REPUBLIC OF KENYA

INAUGURAL KEYNOTE AND OFFICIAL OPENING ADDRESS 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 WORLD HEALTH SUMMIT REGIONAL MEETING 2026

APRIL 27, 2026

NAIROBI

Distinguished Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers; Ambassadors,
Distinguished Scientists and Innovators,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I welcome you all to Nairobi, Kenya, for the World Health Summit Regional Meeting 2026; an important convening that reflects a fundamental shift in the global recognition that Africa is no longer a passive participant in global health, but an active architect of its direction, its priorities, and its outcomes.

2. That this Summit is convened on African soil for only the second time is also an acknowledgement that the future of health policy, innovation, and delivery cannot be meaningfully advanced without Africa at the centre of both deliberation and implementation.

3. On behalf of the people and Government of Kenya, I convey our deep appreciation to all partners and institutions whose foresight, collaboration, and commitment have made this gathering possible, and to each of you whose presence represents the full spectrum of leadership required to drive meaningful change.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

4. This Summit is anchored on a clear and urgent imperative. It calls on us to reimagine Africa's health systems through innovation, integration, and interdependence. It challenges us to design practical pathways that translate into better outcomes for our people.

5. Africa today stands at a critical intersection, defined by stark disparities and immense opportunity. We carry more than 25% of the global disease burden, yet account for less than 3% of global health expenditure.

6. We remain heavily dependent on external supply chains for essential commodities such as medicines and vaccines, producing less than 2% of what we consume. At the same time, despite the dedication and resilience of our health workers, the density of our workforce remains significantly below global benchmarks.

7. This imbalance is neither sustainable nor tenable. It calls for a decisive and deliberate shift- from fragmented, piecemeal interventions to comprehensive, system-wide transformation- anchored in coherent strategy, financed through both domestic and international capital, and sustained by strong governance and accountable institutions.

8. At the same time, Africa possesses unique advantages that must be fully harnessed, including an energetic and youthful population, rapidly expanding digital infrastructure, and a vibrant culture of innovation, which together position the continent as a source of scalable solutions rather than a repository of persistent challenges.

9. Our responsibility, therefore, is not merely to recognise Africa's potential but to fully realise it through coordinated investments, policy alignment, and institutional strengthening that can deliver impact at scale and at speed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. In Kenya, we have sought to translate this vision into action by undertaking a comprehensive reform programme that places health at the centre of our national development agenda, recognising it as a driver of productivity, equity, and long-term economic growth.

11. We have enacted transformative legislation that establishes a durable framework for Universal Health Coverage, ensuring that reforms are not dependent on political cycles but are anchored in law, institutional continuity, and public accountability.

12. Through the Social Health Authority, we are implementing a unified financing model that expands risk pooling, reduces out-of-pocket expenditure, and ensures that access to quality

healthcare is determined by need rather than income or geography.

13. Since its launch in October 2024, nearly 30.7 million Kenyans have registered as members of the Authority. This means that the number of those with health insurance has grown nearly fourfold, from fewer than 8 million just two years ago.

14. In the same period, we have collected Ksh 169 billion ($1.3 billion) across the Primary Healthcare Fund, the Social Health Insurance Fund, the Emergency, Chronic and Critical Illness Fund, and the Public Officers Medical Scheme Fund, and paid out Ksh 124 billion ($954 million) as reimbursements to facilities for care provided.

15. Through a strengthened Primary Health Care system, we have expanded our community health system and deployed more than 100,000 community health promoters across the country, enabling care to reach households directly and ensuring early detection, prevention, and continuity of care, as well as effective linkages to secondary and tertiary facilities.

16. Through sustained investment in digital health systems, we are integrating data, improving transparency, and enhancing decision-making, recognising that effective health systems depend not only on infrastructure and personnel, but also on reliable, real-time information.

17. Digitalisation is not only enhancing efficiency in service delivery but also promoting fiscal accountability, particularly in the context of a shifting global development assistance landscape.

18. These reforms have neither been easy nor flawless. Yet they represent meaningful and significant progress for our people and a clear departure from the constraints of the past. We recognise that transformation is an ongoing process; as we advance, we continue to refine and strengthen both the system and its underlying architecture, learning, adapting, and improving to ensure it delivers fully and effectively for all.

19. Kenya's experience demonstrates that when political leadership prioritises health as a foundational pillar of development, aligns policy with financing, and centres service delivery on communities, transformation becomes both achievable and sustainable.

Distinguished Delegates,

20. The future of Africa's health systems must be shaped through collective continental action that addresses both longstanding gaps and emerging pressures, including the rise of non-communicable diseases, the growing burden of mental health conditions, and the profound impact of climate change on health outcomes.

21. This requires deliberate choices, including increasing domestic health financing in line with our commitments, strengthening local pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity, investing in the training and retention of health professionals, and ensuring that digital innovation serves as a tool for inclusion rather than exclusion.

22. It also requires us to institutionalise preparedness for future health emergencies by strengthening primary health care services, enhancing surveillance systems, improving regional coordination, and supporting continental institutions capable of responding effectively and rapidly to emerging public health threats.

23. In addition, Africa must position itself at the forefront of biotechnology and advanced research by investing in genomics, vaccine development, and local manufacturing ecosystems, thereby transitioning from a consumer of innovation to a producer of globally relevant solutions.

24. To our global partners, I wish to emphasise that Africa seeks partnerships grounded in mutual benefit, aligned with national priorities, and focused on long-term investment rather than short-term assistance.

25. A healthy Africa is indispensable to global stability, economic growth, and shared prosperity. The question before the international community is therefore not whether to invest in

Africa, but how to do so in a manner that is strategic, sustainable, and transformative.

26. It is now my honour and privilege to declare the World Health Summit Regional Meeting 2026 officially open.

I thank you.

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