

SPEECH

BY

HIS EXCELLENCY, HON. UHURU KENYATTA, C.G.H,

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA AND
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE DEFENCE FORCES**

AT

**THE 39TH SHELTER AFRIQUE VIRTUAL ANNUAL GENERAL
MEETING AND SYMPOSIUM,**

HELD ON

15TH SEPTEMBER 2020 AT 12.00 NOON

- **Madame Nouzha Bouchareb, The Chairperson of the Bureau of Shelter Afrique and the Honourable Minister of Housing and Urban Policy of the Kingdom of Morocco;**
- **Honourable Ministers & Heads of Delegations;**
- **Distinguished Guests;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen;**

It gives me great pleasure to join you today during this 39th edition of the Shelter Afrique Annual General Meeting and Symposium. The Shelter Afrique AGM continues to be a unique gathering that brings together not only the organization's 46 shareholders consisting of 44 African Governments, the African Development Bank, and the African Reinsurance Company, but also several other key stakeholders that are important to furthering Africa's housing agenda.

I am speaking to you today in very unusual circumstances, and I thank you for taking part in this first virtual session of the Shelter Afrique AGM. I sincerely regret that Kenya is unable to host this AGM physically due to the ongoing pandemic, and I do hope we shall be able to meet in person in the near future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are living in unprecedented times, and the format of this meeting illustrates how the ongoing pandemic has altered how

we interact with each other. The COVID-19 pandemic, which begun suddenly and without warning, has forced us to change our way of life – how we do things, how we work, how we greet and relate with each other, and how we travel to our places of work and for leisure. Whilst many of these changes will be temporary, some are expected to endure long after the pandemic is over. I therefore urge all participants at this AGM and Symposium to consider how our living and working spaces will be transformed, and to craft appropriate solutions to meet the evolving needs of our citizens.

Kenya is privileged to host the Headquarters of Shelter Afrique and it is indeed an honour to be the host of this year's AGM and symposium. As you are aware, Kenya hosts the offices of other key regional and international organizations such as the United Nations offices in Nairobi (UNON), United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), World Bank, African Development Bank, among others. This speaks to Kenya's Pan-African and multilateral worldview, for which we are most proud. Traditionally, we have always extended the famed Kenyan hospitality and courtesies when hosting meetings of this nature, and we regret that we are unable to demonstrate our hospitality in the usual way this time round. Nevertheless, we hope that by facilitating this virtual meeting, we will both honour our obligations as well as demonstrate the traditional Kenyan hospitality virtually.

Distinguished Delegates,

This year's theme **“Affordable housing delivery as a tool for Africa's Economic revival in the COVID-19 era”** is fitting given that African countries face the twin challenges of rapid urbanisation and an acute housing shortage, that have been further compounded by the ongoing pandemic. Africa is urbanizing rapidly, with her urban settlements growing at a rate of 3.5% per annum. 40% of Africans live in urban centres, and this proportion is expected to increase to 50% by 2030. Africa's population is projected to increase to 1.3 billion people in 2050, with the overwhelming majority of these living in urban centers. This will put unprecedented pressure on housing supply and urban service delivery, making an already precarious situation much more serious.

The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a strong reminder of the importance of building and maintaining decent human settlements that promote the health and wellbeing of residents. Given that most African cities and urban areas lack essential infrastructure and services, it has been difficult to implement strategies aimed at stemming the spread of this novel disease. Indeed, densely populated informal settlements and slums have become the epicentres of the spread of COVID-19. These also happen to be places that are least conducive to the observance COVID-19 protocols. To make matters worse, urban centres continue to bear the brunt of the negative socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. Many urban residents have

lost their livelihoods due to the economic slowdown occasioned by restrictive measures instituted to stem the spread of the disease.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has eroded many of the benefits of recent economic developments, which were propelled by globalisation, cross-border trade, travel and migration, and social interactions. For instance, Africa's growth expectations are likely to reduce by half, with projected GDP growth falling from 3.2 per cent to less than 2 per cent. The African continent is also expected suffer between USD 90 billion and 200 billion in lost output in 2020 due to the pandemic.

Given the numerous challenges that Africa faces, the theme for this year's Symposium is timely. As we implement various strategies to deal with the pandemic, we must craft innovative ideas for urban service delivery in the current difficult circumstances, whilst ensuring that we continue to avail affordable homes to our growing populations.

Distinguished Participants,

In Africa, the construction sector constitutes about 10.5 per cent of GDP. While it is one of the sectors that has been impacted adversely by the economic slowdown, it is also one of the sectors that can rebound quickly. The construction sector

can therefore be targeted to lead the rebound in the broader economy. Economic history teaches us that the construction sector, including housing construction, has been very effective in driving economic recovery.

Housing construction provides excellent opportunities for job creation. Placing reliance on local supply chains also creates opportunities to localize economic prosperity. Housing construction also generates revenues for local and national governments through the issuance of construction permits, and taxes levied on the transfer of property. While the construction sector requires significant capital, record-low interest rates have made the cost of financing construction projects very affordable.

The affordable housing agenda should remain front and center in the economic recovery debate due to the need to provide decent housing and essential infrastructure to all residents, especially the vulnerable populations living in slums and informal settlements.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Kenya remains committed to its Affordable Housing Program as part of my Government's Big Four Development Agenda. This program is in line with the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 that recognizes the right to accessible and adequate housing and to reasonable standards of sanitation. It is also consistent

with Kenya's Vision 2030 which aims at providing the country's population with adequate and decent housing in a sustainable environment.

The Affordable Housing Agenda also promotes the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals and specifically Goal 11, Target 11.1 on "ensuring access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services including upgrading of slums by 2030."

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, my Government had laid the groundwork for a conducive environment for investments in affordable housing. The initiatives we implemented included introducing tax incentives, funding bulk infrastructure for housing projects, creating the Kenya Mortgage Refinancing Company in collaboration with World Bank, and establishing the National Housing Development Fund. We have also partnered with banking institutions to introduce affordable mortgages for home buyers. The Affordable Housing Program also provides avenues for micro and small enterprises to be heavily involved in the supply chain of housing projects.

I expect that these initiatives will soon begin to bear fruit, and that we will achieve our goals of spurring economic growth whilst providing decent and affordable housing to our citizens.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Given the effects of the pandemic and the potential of housing to revitalize our ravaged economies, we must carefully consider all potential practical solutions to our housing and urbanization challenges. This gathering provides an exceptional platform for us to brainstorm together, share experiences, and cultivate learnings that will resolve some of the challenges we face as humanity. Together, let us consider how we can leverage existing programs and previous investments to deliver the mandate bestowed on Shelter Afrique by its shareholders. It is my hope that we will all come away from this engagement with renewed perspectives on how the fulfilment of the housing agenda can contribute substantially to economic recovery across the continent.

As I conclude my remarks, allow me to once again welcome you to this virtual edition of the 39th Annual General Meeting and Symposium, and to wish you fruitful deliberations.

THANK YOU!