

STATEMENT BY HIS EXCELLENCY WILLIAM SAMOEI RUTO, C.G.H.; PHD; PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE KENYA DEFENCE FORCES, DURING A PUBLIC LECTURE AT LUISS SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT IN ROME, ON 21 APRIL 2026

Chairman of the Med-Or Italian Foundation,
Dean and President of the University,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to join you here in Rome. I thank the Med-Or Italian Foundation and the LUISS School of Government for convening this important conversation under the theme Kenya: A Country Looking to the Future.

I address you in two distinct yet complementary capacities: first, as President of the Republic of Kenya; and second, as a representative of the broader African voice.

Allow me, however, to begin with the broader global context. We are living through a period in which many of the certainties that have defined the global order for decades- including multilateral institutions, predictable trade systems, and long-standing security alliances- are faltering.

Conflict has returned to the centre of international affairs, from Ukraine in recent years to the Middle East in recent weeks. Trade routes have assumed renewed strategic significance, as reflected in rising tensions around the Strait of Hormuz. Security, meanwhile, is no longer confined to territorial borders; it now extends into cyberspace, energy systems, and critical infrastructure.

At the same time, technological change is advancing at a pace that governance systems are struggling to match. Climate pressures are no longer projections; they are an immediate and lived reality for hundreds of millions across the world.

In a world as disrupted as this, we must ask ourselves: what defines a truly capable State?

I believe it rests on at least five core attributes: responsiveness, collaboration, innovation, resilience, and ambition.

A responsive State listens and acts with clarity and speed. A collaborative State recognises that no nation succeeds alone and must therefore cultivate partnerships and alliances. An innovative State does not merely regulate technology; it harnesses it to deliver better outcomes. A resilient State absorbs shocks and continues to function, even in the face of disruption.

Above all, a capable State defines the scale of its future and sets its ambition accordingly, because no nation rises beyond the reach of its vision.

For perspective, allow me to ground these reflections in our national experience.

When many think of Kenya, what often comes to mind is extraordinary wildlife or world-class athletes-and while this is true, it is only part of the story. Kenya is indeed a land of remarkable beauty, the cradle of humankind, and the origin of wonder.

That is why we say that, wherever you come from, you do not simply visit Kenya; you return home.

But Kenya is far more than this. It is a dynamic, forward-looking nation at the centre of Africa's transformation.

Situated along the Indian Ocean in East Africa, Kenya occupies a strategic position at the crossroads of global trade routes linking Africa to the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.

With a population of over 55 million-predominantly young, educated, and ambitious- and one of the most diversified economies in the region, Kenya is charting a deliberate and confident path forward, anchored in resilience and reform.

Through deliberate- and at times difficult, but necessary- policy choices, we have transformed Kenya into the sixth-largest economy in Africa, strengthened our foreign exchange reserves, stabilised our currency, reduced inflation, and restored investor confidence, as reflected in the recent upgrade of our credit rating.

Over the past three years, we have made significant strides toward universal health coverage. In 2023, fewer than 8 million Kenyans had access to publicly funded health insurance; today, that number has increased nearly fourfold to over 30 million.

In housing, we are advancing an ambitious programme to expand access to affordable and modern homes, with over 240,000 units currently under construction- driving job creation, economic activity, and improved living standards.

In education, we have undertaken comprehensive reforms to expand access and enhance quality, including the transition to a competency-based education and training system aligned with the demands of a rapidly evolving world.

Kenya is equally a vibrant democracy, grounded in constitutional governance and active civic participation. Our institutions continue to deepen accountability and uphold the rule of law.

Yet our greatest strength lies in our people- innately curious, deeply creative, highly adaptable, and consistently competitive on the global stage; wherever opportunity arises, they rise to meet it with distinction and purpose.

Kenya is also home to one of the most technologically advanced populations in the world. As Africa's "Silicon Savannah," it is a hub of innovation where digital solutions are developed and scaled for real-world impact.

From mobile finance platforms such as M-Pesa to digital public services, innovation in Kenya is practical, inclusive, and transformative.

We recognise that citizens experience the State through service delivery. We are therefore redesigning government systems to be more accessible, transparent, and responsive through digital transformation.

Yet progress alone is not transformation. To assume that we need only maintain the status quo would be a profound miscalculation and dangerous complacency.

For too long, we- especially we in leadership- have tolerated mediocrity and constrained our ambition. That era has come to an end.

Today, we are raising the scale of our ambition, with a clear objective: to transform Kenya into a first-world economy within our lifetime. And we are doing this through three critical priority pillars.

First, we are undertaking a rapid expansion of critical transport and connectivity infrastructure, including roads, airports, and seaports. Over the next decade, we have committed to more than doubling our paved road network, modernising our airports, ports and logistics hubs. Because we recognise that connectivity is the backbone of economic transformation.

