



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY HON. WILLIAM SAMOEI
RUTO, PhD, C.G.H., PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF
KENYA AND COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE
FORCES, DURING THE PRIZE-GIVING CEREMONY OF
THE 2026 WRC SAFARI RALLY KENYA**

MARCH 15, 2026

NAIVASHA, NAKURU COUNTY



**Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good afternoon,**

1. It is a great pleasure to be back here in Naivasha for the 2026 Safari Rally, marking the culmination of the 73rd edition of one of the world's toughest and most grueling rallies.
2. Kenya is truly proud to host this prestigious event, which has become a shining symbol of our nation's passion for motorsport and our commitment to global sporting excellence.
3. Over the decades, Safari Rally has changed shape and evolved. It may no longer be the thousand-mile marathon that once defined its legend, but make no mistake, the spirit of the Safari remains alive and unchanged. It is still the most punishing gravel rally on the planet, a test not only of speed, but of endurance, ingenuity, and imagination.
4. The terrain still humbles even the most sophisticated of machines. The unpredictable weather, the unforgiving surfaces and the vast landscapes of the Rift Valley ensure that every crew lining up at the start understands they are entering one of the toughest battles motorsports can offer.
5. That spirit has always been carried by the legends brave enough to conquer the Safari. The story of the Safari Rally has been written by extraordinary drivers and extraordinary machines.



Shekhar Mehta became the rally's most enduring symbol, winning five times in cars such as the Datsun 160J and the Datsun 240Z. Björn Waldegård added to the legend with victories in the Ford Escort RS1800 and the Toyota Celica, while Juha Kankkunen triumphed in the Toyota Celica Turbo 4WD and the Lancia Delta Integrale.

6. Later came modern icons such as Colin McRae, wrestling the Ford Focus and Subaru Impreza through the African wilderness, and Tommi Mäkinen mastering the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution. Each generation brought new heroes, new machines, and new stories, yet the challenge remained the same: To survive the Safari.
7. This year's rally marked an important new chapter. The ceremonial start and the Kasarani Super Special in Nairobi were replaced by a focused Naivasha-only itinerary. The Shakedown moved to Thursday morning at the new Nawisa test, and by that same afternoon, the competitive action got underway.
8. From the very first kilometre, there was no gentle introduction, but the immediate testing reality of the Safari. Drivers and machines faced razor-sharp rocks, punishing terrain and the infamous "fesh-fesh" sand, a powder so deep it can swallow a rally car whole.
9. Friday proved to be the crucible of the rally - a brutal eight-stage marathon that included a reversed run through the unforgiving Camp Moran stage, a section known for pushing both courage and machinery to their absolute limits.



10. And this morning, the rally returned to the legendary Hell's Gate National Park, where the final runs unfolded beneath the towering cliffs of the Rift Valley. It is here that the Wolf Power Stage delivered a dramatic finale, set against one of the most breathtaking backdrops in global motorsport.
11. It was a fitting conclusion for the Safari Rally - shorter than in the old days perhaps, but no less fierce, no less demanding, and still driven by the same spirit that made it legendary.
12. That is why I must take this opportunity to congratulate every team and crew that took part in this year's rally. Simply arriving here is, in many ways, a victory of its own. The Safari does not merely test machines; it tests resolve, judgment, and the limits of human endurance.
13. To compete on this terrain is to confront one of the greatest challenges in motorsport. And few come here and not be transformed by the experience. Every driver, every co-driver and every team member who lined up at the start leaves with something more than a result - the knowledge that they faced the Safari and emerged stronger for it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. Over the past few months, our nation has successfully hosted several major international events, including the African Nations Championship (CHAN), Rugby Sevens tournaments, the Magical Kenya Open and, this week, the Safari Rally.



These events demonstrate that Kenya is more than capable of hosting world-class competitions and that our country remains a welcoming destination for the world.

15. Beyond the spectacle, events such as the Safari Rally have a profound impact on our economy. They support businesses, create employment opportunities, stimulate tourism, and generate valuable foreign exchange for our country.
16. Last year, I asked the Kenya Motorsport Federation to work with the Ministry of Sports and the International Automobile Federation to advance two important initiatives: The local production of an affordable International Automobile Federation Cross Car and the establishment of a Rally Academy.
17. Today, I am pleased to announce that Corporation for Africa Overseas Mobility Kenya has partnered with the Kenya Motorsport Federation to produce the first Affordable Cross Car, and also donated two Toyota Starlets to support the Rally Academy.
18. In addition, Corporation for Africa Overseas has developed a training curriculum for drivers and mechanics. I commend them for this initiative and encourage them to work closely with TVET institutions and the Ministry of Education to ensure the success of these programmes.



19. Through the Ministry of Sports and the Motorsport Academy, the government will continue to support this initiative to ensure that it provides opportunities, training, and resources for the next generation of Kenyan drivers, engineers, and technicians.
20. As we bring the 2026 Safari Rally to a close, I wish to thank the International Automobile Federation for their continued support, the organising team, the WRC event promoters, our private sector partners, Kenyan fans, visiting fans and all participants whose dedication, commitment, and resilience have made this event the resounding success it has been.
21. **I look forward to welcoming you all again in 2027.**

I thank you.

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