT survive. But those who choose to exploit the opportunities presented by the crisis, become the heroes of the moment.

Fellow Kenyans,

In order to secure the achievements we have made so far and build on them for the future, I further order and direct as follows:

- i. One, the Cabinet Secretary for Interior and Coordination of National Government in conjunction with the Chairperson of the Council of Governors, shall, in three weeks, convene an inclusive National Consultative Conference to review our national and county covid response and together with all stakeholders, chart Kenya's post-covid future.
- ii. Two, that the closure of bars and nightclubs is continued for a further 30 days. However, the prohibition against the sale of alcohol by licensed hotels with residence is vacated. In the next 30 days, bar owners, in consultation with the Ministry of Health will develop self-regulating mechanisms as part of their civic responsibility to their clientele, in order to allow their resumption.
- iii. Three, that the closing time for restaurants and eateries be and is hereby varied by one hour from 7pm to 8pm, effective 27th August, 2020.
- iv. Four, in accordance with the recommendations of the Inter-Faith Council, the maximum number of persons permitted to attend funerals and weddings is reviewed upwards to 100, with all in attendance abiding with Ministry of Health Protocols.
- v. Five, the ban on the sale of second-hand clothing, otherwise known as 'mitumba', is herewith lifted. Details of how this will operated and the protocols for the same will be announced by the Government tomorrow.
- vi. Six, that the Ministry of Sports, Culture & Heritage and the Ministry of Health will jointly issue guidelines on the gradual resumption of sporting events in Kenya.

- vii. Seven, that the Nationwide Curfew that is currently in force between the hours of 9pm and 4am daily, be and is hereby extended by a further 30 days.

Fellow Kenyans,

In concluding my remarks, today, let me say something about our Constitution. Tomorrow, the 27th of August 2020 marks the tenth year since we promulgated our new constitution.

This constitution has been hailed, the world-over, as one of the most progressive in the world. And this is because it is an embodiment of what a social contract between people of different origins and their government, should be.

But I must remind us all of one thing: "...If our past is constantly at war with our present, we end up losing our future". And the spirit of this constitution was meant to reconcile our past with the present in order to secure our future.

But the crafters of this social contract also told us that the new constitution was a 'work in progress'. And as such, we were made to adopt it with the promise that in the future, we will make it better.

Ten years later, the moment to improve on it is - NOW. And as I said in my Madaraka Day Speech, we must not succumb to the paralysis of constitutional rigidity. We must treat a constitution as a living document that must constantly adjust to our emerging realities.

In the past, all our constitutions have been cease-fire documents. Agreements created to dodge confrontation and civil conflict.

And if you do a textual reading of these constitutions, they represent a constant argument between the past and the present. That is why they are cease-fire documents.

But ten years after our progressive constitution, the moment calls us to do better. Instead of a cease-fire document that enforces a zero-sum game in which the winner takes it all, the moment calls us to create a constitutional order that will long endure. And on this, I want to emphasize that we must not go for the populist path. Let us choose the bold path; that path that will assure Kenyans of sustained peace and security, and shared economic prosperity.

Finally, if we view the health crisis as an opportunity, and not just a danger, then we will completely re-arrange our country, its constitutional architecture and its heritage. And as Abraham Lincoln once said: "...The only way to predict the future is to invent it". We can invent the future we want through our actions of 'civic responsibility' today.

God Bless you. God Bless Kenya