

**SPEECH BY HIS EXCELLENCY HON. MWAI KIBAKI,  
C.G.H., M.P., PRESIDENT AND COMMANDER-IN-  
CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THE REPUBLIC OF  
KENYA DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE PAN  
AFRICA MEDIA CONFERENCE, KENYATTA  
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, NAIROBI,  
18TH MARCH, 2010**

Your Excellency, Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda,  
His Highness the Aga Khan, Members of the Fourth Estate, Distinguished Ladies  
and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you for the Pan Africa Media Conference. May I take this  
early opportunity, on behalf of the Kenyan people, to warmly welcome all visitors  
to our beautiful country - Karibuni Kenya.

Allow me to especially acknowledge His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the  
Republic of Rwanda, and retired Presidents Benjamin Mkapa and Joaquim  
Chissano.

I would also like to congratulate the Nation Media group as it celebrates its 50th  
anniversary. 50 years ago His Highness the Aga Khan embarked on what we can  
now call a formidable journey. From humble beginnings, his vision of serving a  
country on the verge of independence has, given birth to the Nation Media  
Group, the largest media house in East and Central Africa.

I congratulate all those who have played a part in the growth of the Media  
Group. I salute the many men and women who have chronicled our history and  
heralded the future prospects and challenges of our country and region. These  
men and women have sought to define our place in a global village as new  
technologies bring to life what looked almost impossible in yesteryears.

We salute past staffers and the new generation of journalists for their  
contribution in making our country the epitome of media freedom on our  
continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this meeting is appropriate and indeed captures the essence of the  
African Promise. It provides a unique opportunity to reflect on the past, present  
and future prospects of the media in Africa in the context of the challenges of a  
dynamic and globalized environment. This is an important theme considering

that the media has a unique contribution to make in the social, political and economic life of our continent.

In the next few days you have a great opportunity to digest the challenges and opportunities of new media. The increased access to mobile phones and the internet has given rise to new media that resonates well with our young population.

However even those of us born before the computer age, appreciate the contribution of these new avenues of communication. Indeed, the advent of citizen journalism has become possible because of tools such as S.M.S., blogs, and social networking websites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Myspace.

I am therefore happy to note that you will be spending some time discussing how these new media tools can deepen democracy on the African continent. You will also be looking into their role in fighting the vices of corruption and nepotism and addressing the environmental challenges Africa must deal with due to the effects of climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The media plays the critical roles of informing, educating and entertaining the public. By providing information, the media enable citizens to make responsible and informed decisions. In appreciation of the crucial role of the media here in Kenya, the Government has in the last seven years remained committed to the creation of an open society anchored on a free media.

Consequently, the media has enjoyed greater freedom than at any other time in the history of our country. This has resulted in an unprecedented increase in the number of media outlets. For example in 1999 there were 16 radio stations mainly operated by the national broadcaster and 8 television stations. Today, we have 80 radio stations on air around the country and 19 television stations.

The growth of the media is a good positive indicator for our nation. We must however continually challenge industry players on the use and application of the media freedom they currently enjoy. With freedom comes responsibility. It also calls for a great degree of tolerance and the need for objectivity to remain a key pillar of journalism.

The media must always be guided by the notion of public good for in many ways you hold the communication channels as custodians of the general public. It is to this public that you owe the need to pass on information that will help shape societies of informed and responsible individuals capable of making rational decisions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issue of managing the media in many countries has often given rise to heated debate on the level of regulation needed in the industry. Here in Kenya we have for some time now debated this matter as we seek consensus among various stakeholders. Several proposals have been put forward including key regulations from the Government.

It is my considered opinion that ultimately the media must rise up from the current understanding of media freedom and embrace the concept of responsible journalism. At the end of the day, professionalism in the industry can only be achieved if the media stakeholders in general made it their issue to regulate the industry. Solutions must be found and the Government stands ready to negotiate.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Pan Africa Media conference is taking place at a significant moment in the development of the East African Region. In East Africa, the process of regional integration has deepened with the signing of the Common Market protocol. Today, the East African Community comprises a large and robust market with a population of 125 million people and a combined G.D.P. of 70 billion U.S. Dollars.

This endowment offers our region a unique opportunity to become a lucrative economic hub in Africa. Personally, I am excited and positive about the prospects for our region. As the regional integration process intensifies, the E.A.C. will be challenged to achieve and demonstrate greater visibility of its programmes. The continued success of the integration process will require greater ownership by the people.

It is in this context that we appeal for closer engagement and partnership with the media. The Media is best positioned to promote awareness, discourse and a lively conversation with the broad range of stakeholders in our region. The media should, therefore, take deliberate interest in our region's integration agenda. You should pursue innovative ways and means of presenting it in captivating ways to the people of East Africa.

You may want to know that the East African Community is the most advanced regional bloc on the African continent. Indeed many other blocs are attempting to replicate this model. On the other hand a number of other countries have shown great interest in joining the E.A.C. It is a story worth telling.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As leaders, we also look up to the media to help in promoting the gains we have made as a continent. You must avoid the easy temptation to be Afro-pessimists, who think nothing good can come out of Africa. Undoubtedly, we have had our share of challenges. We have overcome many of them in shorter periods than our counterparts in the west did when faced by similar circumstances in their long histories.

As you report on Africa you may also want to begin laying more emphasis on the evolving relations between Africa and its external partners. Momentous changes are now taking place with new highs in South-South Co-operation. The unfolding events in this cooperation will herald new global dynamics in the years ahead.

In conclusion, I am happy to note that the African Media Initiative, which was unveiled in Maputo in 2008, has chosen to set up its head office, here in Kenya. Your decision is well received and we stand ready to assist you achieve your mandate.

Finally, I once again commend the Nation Media Group on this auspicious occasion of your Golden Jubilee. I am fully aware that one of the recurring stories that you have covered in Kenya is our 20 year search for a new constitution. I am confident that you are about to embark on writing the final chapters of this long journey.

I am optimistic that Kenyans are now resolved in getting a new constitution. I appeal to you to support this development and give the country the necessary encouragement as we embark on a great journey of building a NEW KENYA. With those remarks, I now officially declare this Conference officially opened.

Thank you and God bless you all.