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New Anti-Corruption Governments:
The Challenge of Delivery
Nairobi, 12 - 13 October 2004

SPEECH
By Hon. Mwai Kibaki
President of the Republic of Kenya

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me great pleasure to be with you as you begin your deliberations during this important experts' meeting on anti-corruption. First of all I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government and the people of Kenya, to extend a very warm welcome to you all.

I believe that some of you may have visited Kenya before, but there are those amongst you who may be visiting the country for the very first time. To each and every one of you, I say "Karibu Kenya!" This means Welcome to Kenya in our national Swahili language. We are proud to be hosting three important international events, namely, the Government's International Experts Meeting on Anti-Corruption, Transparency International's Annual integrity Awards and the Annual membership Meeting.

The significance of these meetings is underlined not just by their key agenda, but more so, by the large number of delegates in attendance from all corners of the globe. We have here today delegates from close to 90 countries. I have no doubt that when you get down to business, you will have great opportunity to share experiences and build solidarity in dealing with the subject of corruption.

In this respect, we share common views and concerns. As you are aware, my Administration was elected on a reform platform. A central pillar of our reform agenda is the fight against corruption. We have given priority to the fight against corruption because we are very much aware of the damage that the vice has caused our country.

Rampant corruption has undermined our development efforts and caused widespread poverty in our society. We therefore promise Kenyans, and our well wishers abroad, that we are determined to root out this evil from our midst. Indeed, I want to assure you all that we have not wavered in our resolve and commitment to transform Kenya into a corruption free society.

I do appreciate that there are high expectations of this government, both from our friends and our own people. There are those who have expressed the view that we could have speeded up the pace of implementation of the anti-corruption agenda. These have sought to judge our policies on the base of perceptions. We therefore plead to be judged by the actions we have, and are continuing to take to eradicate corruption.

I also want to assure my fellow Kenyans that I will remain true to my word, that my government will not tolerate corruption. I will continue to fight corruption, not by shouting from the hilltops, but by tackling the evil from its roots. As you all know, fighting corruption is not an event but a process. It is a war that cannot be won in a single battle.

It involves changing people and systems; it involves changing culture and uprooting systems of patronage that have existed since before independence; it involves changing the very relationship between those of us in government, and the millions who have entrusted us with the responsibility of governing them. One thing we learned soon after taking over the Government in January 2003 was that the institutions and systems that we expected to lead the fight against corruption were not equipped to discharge the heavily responsibility entrusted to them. In fact some were completely compromised by the decades of political influence and manipulation.

We therefore had to streamline these institutions before entrusting them with the difficult task of dismantling the networks of corruption that were deeply entrenched in all spheres of our public sector. We also realised, very quickly indeed, that we were engaged in an uphill task because corruption fights back, and does so viciously. Corrupt networks have at times regrouped and have waged a persistent campaign against the forces of anti-corruption.

Patience pays. So does consistency. We embarked on a deliberate, conscious and systematic process of empowering institutions to deal with the systematic and endemic corruption that we inherited. Parliament enacted new legislation to create new institutions and departments charged with specific tasks in the field of fighting corruption. Reforms were quickly implemented in critical areas, including public procurement. Moreover, we embarked on the process of dealing with past systematic abuses through specialised processes, including task forces and commissions. These are now in the process of winding down and presenting their findings.

We have also continued to prosecute corruption. Particularly in the cases where evidence is sufficient to lead to expected outcomes. A key elements of this process is restitution. We remain steadfast in our pursuit of compensation from those who have converted public resources into their own use. More recently, we created a Committee with broad representation to coordinate public awareness efforts at influencing public behaviour change toward corruption.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

This is a true record of what we have achieved in just a year and a half. Indeed, the list of the actions we have taken is much longer, but I restrict myself to the more fundamental ones. I am sure the key speakers during these meeting, including my Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, will update you in greater detail about where we are in this spirited battle.

One of the critical strategies of winning a battle is that the general must provide the necessary leadership and show a commitment that flows through the ranks down to the foot soldiers. I, as the president of the republic of Kenya gave my commitment to provide leadership in the fight against corruption, and I will continue to do so. This leadership is what provides an enabling environment and continued impetus for success in this struggle.

I said during last year's Conference on Corruption organised jointly by the Government, Transparency International and the World Bank, and I say it again here, that the war on corruption is very much alive. Only this time, we are taking it to much greater heights. This International experts Meeting reaffirms our commitment to the fight against corruption. It is a forum that gives us an opportunity to share experiences and lessons from different countries on how to implement the anti-corruption agenda and make sure we succeed.

This is a serious closed-door meeting of experts that will enable free and frank exchange of views on how to sharpen the global cutting-edge of strategies in the war against graft. It also provides an opportunity to build and strengths coalitions and networks against corruption across all the continents represented here. As I have already said, the fight against corruption is a continuous struggle. Each battle that is won is a nail in the coffin in which we will bury the vice. We Kenyans are therefore pleased and honoured for the support that Transparency International have extended to us in this struggle.

By choosing to hold their Annual Integrity Awards here in Kenya, they have demonstrated their confidence in our efforts. I am indeed delighted to note that we have Kenyans who have been nominated for these coveted awards for their personal bravery, patriotism and commitment to fighting corruption. I would also like to welcome the Transparency International movement to Kenya and tell you how honoured we are that you have chosen to hold your Annual Membership Meeting, including your elections, here on African soil. Once again I say Karibu!

In concluding my remarks today, Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to note that the fight against corruption is about protecting the rights of the people, whose lives stand to change in a dramatic and positive way when public resources are utilised fully and efficiently for the intended purposes. I therefore hope that you will make a deliberate effort to travel out of Nairobi to see more of Kenya and its people.

I would like to assure you that our country is blessed with a unique landscape, fauna and flora. We want to share this wonderful heritage with the rest of the world. I therefore urge you to take time off to enjoy the beauty and diversity that our country offers.

Asanteni Sana na Karibuni Kenya!

