SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE LEADER OF THE OFFICIAL OPPOSITION PARTY, THE HON. UHURU KENYATTA, EGH, MP DURING THE CLOSING CEREMONY OF THE CONFERENCE ON PARLIAMENTS' INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF ICTs TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACY AND PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNANCE: AT SAFARI PARK HOTEL

Mr. Chairman,

Hon. Members of Parliament,

Representatives of Development Partners,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have a very simple task to perform in this Conference today; to close the Conference officially. That means taking stock of all the transactions that took place during the Conference. Not a very difficult task by any means.

Mr. Chairman,

Before I do that, let me associate myself with the sentiments expressed by all previous speakers when welcoming all the delegates to Kenya. Kenyans are a friendly people who like to receive visitors from all corners and their hospitality as in the rest of Africa is known the world over. It is a heritage that we all cherish.

For those of you who may wish to stay a few more days after the Conference, please feel welcome. The warmth of our people has no limits.

Mr. Chairman,

Although it was not possible for me to sit here throughout the duration of the Conference, I have followed the proceedings of this Conference keenly, courtesy of the Kenya National Assembly delegation. The Conference has addressed many issues concerning governance, access to public information, ICT regulatory framework, best practices in ICT management and how the use and application of ICT tools in modern management could catapult Parliament to achieve its mandate by serving Members and the citizens more efficiently and effectively.

During the Conference, we have learnt how Governments and Parliaments in Africa are driving the ICT revolution as the role of the State is vital in showing leadership and commitment to the establishment of a free society where the citizens participate in their governance. Our citizens need to trust the various public institutions which, of necessity, govern their daily lives through the provision and delivery of services. We have seen how the use and application of ICT tools in Government can improve the quality of service delivery as there are inbuilt mechanisms for the public to criticize and demand their rights in a manner that cannot be censored. The application of ICTs in managing public affairs de-congests and distributes power to the people thereby expanding the democratic space because knowledge, from time immemorial, has been regarded as the source of real power. This is because ICTs empower the citizens to access massive information directly from source.

Mr. Chairman,

A time has come when no Parliament which claims to represent and speak on behalf of the people can delay the installation, use and application of ICT tools to deliver Parliamentary information to the public. To begin with, Parliament is the source of all legislation in any democracy. In our Parliament, we have the Departmental Committees before which Ministers normally appear accompanied by their senior advisers to explain various issues in their Ministries including legislation that they intend to introduce in the House for debate. The public in Kenya today are eager to follow the legislative process up to the passage of the Bill. This is because Kenyans today are very anxious to access these Bills and give their comments accordingly. Records of Parliamentary debates should be available on-line for easy and cost effective access to the public. No civilized Government in the present world can afford to hide or make or cause to be unavailable information that the public requires to have as a matter of right.

Indeed, I commend the Government for having introduced some innovative legislation immediately it assumed power. Some of the legislations related to public ethics required of Government officials and the fight against corruption. Nonetheless, let us not delude ourselves that merely passing a law creates an environment that nullifies instances of bad behaviour by functionaries in Government Legislation alone cannot fight graft, greed or rid the country of bad governance.

Mr. Chairman,

The public in our countries must be given modern tools for measuring and monitoring the performance of the Government. Parliament must give leadership in this endeavour by managing its information systems so that the man on the street and the small farmer in the country-side can track the record and parliamentary activities of their Member in terms of his contribution to Parliamentary debates, activities within the constituency and his personal political hygiene. I say this because I believe that while Members of Parliament can vote out the Government in power any time they are convinced it does not serve the wider public interest, the public in Kenya tends to have their chance only once in five years to remove from power the Government that presides over their daily life. It is very clear in my mind that while we are clamouring for ICT tools to enable us monitor the behaviour of the Executive, and we do this without any apology, let us also be aware that the public is keen to have ICT tools installed in Parliament so that their elected representatives could be more accountable to the electorate. This is how I see the challenges and opportunities of ICTs to strengthen democracy and parliamentary governance in Africa.

Put it this way. While Members of Parliament require the services of ICT tools to monitor the activities of the Executive, the citizens need ICT to monitor the performance of their elected leaders because they represent the public the visible face of the Government.

Finally, let me commend the organizers of this Conference for having done a great job. The organization of the Conference was, I think, superb. If there

were any shortfalls I implore the delegates to bear with us. I thank all the delegates whose presence and participation in the Conference has made the meeting successful, for without them, this Conference would not have been held.

With these brief remarks, Mr. Chairman, I wish to declare this Conference officially closed.

The Hon. Uhuru Kenyatta, MP
Leader of Official Opposition Party

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