Second, we are strengthening our export-led agricultural transformation and food security through large-scale irrigation, anchored in the construction of at least 50 mega dams to bring over 2.5 million acres of land into productive use. Indeed, a key outcome of my visit to Italy is to advance the development of at least three of these strategic projects.

Third, we are working to more than triple our installed electricity capacity within the next seven years, to uptake modern technology, power industrial growth and sustain economic expansion. Industrialisation requires energy that is reliable, affordable, and sufficient to match the pace of enterprise.

To deliver on this ambition, we are adopting innovative financing models anchored in partnership. We are identifying commercially viable public projects and working with both domestic and international private sector partners to bring them to fruition; creating a genuine win-win outcomes: sustainable returns for

investors, and improved services for citizens, without imposing additional strain on public debt or taxation.

Through our National Infrastructure Fund and Sovereign Wealth Fund, we are mobilising public and private, domestic and foreign, capital to finance major priority projects worth €33 billion.

Mr President, distinguished guests,

Kenya's national aspirations are inseparable from the destiny of Africa. Our progress cannot be secured in isolation; it is fundamentally linked to the advancement of our continent as a whole.

For Kenya to move forward, Africa must advance. For Kenya to realise its full potential, Africa must not remain at the margins of the global order- it must stand at its forefront, shaping its direction and defining its future.

It is from this standpoint that I now turn to a number of issues that bear directly on Africa's place in the international system and on the evolving dynamics of global geopolitics.

The first point I wish to make is this: Africa is resolved to take full ownership of its destiny, and to shape its future on its own terms.

We are doing so by deepening intra-African trade, expanding manufacturing, and accelerating value addition across our economies. Africa is not merely the next frontier of global trade and investment; it is one of the defining opportunities of our time.

Through the African Continental Free Trade Area, we are unlocking a single market of 1.4 billion people, with a combined GDP of \$3.7 trillion. According to the World Bank, AfCFTA has the potential to increase Africa's exports by over \$560 billion by 2035, with substantial gains in manufacturing and industrial goods.

For partners such as the European Union, this represents a strategic opportunity. The EU is already Africa's largest trading partner, accounting for approximately 25% to 30% of total trade, with volumes exceeding €400 billion annually. Yet much of this trade remains concentrated in raw materials, an imbalance we must urgently address together. Now.

Today, manufactured goods account for less than 20% of Africa's exports, compared to over 70% in more industrialised regions. This is why, across the continent- and certainly in Kenya- we are investing in industrial parks, special economic zones, and regional value chains to build a competitive manufacturing base.

In Kenya, manufacturing contributes approximately 7% to 8% of GDP. We are committed to increasing this to at least 15% over the medium term. Across Africa, manufacturing output, currently valued at

around \$500 billion, has the potential to exceed \$1 trillion by 2030 with the right investments and partnerships.

This is where we see the future of Africa's partnerships with Europe and the wider international community: not as relationships defined by extraction, but by co-production and co-creation. We seek partnerships that invest in production within Africa, create jobs for our people, and deliver sustainable returns for investors. When we create jobs in Africa, we expand markets, strengthen stability, and reduce the pressures associated with illegal migration.

Each year, up to 12 million young Africans enter the labour market, yet only about 3 million formal jobs are created. The implications are clear: millions are left in informal, low-productivity, and often precarious employment, with nearly 96% of employed youth in informal sectors and many still living in poverty. This is not merely an economic concern; it is a social and political imperative. Without jobs and opportunity, we risk cycles of instability, unrest, and lost potential.

By investing in manufacturing and value addition, we lay the foundation for large-scale job creation. Industrialisation remains the most viable pathway to absorb our growing workforce, raise incomes, and build resilient economies. It is how we convert demographic pressure into a demographic dividend.

If we get this right, Africa's youth will not constitute a burden on the global system; they will be one of its greatest engines of growth, innovation, and shared prosperity. That is the opportunity before us, and that is the future we must build.

This is why Africa's demographic trajectory matters not only for Africa, but for the world.

By 2050, one in every four people globally will be living in Africa. This is not simply a demographic projection; it is a defining reality for global demand, supply chains, and economic growth. The question is not whether Africa will shape the future, but whether we will build that future together. The time to invest in Africa is now.

However, for Kenya- and for Africa more broadly- to fully realise this potential, we must acknowledge that the current global financial architecture does not work equitably for all. It was designed in a different era, for a different world, and too often it continues to favour the already developed while constraining those still building.

Today, African countries face disproportionately high costs of capital, not always due to underlying fundamentals, but as a result of structural biases in global risk assessment. Credit rating systems, largely calibrated to advanced economies, frequently fail to reflect the resilience, growth potential, and reform trajectories of African markets. The result is a persistent risk premium that raises borrowing costs, limits investment, and slows development.

Institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme have acknowledged that countries in Africa and across the Global South often pay significantly higher interest rates than advanced economies, even where debt levels are comparable or lower.

In times of crisis, we have witnessed abrupt credit rating downgrades- sometimes preceding actual defaults- triggering capital flight and further constraining fiscal space. This is not merely a market outcome; it reflects a deeper structural imbalance.

We therefore call for a more just, balanced, and responsive global financial system- one that recognises both risk and opportunity; one that reflects not only past performance, but future potential; and one that expands access to affordable capital rather than restricts it.

This is not a call for concession. It is a call for fairness, for accuracy, and for a system that is truly global in both design and outcome. Without such reform, we risk perpetuating a cycle in which those who most need capital to grow remain those least able to access it. That outcome is neither sustainable nor just; for Africa or for the world.

Nowhere is this imbalance more evident- or more consequential- than in the global response to climate change.

Climate change stands as both a profound test of our time and a gateway to a new global economy. Across Africa, climate-related shocks are eroding between 3% and 5% of GDP annually, draining public resources and reversing hard-won development gains.

Yet within this challenge lies significant opportunity. Climate action is no longer solely an environmental imperative; it is a central driver of future economic growth. Investment in clean energy has now surpassed \$2 trillion annually. Yet Africa, home to nearly 20% of the world's population, receives less than 3% of this investment. This imbalance must be addressed.

The transition to clean energy offers a pathway to industrialisation, job creation, energy security, and long-term competitiveness. It is about building new industries, modern energy systems, and resilient economies; an entirely new growth model anchored in sustainability.

Africa is not standing still. Kenya provides a clear illustration of what is possible. Today, over 90% of our electricity is generated from clean energy sources. We are a global leader in geothermal power, with projects such as Olkaria placing Kenya among the top producers worldwide.

We have also made substantial investments in wind and solar energy, including the Lake Turkana Wind Power project, one of the largest on the continent, as well as continued expansion of solar generation. These investments are not only reducing emissions; they are powering industry, lowering costs, and strengthening energy security.

Across Africa, similar efforts are underway, scaling renewable energy, advancing green industrialisation, and strengthening climate resilience across agriculture, infrastructure, and livelihoods. These are deliberate steps to reposition Africa from a victim of climate change to a driver of global solutions.

But Africa cannot do this alone. The international community must now match ambition with delivery. Climate leadership must be measured not by declarations, but by results. This requires a fundamental shift: reforming financial systems, scaling up climate finance, and ensuring equitable access to investment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My final point on Africa concerns the continent's place on the global stage, particularly within the architecture of international peace and security.

For decades, the world has relied on a framework designed to preserve international peace and security, prevent conflict and aggression- particularly among major powers- enable collective action when peace is threatened, and uphold the responsibility of leading nations as custodians of global stability.

That framework has served the international community so far. Yet today, it is under significant strain. What clearer evidence of dysfunction can there be than a system in which those entrusted to underwrite global peace and prevent aggression are themselves the accused.

What clearer signal do we require than a world that appears to be drifting toward an order defined not by rules, but by might. A world where the strong act with impunity, while the broader international community, including the United Nations, have no recourse?

It is for this reason that Kenya, together with the rest of Africa, are right in calling for urgent reform of the United Nations, more particularly the United Nations peace and security architecture, to ensure that it is fit for purpose in the realities of our time.

We cannot, in good conscience, speak of a truly "United Nations" when the voice of 54 African countries remains absent from the highest levels of decision-making on global peace, security, and development.

Africa must, as a matter of principle and justice, be accorded permanent representation on the United Nations Security Council. This is neither a concession nor an act of affirmative action; it is a necessity for the legitimacy, credibility, and effectiveness of the United Nations itself.

We must recall the solemn commitment that gave rise to the United Nations eight decades ago: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice brought untold suffering to humanity. That commitment- "never again"- was not a mere slogan; it was a covenant with humanity.

I wish to reiterate the following. When power begins to outweigh principle; when established norms lose their authority; when might is allowed to define right; and when the international community stands divided or paralysed in the face of aggression, we move dangerously close to the precipice of global disorder and anarchy.

This is a future that we must collectively- and decisively- reject.

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

I was invited to speak about Kenya: a country looking to the future. I chose also to speak about Africa: a continent looking above and beyond. I did so because the two journeys are inseparable. Our challenges are shared, and so, too, are our opportunities.

Today, both as a nation and as a continent, we are ready: ready to confront our challenges with honesty, and ready to take responsibility for shaping our future. We are doing our part.

What we ask of the world is straightforward: partnership and solidarity. Partnership that recognises our potential, and solidarity that translates ambition into action.

If we succeed, the future we are shaping will not belong to a few, nor to the mighty and most powerful; it will belong to all.

And that is a future worth building- together. Right now.

I thank you.