To the ODM youth convention attendees, all Kenyan youth and the Kenyan people

Accept my greetings from the land of the Canucks, as some people call Canada. I salute you in the name of Kenyan patriots, young and old, men and women, boys and girls, focused on the betterment of our nation Kenya. I had hoped to be with you today, but distance and timing don’t allow me to do so.

_Ukiona vyalea vimeundua_

The role of youth in shaping the future and destiny of nations is well-recorded in history; it was a young Fidel Castro that freed Cuba from the shackles of privileged exploitation of the masses; that was in the 1950s. In the late 1940s, Nelson Mandela and a coterie of young people (among them Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and others) founded the African National Congress Youth League that, over time, shaped the nature of the ANC and hence the future of South Africa. In our own Kenya, Dedan Kimathi and colleagues founded the Kenya Land Freedom Army that became Mau Mau and played a major role in the lead up to Kenyan independence.

The second liberation in Kenya was mooted in the 1980s by Young Turks that took the struggle for change to another level. Today, we live off the benefits of that sacrifice in the form of a new constitution.

Clearly little development comes about by accident; it must be mooted and engineered for society’s benefit. The future we will live is the future we create today! And youth have a major (if not the major) role in this.

And as Johann Von Schiller once said: "He who has done his best for his own time has lived for all times."

It is a call to us to do our best in our time and hence live for all times; and that time is now! ....

_Nguru chia ‘Momura ‘Nchogu Egwatia ‘Mbara (Kisii saying) – a young person’s energy is similar to that of an elephant splitting wood!_

As young people, you are advantaged most of all because you are endowed with youthful energy, which energy, if not properly harnessed can cause havoc. Yet, when channelled into positive endeavours, it can be a cause for common good.

It is in this respect that your convention is relevant: you want good for Kenya and you are positively engaging in how to create a better country for all of us. For this, I salute you!

There is more. The fact that you have more “life” ahead of you than most of us is a cause to think, plan and channel your energies into nation building. That nation building includes a constant search for the truth, a constant search for ways to improve the nation’s well-being, a constant search for making Kenya a great nation; ...

It is your time to lead! And you lead not through platitudes about leading of tomorrow, but leading today in the circumstances you find yourselves because leadership is a learnt process, built through cumulative experience in various roles. Among you will come future cabinet secretaries, industry captains, professors, scientists, governors, name it!

As such, if you haven’t started leading already, get started now for you are leaders of today and tomorrow; we all are! So lead in your community; lead in your party; lead in your church or school, lead at your workplace, lead anywhere and everywhere!

Remember:
"Success often comes to those who dare to act. It seldom goes to the timid who are ever afraid of the consequences." – Jawaharlal Nehru, 1st Prime Minister of India

Unique times

We also live in exciting times where the rate of change can be overwhelming; there are few times in history that have been more challenging than today. At the same time, there hasn’t been a time in history that presents more opportunities than we have today.

Ours is an information age with many facts at our fingertips; we have all kinds of information at our disposal, fast and easily obtained. It can be historical, scientific, social… name it! And we know information is power. And since we have, on our reach, the greatest amount of information there has ever been, it then means we have more power than past generations.

Information available is both historical and contemporary examples from which we can learn; whether in social mobilization, social re-engineering or technological change, we have a lot of illustrations that we can inform our actions and plans for the future. And that information is at our fingertips, courtesy of technology.

The chance is that what we would like to do in Kenya, we can learn from the examples of others; these may be cases of failure so that we do not fall into the same mess; often, they are models of success that we can emulate and succeed.

We are witnesses to the impact of technology, social organization, rapid information exchange and the like as demonstrated in the examples of recent changes in Tunisia and Egypt with more underway in what some have termed the Arab Spring. Such changes would not have been possible without technology and the fact that we now live in a global village; and the changes driven largely by young people in those countries.

Friends, these are exciting times! It is our duty to embrace the challenges we face and harness the tools we have for the sake of common good. Exciting times you must say! Let’s embrace the challenges.

The challenges

At independence, the late president Jomo Kenyatta asked the country to tackle ignorance, poverty and disease. Almost 50 years since that proclamation, there are millions of poor Kenyans; millions without access to health services and even many more millions that are ignorant; ignorant of the national values, good citizenry, equity, justice, respect for the rule of law, respect of the right of others to be, name it!

That we haven’t attained the objectives set in 1963 is demonstrated by the many cancers that ail our nation: greed, selfishness, corruption, crime, discrimination (gender, ethnic, age, etc.) and more; ills which are largely responsible for the slow pace of development in our country; ills that prevent our people and nation from attain full potential.

We have a duty to tackle these ills and make Kenya a better place now and the future; it is a duty; a responsibility.

We have a duty to make Kenya a friendly society to live in; a caring society and a just society where each and every one of us gets a chance to attain their dreams; for we know must understand that when one of us attains their dreams of success, we collectively benefit as a
nation; and we should all be proud of that; and hence the reason we should all be supportive of each other – to succeed.

