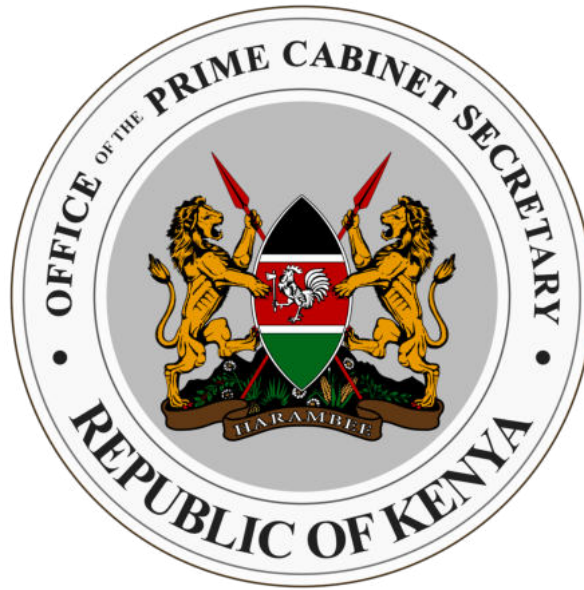




**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT**

OFFICE OF THE PRIME CABINET SECRETARY

SPEECH BY H.E HON. DR. MUSALIA MUDAVADI, EGH, THE PRIME CABINET SECRETARY OF THE REPUBLIC OF KENYA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE 19TH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF THE COMMONS (IASC) BIENNIAL CONFERENCE, AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI; JUNE 19-24, 2023



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KENYA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE 19TH
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H.E. Hon. Johnson Sakaja; Governor, County Government of Nairobi;

Prof. Charles (Charlie) Schweik; President of the International Association of the Study of Commons;

Prof. Hugues Abriel, The Vice-Rector of Research, University of Bern;

Prof. Stephen G. Kiama, Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi;

The co-organizers of the IASC Biennial Conference; University of Nairobi CETRAD; University of Bern, Centre for Development and Environment; the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute; Swiss TPH, Basel; and the Swiss Society for African Studies.

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

1. It is a great honor to be in the midst of inordinate minds that are spearheading the study and debate on integrating "the commons" in alternative development pathways. My appreciation goes to the International Association for the Study of the Commons (IASC) for choosing the University of Nairobi, as the host of the 19th Biennial Conference.
2. I also thank the organizers for the privilege to be your chief guest in inaugurating this 19th Biennial Conference with the compelling theme; *"The Commons We Want:*





Between Historical Legacies and Future Collective Actions”.

3. I therefore warmly welcome all of you esteemed delegates, scholars, researchers, and practitioners gathered to explore the potential of the commons in shaping a sustainable and prosperous future. I have no doubt that after experiencing our unique Kenyan hospitality, many similar events as this conference will attract to Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen;

4. The concept of commons has been a cornerstone of human interactive civilizations since time immemorial. It is only that we often don't talk much about it, hence, the importance of this conference.
5. My understanding of the notion of the commons is that it represents shared resources, spaces, and systems that are managed collectively. Most importantly, it is guided by principles of fairness, equity, and sustainability. These are principles embedded not only in our Constitution but also guide our development planning.





6. In Kenya, the commons we aspire to are rooted in the belief that by harnessing the power of collaboration and inclusivity, we can create a future that is just, resilient, and prosperous for all. Coincidentally, the government's Bottom-Up Economic Transformation Agenda (BeTA) is rooted in the belief that we are safe if we uplift the livelihoods of those at the lower end of the economic ladder. Our view is that development that is not shared by the majority is pseudo-development, or what Walter Rodney accurately called under-development.

7. For Kenya, therefore, the notion of the commons is not a borrowed ideology but instead runs deep within the fabric of our society. At independence, the spirit of working together to uplift each other was capitulated in the clarion call of *Harambee*. As a result, today, many Kenyans belong to associations that pool resources for each member's development. They range from funeral committees; youth, women, and savings groups to multimillion cooperative movements. This has become the foundation for a shared vision of sustainable development that influences government development planning. We, therefore, look forward to realizing the world commons we want through international collective effort. Conferences like this one today should impact transformative mindsets to transcend artificial fixation with geographical, political, cultural, gender, and economic boundaries. We want to embrace stewardship that results in cooperation by the world's populations.





Ladies and Gentlemen;

8. At the heart of the commons we want, lies the acknowledgment that our natural resources are finite and must be managed wisely. Sustainable land and water management is crucial for the preservation of our biodiversity, and the mitigation of climate change impacts; and therefore, the well-being of world communities. By adopting innovative conservation practices, promoting responsible land use, and empowering local communities, we can safeguard our commons for present and future generations.

9. This is why Kenya has taken the lead in climate change mitigation. Without prompting from elsewhere, we have taken the leap to plant 15 billion trees in 10 years in our effort to gain 30% tree cover nationally. The drive is coming from the Bottom-up by empowering community participation. Meanwhile, we are leading conversion to green energy reliance.

10. Kenya's commitment is **to reach 100% clean energy by 2030**. You might want to know that we are not far off this target today: By 2021, **81% of Kenya's electricity generation** will come from the low-carbon sources of geothermal, hydro, wind, and solar power. **Over half** of this low-carbon electricity came from geothermal energy, which Kenya has in





abundance. We have so much geothermal energy that **excess geothermal energy is released during the night** when electricity demand is low.

