

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

OFFICIAL REPORT

Eighth Parliament - Third Session - First Day

(Eighth Parliament established by Proclamation - Legal Notice No.7 of 23rd January 1999)

Tuesday, 6th April, 1999

STATE OPENING OF A NEW SESSION

The National Assembly met at thirty minutes past Two O'clock at Parliament Buildings on Tuesday, 6th April, 1999, it being the first day of the Third Session.

ARRIVAL OF HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

[His Excellency the President (Mr. arap Moi) escorted by the Speaker and accompanied by the Mace of the National Assembly, entered the Chamber at fifty-five minutes past Two O'clock]

[His Excellency the President (Mr. arap Moi) took the Chair]

(The Mace of the National Assembly was placed on the Table)

PRAYERS

Mr. Speaker: Your Excellency, hon. Members, may I call upon the Spiritual Leaders to offer prayers for this new Session.

*(Prayers were then said by the following: Rt. Rev. Gitari;
Bishop Urbanus Kioko; Sheikh N.M. Nahdy;
the Rt. Rev. Jesse Kamau and Mr. Soipin Lekoolool)*

COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIR

WELCOME TO HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

Mr. Speaker: Your Excellency the President, on behalf of all Honourable Members, I welcome Your Excellency to this August Assembly to perform the State Opening of the Third Session of the Eighth Parliament of our Republic.

This occasion is cherished by all as it sets in motion the activities of this House. It is the day which Your Excellency presents to the House a considered assessment of the state of the nation, as well as a statement of the Government's major business intended to be brought before the House during the Session. Hence it gives Members an opportunity to hear from you, both as Head of State and Government.

Your Excellency, today is almost one year and two months since the formal inauguration of the Eighth Parliament on 3rd February, last year. There is need therefore for all honourable Members to reflect on their programme of activities, achievements and failures during the past one year. One year is a reasonable span of time to assess success or failure of any institution. In my view this House, since its inauguration last year, has made tremendous steps in addressing issues pertinent to our society.

Debate has been more issue oriented since the re-introduction of multi-party politics in 1993. There has been considerable rapport between Hon. Members of the various political parties both within and outside the Chamber. There has also developed a spirit of give and take. This is as it should be. I expect this trend to continue, to be developed and nurtured. It is in the best interests of this country that we do so.

There are, however, several limitations to the work of Parliament that need to be addressed both internally and externally. For Hon. Members to be effective in their work, they require space, material and

resource persons. To this end, I am happy to report to Your Excellency and to the House that the process of awarding tenders for the partitioning of Continental Building are at an advanced stage. According to the approved designs by the relevant Committee of the House, there will be 224 offices for all Hon. Members (including Ministers and Assistant Ministers), an ultra-modern Parliamentary Library, a Parliamentary Research Centre, five Committee Rooms and a Health Centre among other facilities. These facilities and services when ready will enable Parliament to build the capacity to achieve the noble objective of making this House accessible to all Kenyans through enhanced committee operations, researched and informed Parliamentary contributions and enable hon. Members attend to the needs of their constituents in dignified offices rather than in corridors, roadways and cars as the position has hitherto been. Parliament will therefore, make to the Treasury a requisition for considerable amounts of monies meet the cost of putting in place the necessary material and to employ all necessary human resource persons. It is a cost that Kenyans ought to and must bear in their quest for a working Parliamentary democracy.

Parliament urgently requires to recruit and train personnel to service the various Committees of the House, serve the library, hon. Members' offices, in the Chamber and various other places. These officers must meet the special needs of Parliament and be answerable to Parliament. In my six years as Speaker, I have found the Public Service Commission most unresponsive to the needs of Parliament.

(Applause)

It is now time to have a Parliamentary Service Commission! In the meantime, we shall employ the meagre human resources to develop and shape the Departmental Committees. These Committees have, due to lack of physical and human resources, been restricted to Bills. Their scope is much larger than that.

Finally, I would like to make a special appeal to Ministers; please use the Floor of the House to launch new Government policies. I will avail the time for you. The House is a much better forum than Harambee meetings or funerals!

(Applause)

It is now my singular honour and privilege to invite Your Excellency to address the House and officially open this our Third Session of the Eighth Parliament.

Thank you.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

His Excellency the President (Mr. arap Moi): Mr. Speaker, Sir, my first and pleasant duty is to welcome hon. Members to the Third Session of the Eighth Parliament. During the recess, we lost hon. Ndubai, who until his death was the hon. Member for Tigania West. I therefore, ask you all to stand and observe a minute of silence in his remembrance.

(Hon. Members stood for one minute in silence)

Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Christmas recess provided the opportunity for us to visit our constituencies and see for ourselves the development activities taking place in our country. I am confident that hon. Members are fully updated on the development challenges facing our people.

Kenyans look up to us to provide solutions to their problems. They will be keen to see what measures this House will take to resolve the pressing issues facing them. This Session of Parliament will therefore need to be more resourceful and devote more of its time and energy towards tackling the problems facing our people.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, while the House was on recess, I also found time to visit various parts of the country to review progress on development programmes. I had the opportunity to talk to wananchi and to listen to their problems. Unemployment, hunger, malnutrition and the burden of cost-sharing in schools and hospitals are some of the problems that call for our urgent attention. In addition, poor roads, inadequate supply of water, energy and communication facilities continue to hamper the efforts we are making to raise economic growth rates.

