



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

**SPEECH BY H.E. DR. WILLIAM RUTO, CGH,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA AND
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE
FORCES, ON THE OCCASION OF THE AWARD OF A
CHARTER TO RIARA UNIVERSITY**

MARCH 19, 2025

STATE HOUSE, NAIROBI

Greetings,

1. It is a delightful privilege to be with you this morning, and to preside over this historic ceremony as the charter is awarded to Riara University. The award marks a truly crowning achievement for the founders and leadership of this institution, whose commitments to consistent investments to raise the standard of private education in Kenya is well documented. Therefore, this event is yet another significant milestone in our country's journey to improve the quality and, at the same time, expand access to quality higher education by strengthening the university sector's capacity to meet the human development needs of an ambitious people, manage the dynamic imperatives of a globalised economy and address the innovative gaps of our nation and region.
2. We are here to reaffirm our understanding and remind the world of the indispensable role of education as the key to prosperity in the sense that it is the foundation upon which we build a strong, dynamic, resilient, secure and innovative society. Education is also a strong pillar of freedom, democracy, justice and the rule of law. Bearing this in mind, it is possible for us to better appreciate the evolution of higher education in Kenya, which has been nothing short of remarkable, as being consistent with our nation's disposition and ambition.
3. In 1970, we had only two universities – one public and one private - serving about 3,000 students. Today, we have a total of 79 universities with over 570,000 students, 150,000 of whom attend private universities.
4. I have no doubt that this impressive progress was only made possible by the immense contributions of visionaries who dared to dream bold dreams, pioneering entrepreneurs who staked fortunes on their conviction, and dedicated professionals who were willing to give new methods, approaches and systems a chance.



Illustrious educationists like those behind the Riara Group, of which Riara University is a part, are among the leading lights of this exemplary movement in the private sector. I am honoured to have this opportunity of congratulating Mr Daniel Gachukia and Prof Eddah Gachukia for the pioneering role they have played in our country's education sector for many decades. Their work over the past 50 years has positively shaped the landscape of Kenyan teaching and learning, touching thousands of lives and positively affecting the destinies of many. Your impact and legacy will endure for generations to come.

5. Ladies and gentlemen, I am certain that we all agree that the commendable growth and expansion of our higher education sector must be accompanied by a consistent commitment to the highest standards, as well as intentional innovative and forward-thinking strategies in order to align with the endlessly evolving needs of our economy and society. Without this attitude, we shall struggle to fully unlock its transformative potential. With collaboration between the public and private sector, between education and industry, between learning, training and research, and between communities and educators, our country will advance greatly as a leader in emerging fields of knowledge, science, technology and innovation.
6. In this spirit, I invite all of us to apply our minds to the critical challenge of unemployment, and rise to the occasion by redefining the role of universities, not merely as centres of academic excellence but, equally and crucially, as engines of opportunity and innovation. The time has come for us to critically review curricula in order to design programmes that equip graduates with the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to excel in an increasingly competitive, highly dynamic and globalised job market.
7. It is no secret that chronic underfunding has been a critical impediment to the ability of our universities to design and implement market-oriented programmes that align with the needs of a modern economy.



I have disclosed before that, by the end of 2022, our public universities had accumulated debts exceeding KSh120 billion, with 23 of them struggling and on the verge of bankruptcy.

8. However, through determined collaboration, we developed and implemented interventions to strengthen university governance, democratise their revenue streams, and implement cost-cutting measures.
9. Across the world, institutions of higher learning are moving towards a stronger role in enterprise, with many integrating research, innovation, and production into their core functions. The time has come for Kenya to embrace this model and, through the Kenya Network of Entrepreneurial Universities, we intend to engage all universities to implement it. At present, participating institutions are 14, including three private universities, among them, Riara University. In the 2025/26 financial year, this number will increase to 24, with a longterm goal of incorporating all public and private universities.
10. This transformation is already yielding results with clear progress towards sustainability. Our universities have increased their extra-budgetary revenues by KSh9.6 billion, from KSh45.2 billion to KSh54.8 billion in the 2024/2026 financial year.

This is strong evidence that by diversifying revenue streams, universities are indeed moving towards financial independence and institutional sustainability. This is good news for learning, teaching, research, development and innovation.

11. To enhance efficiency in student financing by streamlining loan processing and ensuring timely disbursement, the government has merged the Higher Education Loans Board (HELB) and the Universities Fund.



12. As I promised last week, HELB released KSh1.5 billion last Friday, and yesterday an additional KSh4.5 billion, bringing the total disbursement to KSh6 billion for students upkeep.
13. So far, HELB has disbursed KSh36.6 billion in tuition and upkeep loans, benefiting 418,729 university students and 233,540 trainees in TVET institutions for the 2024/2025 financial year.
14. To fully fund the 401,334 university and 227,433 TVET students, a total of KSh48 billion for loans and KSh26.5 billion for scholarships is required. Also needed is an additional KSh23.4 billion in capitation grants for public universities, and KSh574 million for private universities.
15. These statistics are very important because they underscore the progress we are making on our journey of guaranteeing inclusive higher education.
16. Ladies and gentlemen, I must briefly mention another key reform underway in our education system, which complements the efforts to improve the relevance and applicability of education as well its capacity to offer effective pathways for developing the skills and talents of learners. The Competency-Based Curriculum model equips learners with practical and relevant skills, ensuring they transition seamlessly into well-prepared professionals and entrepreneurs ready to power our economy. I want to assure parents that the Government has made all necessary arrangements to facilitate the transition.
17. To remain competitive in a global landscape, I encourage our universities to forge stronger partnerships with the private sector and commercialise innovations, develop market-driven programmes that equip students with future-ready skills and leverage technology and digital platforms to expand access to learning opportunities.



18. I therefore urge Riara University to lead the way in mobilising the necessary resources to actualise its Konza Campus into a centre of excellence in technology innovation, not just within Konza Technopolis, but across Africa. As you do this, I encourage you to be bold and different in order to pioneer innovative training and research programmes that tackle Kenya and Africa's greatest challenges head-on.
19. I assure you of the Government's steadfast commitment to the growth and development of our higher education sector. We shall continue to design policies that transform universities into hubs of research, innovation, and excellence.
20. Once again, I congratulate Riara University on this historic achievement. May you continue to bear high the bright torch of knowledge and innovation, and to inspire generations to contribute to our nation's progress towards greatness.
21. I now officially present the charter to Riara University. Hongera!

Thank you
God bless you
God bless Kenya.

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