The President of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association,

Honourable Members of Parliament,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government and people of Kenya, I warmly welcome you all to Nairobi for the 56th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference.

It is gratifying that Kenya has been chosen to host this conference at a momentous time in the history of our Nation. We are fresh in the Second Republic following the promulgation of our new Constitution on 27th August. The choice of Kenya as the venue of the meeting underlines the confidence you have in our new Kenya. We are delighted to be your host and hope you will enjoy your stay in our country. It is also our earnest hope that your deliberations in the coming days will be enriching and rewarding and will be essential in strengthening Parliaments so as to be more
Distinguished Delegates,

As Parliamentarians, we are all aware that our electorate looks upon us to provide solutions to the social, political and economic challenges facing them. The series of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conferences held annually, therefore, provide a unique opportunity for Commonwealth Parliamentarians to share experiences and deliberate on solutions to the challenges facing the people.

In this regard, I am glad to note that the theme of this year’s conference ‘Parliament and Development in the 21st Century: Thus Far and Beyond’ is a timely and most appropriate theme. Indeed, the topics to be discussed under this theme comprise the key development challenges facing our countries. In particular, the issues of climate change and energy, status of women, migrant workers as well as peace and security are relevant developmental challenges which we are confronted with today and which requires urgent attention.

As regards the environment, we are aware that climate change continues to threaten our survival.
As will be recalled, the Conference of Parties, held in Copenhagen in December last year ended in vain with regard to achieving a new climate treaty to replace the Kyoto Protocol which expires in TWENTY TWELVE. Addressing climate change, therefore, remains an urgent matter. We must act responsibly to save our planet and the lives of our people. Parliaments must, therefore, take a more proactive role in lobbying their respective governments to commit themselves to reduce carbon emissions. This forum is an opportunity for you, Parliamentarians, to further dialogue on the climate change debate which would inform consensus building on a post-Kyoto deal on greenhouse gas reduction which countries would be obliged to implement.

Distinguished delegates,

As we deliberate on climate change, it is important to address the sustainability concerns linked to our continued reliance on conventional sources of energy, especially the consumption of fossil fuels in our day-to-day economic activities. The over-consumption of energy derived from combustion of fossil fuels have led to diverse and complex consequences which impacts adversely on countries. We therefore, have the obligation to cut down on the use of fossil fuels through conscious investments in low-carbon renewable energies which are environment-friendly. These renewable energies include solar, nuclear and hydropower,
among others. This underscores the need for Parliamentarians to take a lead in the development of enabling policy and legal framework for investment in renewable energies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, we created a framework towards empowering women. Millennium Development Goal 3 is specific on the promotion of gender equality with the target of achieving 30 percent political representation of women. I am glad to note that this subject will attract consideration at the forum of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians that is taking place concurrently with this conference. It is my hope that progress towards achieving gender equity in our respective countries will be evaluated and recommendations made on the way forward. In Kenya, we are continuing to give greater attention to political participation of women because we recognize the critical role that women play in development. In this regard, I am happy that our new constitution has reserved 47 parliamentary seats for women representatives, who will be elected from each of the devolved county levels of government.

Distinguished delegates,
The issues of migrant workers have attracted much attention. It is estimated that over 86 million people in the world work and live outside their home countries. This number is expected to rise with growing globalization characterized by freer flow of people, money, goods and services. We need as a Commonwealth community to urgently address issues that continue to affect these migrant workers, which include exposure to hostility as well as labour demand patterns that make migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation and poor living conditions. In this regard, there is need for implementation of policies that protect migrant workers through an international cooperation strategy and improved migration management. Meetings of this nature can help to chart a path in ensuring suitable working terms and conditions within and outside countries. Efforts directed at combating illegal employment or trafficking must also rank high in our agenda.

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to note that a number of nations in our commonwealth community are this year marking the milestone 50 years anniversary of independence. This is therefore a defining moment in many nations. In Kenya we are this year marking our 47th Independence anniversary. It is therefore befitting that as a nation, we have
made the bold step of reviewing and overhauling our governance structures to reflect the modern challenges and opportunities that we face. Last month we voted for and enacted a new constitution as the basis of stability, progress and good governance. Our experience in enacting a new constitution offers valuable lessons in the journey to transform our nations.

It is important to note that strong institutions of governance, especially the legislature, provide the capacity to deal in a meaningful way with the challenges of democracy and institutional reforms that are required for sustainable development. We are therefore happy to be ushering in a new constitutional dispensation that gives clear demarcations in the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government. We are also glad as a nation to have in our constitution a ground breaking bill of rights that guarantees the access of fundamental and basic rights to our citizens.

In this regard, I note that on the agenda at this meeting is the need for Commonwealth Parliaments to address the challenges of sustainable development. We must make informed development policies in the areas of socio-economic development such as water and sanitation, energy, health and education. These are the basic rights people must enjoy in order to be productive and to lead dignified lives.
In conclusion, I note with gratitude that the organizing committee of this conference has put in place a comprehensive programme that includes tours within and outside Nairobi City where delegates will have an opportunity to experience the beauty of our country. I urge you to take time out to sample our rich natural heritage and enjoy the warmth and hospitality of our people.

With these remarks, it is now my pleasure to declare the 56th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference officially open.

Thank you and God bless you all.