My Government has implemented various policy measures to revitalize the economy. Although these have yielded positive results, low economic growth rates in general and low productivity in the agricultural sector in particular, are areas that require priority attention from all of us. As we continue with the liberalization process,

we must at the same time review existing laws and come up with new laws that will cushion our farmers against the adverse effects of the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the short-term consequences of structural adjustment policies are painfully severe particularly on the low income earners. These policies have resulted in higher levels of unemployment and have worsened the poverty situation in the country. As hon. Members will agree, poverty respects neither ethnic, cultural, religious nor political boundaries. In this regard, the reduction of poverty requires the co-operation and participation of all Kenyans.

As part of this effort, my Government prepared the National Poverty Eradication Plan which I launched on 11th March, this year. The plan outlines the measures we must take to bring this problem under control. During the launching ceremony for the plan, many views were expressed on how to tackle the problem of poverty. The views will be incorporated in the implementation strategy. Furthermore, and as requested by participants at the forum, the plan will be Tabled before this House for further discussion and adoption. My Government looks forward to incorporating views from hon. Members which will assist in this worthwhile course.

We must, however, accept the fact that a lasting solution to the problem of poverty can only be achieved through the realisation of higher economic growth rates. My Government has implemented the necessary economic policy measures to strengthen the role of the private sector and to enable it play its part in boosting economic productivity. We will also continue to ensure micro-economic stability through strict budgetary discipline. But the overriding principle in our efforts to reduce poverty remains hard work on the part of each and every able bodied Kenyan.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with regard to security, we shall need to improve vigilance on all our borders because of increased insecurity in the neighbouring countries. Towards this end, the Government has taken the necessary action to increase budgetary resources that will be applied towards strengthening the security of our borders. Our security personnel are under instructions to track down criminals and bring them to justice. Kenyans have a duty to report suspicious persons, whether they are Kenyans or foreigners, so that our law enforcement agents can weed out criminals from our midst. Furthermore, we as leaders have an obligation to discourage the growth of the culture of violence and defiance of authority. We have a duty to promote tolerance and responsible nationhood so that we can maintain peace and stability that are crucial for rapid development.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the problem of corruption is of concern to all of us. Corruption is a vice that undermines efficiency and raises the cost of providing services to wananchi. It is Kenyans themselves, those who give as well as those who receive bribes, who must reject this social evil. My Government has established the Kenya Anti-Corruption Authority to deal with cases of corruption. It is worthy, however, to understand that an Anti-Corruption Authority in itself cannot weed out corrupt attitudes or practices. Thus, I call for your support for the Authority to enable it discharge its duties effectively. Hon. Members should play a more meaningful role of educating people in our society on the evils of corruption so as to change their attitude. The Government can pass legislation and enforce laws, but the real victory against corruption will come when our people accord this vice the contempt it deserves.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, the challenges of nation-building call for all of us to be disciplined, united and objective in pursuing issues of national importance. All Kenyans, and in particular, all leaders, irrespective of their political persuasions, have a collective responsibility to ensure the unity, stability and prosperity of this nation. I urge hon. Members to cast aside personal interests and join hands in working for the common good of our country and people.

In this regard, the constitutional reform process is important to all of us. Kenyans are anxious to see the process move forward. As I have said before, the document that will come out of the constitutional reform process will not be the property of any one political party. It will belong to all Kenyans. I therefore urge political parties to work together to find a mutually acceptable solution to the current stalemate in the process.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, this Session of Parliament is unique in the sense that it is the last one in this millennium. We are on the threshold of a new century, but of greater importance is the fact that we are on the threshold of a new economic era. My Government has put in place an enabling atmosphere for both individuals as well as companies to engage in commercial activities both in the country and elsewhere in the world. Kenya has been at the forefront in strengthening regional co-operation. What we need now is for Kenyans to be more vigorous in taking advantage of the existing opportunities to improve their well-being.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, during this Session, the Government will Table a number of Bills for discussion by the House. These will also include two Bills which lapsed at the end of the last Session. These are the Traffic (Amendment) Bill and the Medical Laboratory Technicians and Technologists Bill. In addition, the House will be called upon to deliberate on the Industrial Properties Bill, the Environmental Management Conservation Bill, the Tea (Amendment) Bill and the Kenya Roads Board Bill, among others. I urge hon. Members to take time to study

these Bills and make contributions that truly represent the wishes of their electors. In addition, I urge hon. Members to give priority to the Business of this House and minimise incidents of lack of quorum.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, as I conclude my remarks today, I wish to emphasise the need for unity in addressing the problems facing our people. The task of nation-building is a difficult one, but through our unity of purpose, we will succeed in putting this country on the path of sustainable economic growth. I therefore, urge all hon. Members to always strive to put the common interest of our people ahead of individual interests. If we do so, we shall succeed in building a nation that we can all be proud of and which will be the pride of future generations.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, with these remarks, I wish hon. Members frank and fruitful deliberations throughout the entire Session of this Parliament.

Thank you.

(Applause)

NOTICE OF MOTION

THANKS FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

The Vice-President and Minister for Planning and National Development (Prof. Saitoti): Mr. Speaker, Sir, I beg to give notice of the following Motion:-

THAT, the thanks of this House be recorded for the exposition of public policy contained in His Excellency's Presidential Address from the Chair on 6th April, 1999.

DEPARTURE OF HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now His Excellency's pleasure to take his leave.

*(His Excellency the President, in
procession, left the Chamber)*

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House is now adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, 7th April, 1999, at 9.00 a.m.

(The House rose at 3.40 p.m.)