11. On matters of commons, by 2020, **over 71%** of Kenyans had access to electricity. Still, our installed geothermal capacity can be **increased eightfold**. For the investment-minded, this opens opportunities for scaling up green manufacturing capacity. Exporting excess electricity to neighboring countries is also on the cards.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

12. The commons we pursue are also deeply intertwined with social justice and inclusivity. We are determined that everyone in society has equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes. Affirmative action thus runs through Kenyan governance systems; be it empowering marginalized communities, promoting gender equality, and upholding the rights of indigenous peoples. This is aided by the Constitution of Kenya (in Articles 69,70,71 and 202) that guarantees access, sustainable use, management, and protection of our natural resources, which includes the commons. The rights and responsibilities of local communities over these resources are especially emphasized.





13. These Constitutional provisions can be difficult to implement in the absence of clear and workable frameworks. However, in Kenya, these facets of creating a society where no one is left behind and where the benefits of the commons are shared equitably, are ingrained at even the risk of being taken for granted. This is why the government, through my office, is inculcating "*Whole-of-Government*" and *Open-Government* approaches in public service to ensure Kenyans are not forgotten in decision-making on matters common.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

14. For a country whose economy depends directly on the exploitation of natural resources, we have no opportunity to side-step issues in the commons. Balancing the preservation of the commons and the immediate needs of society is not an easy affair. In some cases, one is dealing with real violent conflicts because THE INTERACTION is real-life-threatening:
15. Farmers are forced to encroach into fragile forest land out of need to feed their families. The consequences are the destruction of water towers upon which their very own livelihoods depend. On the other end; how can we secure wildlife sanctuaries to grow the vital tourism sector side-by-side with the competing needs of pastoralists seeking to protect and





graze their livestock, especially during periods of punitive droughts?

16. Nairobi is a highly cosmopolitan urban center and maybe the only city in the world existing side-by-side with a natural habitat - the Nairobi National Park. But how can the city grow without interfering with the wild in the National Park?

17. Some of you may recall the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize laureate, the late Prof Wangari Maathai, who also taught at this venerable University. As early as 1989, the renowned environmentalist fought hard to prevent government construction of a 60-storey building within the city's most central common space at Uhuru Park. Among other reasons, she argued that Uhuru Park gave millions of Nairobi residents a natural environment for recreation and a breath of fresh air. That taught us the lesson that whereas our natural resources, and the commons, should be seen as vital development assets, we must also seek viable alternatives to ensure their protection.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

18. Back to the purpose of this conference: Education and knowledge-sharing are fundamental to the commons we want. By investing in quality education,





promoting research, and fostering intellectual exchange, we can build the capacity of our citizens to understand and address the complex challenges we face. Through collaboration between universities, research institutions, and communities – and government – we can generate innovative solutions that will produce a sustainable future.

19. The commons we want must also embrace the power of technology and innovation. Digital advancements offer immense opportunities for participatory governance, citizen engagement, and the efficient management of resources. By harnessing the potential of digital platforms, we can enhance transparency, accountability, and effective decision-making – by ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and respected. This is the essence of Kenya’s *Open-Government* thrust.

20. Yet we face a new existential threat: Apart from new issues of health and digital commons which are prominently featuring for the first time, local commoners face increasing pressures from international conservation and sustainable development frameworks. Often these agendas do not include the locals’ resource rights, their views on resource governance, and their role in maintaining sustainable resource use. This must change and change urgently





so that recognition and participation can help achieve a sustainable future.

21. In sum, the challenges facing the commons are being aggravated by environmental degradation, climate change, population pressure, and rising poverty levels among our people. The conflicts associated with shared resources are some of the most protracted to resolve; be it clans jostling over grazing lands, or people taking up arms against invasive wildlife. Sometimes government intervention only postpones the escalation of crises, thus only delaying resolution. Between countries, diplomatic channels are sometimes not as effective in cross-border conflicts over shared resources. We need to acknowledge that in most cases, the source of conflict invariably holds the ultimate solutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

22. My presence here to open this conference is an endorsement of its important contribution to the national development agenda. Under Open - Government, I am optimistic we will leverage partnerships in IASC's vast pool of research and expert knowledge in the development of effective policies for the implementation of sustainable management practices for the commons. This will include strengthening collaboration and cooperation, equitable access and distribution, and participatory governance.





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23. I am aware that participants have approached this 19th Conference with open minds, ready to challenge assumptions, embrace diversity, and explore new avenues for collaboration. I draw inspiration from the wealth of experiences, research, and knowledge represented in this gathering, knowing that vestiges will remain in Kenya. That way, we can together, shape policies, practices, and transformative initiatives that will unlock the full potential of the commons and steer our societies toward more sustainable and inclusive progress.
24. Once again, I express my deepest appreciation to the International Association for the Study of the Commons for entrusting Kenya with the responsibility of hosting this esteemed conference. I am also grateful that the University of Nairobi, my Alma Mater, has risen to stardom as the local host. May deliberations in the conference therefore ignite new ideas, inspire innovative solutions, and pave the way for the commons we want.
25. I wish you an enlightening conference and look forward to the fruits of your collective efforts for a more sustainable future.





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26. It is now my pleasure to declare the 19th IASC Biennial Conference 2023 officially open. And once again, welcome to Nairobi for a safe stay and fruitful participation in the conference.

Thank you.

**H.E HON. DR. MUSALIA MUDAVADI, EGH,
THE PRIME CABINET SECRETARY
REPUBLIC OF KENYA**