We have a duty to tackle the greed that has eaten into the fabric of our society; it is greed, for instance, that causes grown men and women to squander Kshs4.2 billion at the expense of our children and their future.

Do these people have no shame? Do they ever ask themselves how many orphans (say) would be supported with Kshs 4.2 billion? How many classrooms would have been built with that kind of money? How many books the money would have purchased? How many libraries this would have equipped? How much writing material that would have bought? How many bursaries this would have supported? And in a word, how many kids’ education we would have nurtured and perhaps set them on course to become more useful members of society than otherwise they are set to become?

Fellow Kenyans, we need to look at ourselves critically and say collectively that greed is wrong; so is corruption and embezzlement; and hence we must fight it as a people, a country and a nation. This is not a matter of tribe this or that tribe. Bottom line: when Kenyan children’s education is impacted it impacts us all.

How?

May be the kid that failed to get an education is tomorrow’s criminal that would terrorize us all? May be that kid would have become a scientist, lawyer, engineer, etc. and something s/he may not attain, giving us collective loss.

The words of Mahatma Ghandi come to mind when he said that: *there is enough on earth for everyone’s use; but not for everyone’s greed!*

So why are we building a country governed and driven by greed? Why the maniacal illegal amassing of wealth when fellow citizens may not have roofs over their heads; clothing on their bodies; or food on their tables.

**Negative Ethnicity – Tribalism**

We can talk of many other ills but you understand, I am sure, the direction I am driving at.

There is one ill that I must mention, one that is perhaps the most potent in terms of national cohesion: it is negative ethnicity or tribalism; and one which, I believe, young people of Kenya are best placed to address.

If there is anything to learn from the post-election violence of 2008 it is that we are all connected, we are all dependent on each other and without cooperation and collaboration, we will all suffer.

As young people, you must resist the urge of many to use you for the sake of their agendas. Moreover, it is our collective duty that we align ourselves with leadership based on the common good that leadership can bring to our country.

I will illustrate.

In the post-election violence of 2008, young people were at the centre of committing many crimes. Young people killed; they raped women (young and old); they looted ... and just because the other person belonged to a different ethnic group!
Others were heard to sing politicians praises, because of their tribes, without asking about the agenda of those leaders and what good that agenda could do Kenya. Clearly, many of these young people had literary stopped thinking; yet to succeed as a nation, we must all use our brains.

I want to paraphrase Barack Obama’s call to Americans when he said that all Americans were Americans, regardless of their colour, gender, age, religion ...

It is about time, we in Kenya said it in our own words: there is one Kenya for all of us; we are all Kenyans and hence there is no Kikuyu, Luo, Kisii, Meru or some other Kenyan ethnicity. We are just Kenyans, whether women, men, children, boys or girls.

We are and must be simply: Kenyans.

*Mimi Mkenya! Uta do! Or
*Mimi Mkenya kuna swari?

**The Challenge of Leadership**

"Ten soldiers wisely led will beat a hundred without a head". –*Euripides*

The year 2012 is fast approaching; and all indications that those elections will historical; historical in the sense that it will give an opportunity for realizing the full potential of the new constitution.

The opportunities ahead of us are unprecedented; we can grab the bull by the horn and make it a success! However, the risks that come with these opportunities are equally high! We risk failing miserably if we don’t conduct the elections as should be the case.

More than any time in our history, we must elect people on their merit to carry out the duties of the offices into which we elect them. These offices include the president, senators, women representatives, and members of parliament, members of country assembly, mayors and governors.

Unless we elect the right people to the right positions, the promise of the new order will come to nought! More than ever before, the voter has a chance to shape our destiny; and more than ever before, the voter must learn what is in the best interest of the nation in order to make the right choices.

As young people, you have a responsibility to educate yourselves and the rest of the voting population on the need to elect people of competency; action-oriented men and women; go-getters and people that can create and implement programs; men and women of good standing in society; men and women worth emulating as a people; and men and women committed to the nation’s common good.

Then and only then can we realize the promise of the new order under the new constitution.

As many of you may be aware, I will be offering myself for public office come 2012; an announcement will follow soon as to the exact office for which I will run. We believe that we are competent and have the capability to serve our people and future generations; and more than ever before, this is the time to serve the great people of our country and a chance to shape the destiny of our nation.
We will welcome your support.

**In Conclusion**

I thank you for the chance to listen to my remarks; I hope you will deliberate fruitfully on the future of our nation and that you will have useful take aways to implement in your respective areas. Among these is the fight against greed, corruption and discrimination; and fight for the election of competent leaders all across the nation as a sure way of laying the foundations of strong Kenya in the future.

And we must do our best always for

*Excellence is not a destination; it is a continuous journey that never ends.* – *Brian Tracy*

God bless you all and all our Kenyan people!

Matunda Nyanchama

*Dr Nyanchama is a ICT professional, past president of the Kenyan Community Abroad and*