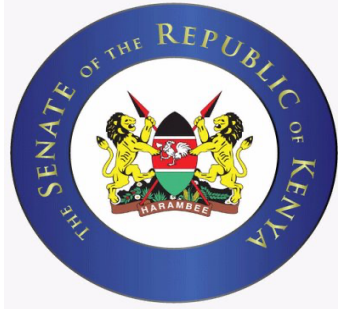


REPUBLIC OF KENYA



THE SENATE  
OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

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**REMARKS BY RT. HON. SEN. KENNETH M. LUSAKA,  
EGH, SPEAKER SENATE, AT THE OPENING OF THE  
ICGLR YOUTH CONSULTATION, 10<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2021,  
NAIROBI, KENYA**

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*Honourable members of the Forum  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen*

*Kailash Satyarthi aptly says:*

*“The power of youth is the common wealth for the entire world. The faces of young people are the faces of our past, our present and our future. No segment in the society can match with the power, idealism, enthusiasm and courage of the young people.”*

I am pleased to join you today for this caucus that brings together key stakeholders of the Great Lakes Region to engage with the youth of the region

in shaping the Youth, Peace and Security agenda especially in the wake of this pandemic.

Globally, the youth are the most significantly affected because the enterprise sectors that have been most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic are those where youth thrive. This means that any mitigation and strategy for economic and social recovery needs to have a big youth component. I want to commend ICGLR for this initiative which is a clear demonstration that the youth must be included in major decision making processes.

Despite these, there is still the reality that youth remain the youth remain marginalized and excluded from the political and important decision making processes. This is indeed more reflective of Africa than any other part of the world. Despite the fact that youth account for more than 70% of the population, they are not involved in socio-economic and political spheres. Though some constitutional provisions have been made by some countries, these policies and legislations remain largely paper values.

As mature leaders, we have not always responded effectively to the needs of the continent. However, in recent times, we continue to see and nurture hope in the rising generation of youth who have played a critical role in building structures for successful economic transformation, representation, and public service. The urgency of these efforts is not lost on the youth, as they have the most to lose if solutions are not enacted. Indeed youth today have advantages that we only dreamt of growing up: you are blessed to grow up in the current

digital age where your equally youthful peers are using their talent and innovation to make a difference.

***Distinguished guests, Ladies and gentlemen***

Statistically, by the year **2025, approximately 370 million young Africans** will reach the working age. If we do not act to enact legislation that speaks boldly and firmly to the needs of this future, we will be swept up by globalization and global democratization, we will still have weak institutional frameworks that continually fail to help fulfill even the most basic needs of its citizens namely; security, healthcare, education, gainful employment, access to justice.

Of greater concern is the age disparity of our leaders: **most legislators are aged between 55 and 75 years. On average, only 14% of Parliamentarians in Africa are under 40 years old.** This represents a big gap between policy makers and those who are affected by these policies and who in the real sense of the word, have to live with the consequences of these policies.

If the youth have not been adequately engaged in the designing, planning and implementation of programmes and policies that affect not only them but also the country at large, their knowledge, skills and energy remain underutilized. I know these are some of the reasons that led to this meeting that brings together like minded youth of the region, policy makers and development partners. I urge you to seek ways to promote and enable youth leadership, participation and collective action in the continuum of good governance, peace, transformation and development in the region.

There is still largely a need to strengthen unity of purpose and direction and enhance connectivity amongst the youth towards the creation of a new world order. Such initiatives should not replace existing grassroots youth initiatives but compliment, strengthen and amplify their endeavors through collective action. The fact that it admits a limited number of individuals to be participants creates room for multiplier effect of the identified thematic areas in all the countries represented here.

### ***Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen***

This is not to say that all is lost, or that it all depends on the older leadership, or that the slow pace of progress is dependent entirely on the existing leadership. We also need to interrogate the youth especially those who already hold leadership positions or who aspire to hold such positions: When young leaders reach positions of influence, they should not stop and feel the sense of achievement. They must focus on building strong institutions for succession planning and accountability.

As a Senate, we have had several challenges posed by the pandemic in carrying out our parliamentary duties. Most of these are legal and constitutional, procedural, technological and practical considerations of modifying sittings of the House in response to COVID-19. There have been many modifications by legislatures in response to COVID-19 and as a Senate, we have taken an incremental approach during these exceptional times to remain true to our calling and mandate. I urge you as young people who are even more

technologically suave, to go the same way: Innovate, Adapt, and Reconfigure. Do not look for barriers, go for the possibilities.

You must boldly champion and advance societal growth, poverty reduction, economic expansion, and innovation throughout the continent by strengthening the participation of more of you, promoting human rights, facilitating access to justice, and ensuring inclusion of all. Even though youth participation is not much pronounced, your will, desire and impact in the day to day social, economic, and political activities of your countries remains high. There is favourably high grounds for you to invest your efforts, knowledge, and skills. It may take time, it may be slow, but it is doable. The achievement of new spaces of political and cultural participation of youth is possible if you are well prepared.

On leadership roles, I urge you to be very intentional. Do not attempt to seek a leadership position unless you are well prepared. Have a realistic plan of how to achieve what you want and then go for it as if all your life depends on it. I want to leave you with one of my favourite quotes.

***If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michaelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'***

**I THANK YOU!!**