

SPEECH BY THE CABINET SECRETARY DURING THE NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS OF THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD ON 16TH JUNE 2017 IN BUNGOMA COUNTY AT CHEPTAISI HIGH SCHOOL

The Child Guests,

Children,

The Principal Secretary, State Department for Social Protection,

The Governor, Bungoma County, Hon. Kenneth Lusaka, Members of the County Government,

Mr. Noah Sanganyi, Director Children Services and Secretary to the National Council for Children's Services,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to join you today as we celebrate the Day of the African Child this year. On June 16 every year, governments, NGOs, international organizations and other stakeholders gather to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing the full realization of the rights of children in Africa.

It is in commemoration of about ten thousand black school children who marched in a column more than half a mile long, in the Soweto Uprising on 16th June, 1976, in South Africa protesting the poor quality of their education and

demanding their right to be taught in their own language. It also raises awareness of the continuing need for improvement of the education provided to African children. This year the Day is being commemorated under the theme: **The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for Children in Africa: “Accelerating Protection Empowerment and Equal Opportunity”**. This theme emphasizes on the importance of creating and maintaining a safe and conducive environment for children to grow, develop and mature properly during the period of childhood.

“Statistics by the International Monetary Fund show that 41% of Africa’s population is below the age of 15 years”. “This has mainly been due to Africa’s progress in education, health, and economic sectors which have greatly enhanced child survival. It is projected that Africa’s 1.26 billion populations will double by the year 2050”. In Kenya, about 42.5% of the total population is children aged between 0-14 years.

By 2063, Africa’s human capital will be fully developed as its most precious resource, through sustained investments based on universal early childhood development and basic

education, and sustained investments in higher education, science, technology, research and innovation, and the elimination of gender disparities at all levels of education. This Day gives us an opportunity to take stock of what we have done for our children and reflect on what needs to be done to ensure that they enjoy their rights and therefore develop to their full potential.

African children shall be empowered through the full implementation of the African Charter on the Rights of the Child. Africa will be a continent where the talent of the child will be fully developed, rewarded and protected for the benefit of society.

We aspire that by 2063, Africa: Is People-centred and caring; and Puts children first”.

The Day of the African Child was first celebrated in Kenya in June 1991 and has since become an annual event celebrated not only nationally, but in all the Counties and Sub-Counties in the country.

Kenya has homegrown school feeding programme that supports over 1.1 million children. In 2017/2018 financial year the National Treasury has allocated Ksh2.5 billion to

this programme. The other programmes like Cash Transfer for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (CTOVC) is supporting 353,000 households (on average 1,059,000 children), Free Basic Education and 702,403 Laptops distributed to different primary schools in the Country are geared to accelerating protection, empowerment and equal opportunity. These improve not only enrolment and attendance, but all aspects of learning.

The Government has also allocated ksh5 billion from January 2018 for children to go school from Standard One to Form Four without paying school fees.

These Government measures create an environment that promotes the ease of access and enjoyment of all rights by the children.

Kenya is a signatory to the African Charter on the Rights of Welfare of the Child which among other things, calls on all member states to protect both boys and girls from situations that affect their welfare, dignity as well as normal growth and development.

To give effect to the provisions of this Charter as provided for under article 2 of the Constitution that recognizes all

treaties and conventions that Kenya has ratified as a direct and automatic source of law, the Government has developed laws and policies that safeguard the development, protection, survival and participation rights of the children of this country.

Section 53 of the Constitution, stipulates that all children should be protected from all forms of violence and ill treatment and emphasizes on the consideration of their best interests in all matters concerning them. Similarly, the Children Act of 2001, states that children should not be subjected to any situations that may cause them physical or psychological harm. The Counter-Trafficking in Persons Act No. 8 of 2010 provides for the prevention, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

The National Children Policy and the National Plan of Action for Children in Kenya (2015-2022) provide a clear roadmap for the implementation of all the legal provisions regarding the acceleration, empowerment, protection and equal opportunities of children.

We appreciate the fact that while we may have a sound legal and policy framework aimed at promoting protection, empowerment and equal opportunity, in Kenya, other cultural, economic, political, social and religious factors

interact to place many of our children at risk of not achieving the same. For example in Bungoma County we still find Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), teenage pregnancies, early child marriages, children being involved in cross-border trade, Boda boda business, and being recruited in illegal groups like Sabaot Land Defence Force (SLDF). The same is being witnessed in other counties like Baringo, Turkana and West Pokot just to mention a few.

The Government has come up with interventions aimed at accelerating protection, empowerment and equal opportunity. To enhance accessibility, equity and retention of children in school the Government, in 2003 declared Primary Education in Kenya, Free and Compulsory and in 2008, introduced, subsidized Secondary Education. It has also introduced mobile schools and constructed low cost boarding schools in Arid and Semi-Arid areas of this country and continues to support school feeding programmes in the same schools.

To cushion families from the effects of poverty and other social inequities that would otherwise promote inequalities the Government established and continues to expand Cash Transfers to Orphans and Vulnerable Children, Older

Persons and those with severe disabilities. These initiatives have had a significant impact on poverty reduction and consequently accelerated protection, empowerment and equal opportunities that have enabled children to enjoy their rights.

The Government has also partnered with other stakeholders in the Children Sector to: establish and popularize the 24 hour, toll free child help line 116; establish community peace initiatives and disarmament exercises across the country; establish Rescue Centres and Gender Violence and Recovery Centres among other things.

As a Council, we realize that despite all the gains we have made to ensure that the rights and welfare of the children of Kenya are upheld, there are still many challenges that impede the full realization of the ideal situation where children are not denied their right to a fulfilling childhood.

The commemoration of this Day, therefore, gives us yet another opportunity to mobilise all our resources and consolidate effort towards overcoming these challenges and generally upholding the rights and welfare of children, who constitute the backbone of our country's future.

As I conclude, allow me to take this opportunity to thank all those working for children and urge them to continue in their commitment in accelerating protection, empowerment and equal opportunities to the children of this Nation to enable them enjoy their rights to the fullest.

With those few remarks, I declare the 2017 celebrations of the Day of the African Child Officially commenced.

God bless the children of Kenya,

God bless the children of Africa.