



**REPUBLIC OF KENYA  
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION, COMMUNICATIONS AND  
TECHNOLOGY**

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**ADDRESS BY MR JOE MUCHERU, EGH, CABINET SECRETARY,  
MINISTRY OF ICT, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup>  
EDITION OF THE NAIROBI INNOVATION WEEK 2017 AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI ON 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2017**

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Colleague Cabinet Secretaries,  
Deputy Minister of Development of Finland,  
The Chancellor of the University of Nairobi Dr Vijoo Rattani,  
The Vice Chancellor Prof Mbithi,  
Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to stand before you, on behalf of His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta, to preside over this official opening of the Third Edition of the Annual Nairobi Innovation Week. I am humbled to represent His Excellency the President, who would have wanted to be here in person but had to attend to other pressing national duties.

I was at this podium in August last year during the opening of the Second Nairobi Innovation Week. I congratulate the University of Nairobi for organizing this event, and for consistently spearheading and leading other partners in shaping and enhancing the program to a global scale.

Specifically, I appreciate and recognize the strong partnership between the University, industry, development partners and Government in promoting the innovation culture in this country.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Innovation is a crucial driver and can be an aggregator for national development. It can enhance Kenya's comparative and competitive advantage. This is largely through the creation of new businesses and acceleration of small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which have great potential of becoming engines for economic development.

Innovation can inspire useful mechanisms to solve day to day development challenges, from the very basic human needs such as providing access to clean drinking water, eradicating neglected diseases, and developing sustainable hunger reduction solutions for

national economic development and growth. A successful development strategy must therefore build extensive innovation capacities in order to foster growth.

The rapid growth that some developed and developing economies have witnessed can be attributed to their build-up of innovation capacities. These countries recognized that innovation is not just about high-technology products, but that innovation capacity has to be built early and be embedded in the development process. They invested heavily in Research and Development (R&D) to support their innovations. Indeed, there is evidence that R&D played a key role in the meteoric rise of Asian economies such as China, India and Korea.

Many countries across the globe are determined to become the new global centres of technological innovations and are investing heavily in supportive infrastructure like high-speed Internet, tertiary education and tech hubs. Kenya has not been left behind in this global technological

surge. We have in the recent past made significant leaps in development through technological innovations that are home grown and scaled globally.

This is attributed to the enabling legal and policy environment created by the Government, as well as increased R&D funding to promote innovation in our universities. Popular examples of made-in-Kenya tech innovations include MPESA, MKOPA and Ushahidi, among others.

Let me talk a bit more about MPESA, which as we all know has earned Kenya the premier position in mobile money technology. The MPesa platform is a national pride with over 26 million subscribers, and is often cited in global Fintech forums. The proposed legislative amendment to split Safaricom and MPesa is therefore not one supported by the Government, as it would send a negative precedence of punishing and suppressing innovative operators, hence discouraging investments.

The Government will support companies that exploit Kenya's rich innovative culture, to design disruptive solutions that support the whole ecosystem, and contribute to the country's development.

Going forward, the Government will hasten the completion of the revised National ICT Policy. We will also review and finalize the draft policy on Science, Technology and Innovation, which was the basis of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act of 2013.

Further, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Medium Term Plan of Vision 2030 recognizes that innovation system is still fragmented and therefore incapable of creating the desired synergies and networking among government, research and training institutions as well as industry, financial sector and professional groups. In fact, innovation is distributed across Ministries and Agencies.

We are focused on creating proper institutional frameworks to ensure that innovation activities across Government are harmonized to avoid duplication of efforts and enhance effectiveness.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In the recent past, an emerging global shift of investment towards Africa as the new frontier of business has been witnessed. For example, Boeing, the leading US aircraft manufacturer plans to open two offices in Africa – one in Nairobi and the other in South Africa. This has been enabled by several factors: discoveries of large deposits of natural resources, a vibrant and highly educated youthful population and a growing middle class.

I challenge our universities and private sector to collaborate and innovate together and build on this positive global inclination, which can transform Africa. If our society is not innovative, others will come and

exploit our resources, particularly our newfound oil and mineral deposits, and minimal benefits will cascade to the populace.

Similarly, our youth must be empowered with skills geared on shifting their mindsets from job seekers to job creators. They must be encouraged to exploit their latent talents and seek to provide solutions to perennial challenges facing our country, including unemployment, food security, national security and health among others.

In this regard, the government is implementing the Ajira Digital Program - an innovative program that targets to enable young people to access over 1 million jobs every year through online platforms. We are confident that through this program, we will significantly solve the unemployment puzzle that has dogged our country for many years and in the process position Kenya as the choice destination for online work.

To achieve this goal, we have invested heavily in awareness creation, sensitization and training about online work in order to grow a critical mass of online workers who can also mentor thousands more to exploit this opportunity.

We are also in the process of establishing Constituency Innovation Hubs in all the 290 constituencies in collaboration with Members of Parliament and the National Government Constituency Development Fund Board. Each constituency will have up to four innovation hubs providing free wi-fi, high speed internet connectivity as well as digital devices to enable young people at the grassroots level to have equal access to online work and other digital opportunities through which they can develop their innovations and earn decent incomes.

The Studio Mashinani Project is yet another initiative that my ministry has rolled out to provide an opportunity for our youth to develop their creative talents and earn from it. Inspired by the mantra, *Talent ni Kazi*, we have developed five studios in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu that

will be used by talented young people to record quality audio music, commercials and jingle pieces.

Through the Digital Literacy Program, we have made tremendous progress towards developing a firm foundation for a sustainable digital future for our country. By introducing digital literacy skills to our learners at primary school level, we are investing in the future innovators that the country will depend on to realize its long term development goals. Contrary to some media reports, the program is well on course towards full implementation in all public primary schools.

In conclusion, **Ladies and Gentlemen**, I would like to once again credit the University of Nairobi for effectively preparing this Forum. The Government will continue to support the Nairobi Innovation Week as a national program. I look forward to visiting the exhibition stands, where I hope to see remarkable and diverse displays of transformational innovations and an array of interesting concepts.

It is now my privilege to officially declare the **Third Nairobi Innovation Week 2017** officially opened. I wish you all interesting and fruitful deliberations.

Thank you and God bless you all!