

President Kenyatta's Full Labour Day Speech 1st May 2020

My Fellow Workers,

I am pleased to address you this morning, as we come together to mark Labour Day 2020.

On this day, we honour and celebrate the hard work and industry of our People. The labour of your hands has powered our economy, defined our industries and placed us on the continental map.

Because of our workers, we are among the top six largest and most diversified economies in the continent of Africa. We thank you.

At home, Kenya is a Nation of diligent and hardworking people. From the Marigiti woman who is at the market at 3am to the farmer who is up before the sun rise, Kenya is a nation of hardworking people. But that is not all.

Against all odds, our health workers are giving their all, saving those affected by Covid-19. Against the floods and the heavy rains, our farmers are toiling to feed our families.

Across the region, our truck drivers are working through bad weather to transport goods to our counties and to our neighbours. And with selfless abandon, our Police and Security Officers are standing guard, to protect us.

As a fellow worker, I thank you all for making us a Nation that embraces hard work as a mark of dignity, and resilience.

Fellow Kenyans,

Now I will turn to our current circumstances. We are celebrating Labour Day in extraordinary settings because of Corona Virus.

Businesses have closed down abruptly, working hours have reduced and opportunities have been lost. Sadly, result is job losses for our people; and I feel the LOSS.

The hardest hit, in our economy are workers in the informal sector, the self-employed and casual labourers. Majority of these are young people who may not have any savings to cushion themselves from this pandemic.

In SUM, we cannot relax in our efforts to conquer this invisible enemy and to put our economy on a strong growth path. Because, if we do not, we could lose upwards of half a million jobs over the next 6 months. We must do whatever it takes to minimize, if not to fully contain such loss in jobs.

Fellow Kenyans,

This is why my Administration has rolled out some FISCAL and MONETARY policy measures to cushion the looming situation. I have already announced the accelerated disbursement to the elderly and the indigent, coming from the Social Safety Net Fund.

I have also announced the direct weekly cash stipends to thousands of vulnerable households in informal settlements and fragile rural areas.

And last week, I announced the 'Kazi Mtaani' initiative, which will give unemployed young people the opportunity to earn a daily wage as they build our motherland Kenya.

As a Government we are at work to flatten the Corona CURVE; but fundamentally, I want us to flatten and crush the curve of joblessness. And we will do it.

Over the coming weeks, I will give some PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS on post-COVID-19 pandemic social economic recovery strategies.

I want to assure the workers that I have their back. And I will do everything to protect them from the economic downturn and the political opportunists who feed their ambitions on the misery of workers.

Fellow Kenyans,

We shall "Komesha Corona", "Tutaokoa Uchumi wetu". We shall build a greater shared prosperity that will deliver more jobs and better lives for all our people.

But today I also have a request to make to the labour movement. Because I want to partner with you, I want you to partner with Kenyans on two issues.

One, sometimes it takes a great crisis to create great opportunities. A people become great because the threat of crisis did not suppress their spirits; instead they saw it as an opportunity to transform their economies and their livelihood.

The Moment we are in as workers is a moment of CRISIS. We can see it as a moment of danger or we can see it as a moment of opportunity. I urge us all to see it as a moment we can use to better ourselves.

And I say so because an owner of industry is nothing without those who make the industry work. The Industry works because of the worker. Without the worker it is nothing but dead capital. If the worker becomes the industry, economic growth is assured. And this is the opportunity that the Corona virus is placing before us.

It is inviting us to think differently and change our lot if we focus on the opportunity and not the danger.

If we are 47 Million Strong, the labour movement must claim their space. Not as trend followers, but as trend-setters. And they must use this moment, as they did in our history, to organize themselves for the renewal of our economy.

They must declare that the worker will not be organized by the politicians but by the needs that drive them. They must see the opportunity and not the danger in the moment.

And my second request. If there was ever a time in our Nation's history that we needed to come together as Kenyans, it is now.

To flatten the curve of joblessness, we must embrace our Kenyan imperfections. And we must do so by EMBRACING that which is Kenyan. We must BUY Kenya; Build Kenya. That is how we shall survive.

To rescue our tourism sector, we must commit to take all our holidays in Kenya for the next one year. We must visit our hotels and parks, and every corner of our country.

We must commune with our people and find ourselves in this undertaking. Let us spend our money amongst our own people so that they, in turn, can get to keep their jobs and feed their families.

To save jobs in our manufacturing sector, we must shed some of our long held prejudices against Kenyan made products and embrace them. Let us buy what we

make, whether it is cooking oil, soap, sufurias, spoons, bicycles, furniture or locally assembled cars.

If we buy Kenya, we will build Kenya. And Kenya is each and every one of us. This must form the baseline of our survival strategy.

Let us also support our textile sector. We now know that a face mask from Kitui is just as good as or better than that from any other part of the world. If we can buy these face masks for our protection, why not other items of clothing?

But there is another item I want to mention here. I want to encourage our employers who insist on formal wear by their employees to ensure that those dress codes also include our own African attire.

Let us be proud to wear our made-in-Kenya shirts and dresses. This will extend employment opportunities for thousands and encourage more of our farmers to plant cotton and invest in inputs for other fabrics, like wool, which we can easily produce locally.

To those in our transport sector, the measures you have taken so far on hygiene and discipline should not be forgotten when Corona is behind us. Let your buses and matatus be clean, treat your passengers with the respect that they deserve, charge them fairly, and, above all, keep them safe.

And to our media houses and entertainment spots, it's time to become Kenyan.

To survive in this pandemic, we must look inwards. We must protect what makes Kenya Kenyan. And as media dominates our living rooms and mobile phones, I appeal to them to think only of our country. Play Kenyan history, Kenyan music, Kenyan soap operas, Kenyan news and Kenyan everything.

If media plays Kenyan content, Kenyan content will build media after Corona. We have a peculiar opportunity to promote our film makers, and artists during this time of confinement. Let us use it to create a Kenyan culture of nationalism.

Lastly; let me recognize the steady leadership of the labour movement under Comrade Francis Atwoli. He has done well in steering our relationship as workers, unions and government and the unions. And you have been instrumental in defining who the true friends of the workers are.

Mine is to assure you and all Kenyans that the government is owned by the workers. Without the workers, government has no shareholders. And that is why today I am happy to be a worker amongst you.

I wish you all, a happy Labour Day. May God bless you, provide for you and protect our country.

Happy Labour Day, stay safe and stay home.

God Bless You and God Bless Kenya.