



KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY H.E. DR. JULIUS M. MALOMBE, EGH, GOVERNOR, KITUI COUNTY DURING THE COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS CONSULTATIVE MEETING WITH COUNTY SECRETARIES

NAIROBI, 5TH MARCH 2026

1. SALUTATIONS AND INTRODUCTION

Chairperson of the Council of Governors,

Fellow Governors Present,

**The Chief Executive Officer – Council of Governors
& Other CoG Officials Present,**

County Secretaries Present,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning! Hamjambo!

It is both an honour and a privilege to join you today in this important consultative meeting convened by the Council of Governors here in Nairobi on ***coordination of county governments to strengthen institutional linkages and enhance service delivery***. I thank you sincerely for inviting me to ***share insights on the journey of devolution in Kenya*** and to also expound on the ***legitimate expectations of the County Secretary and the public service*** in our devolved system of governance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start by invoking the words of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States of America, who reminded us that:

"The best way to predict your future is to create it."

Devolution was our collective opportunity to create the future we desired for our counties and for our nation. Devolution is already a reality that is now 13 years old. It is

important for us to remind ourselves that the responsibility of shaping the future of devolution rests not only with elected leaders but also with other stakeholders including the management and administrative stewards gathered in this room today.

County Secretaries occupy a strategic and sensitive position at the heart of county administrations. You are the links between the political leadership and the administrative systems of the county. You facilitate continuity in governance by putting into place systems that ensure institutional memory. Your success in the execution of the mandate of your office greatly contributes to effective service delivery by county governments.

Devolution is no longer a theory. It is a lived reality for millions of Kenyans. It has reshaped how resources are allocated, how services are delivered, and how citizens engage with government. The success of devolution does not depend solely on constitutional text or political goodwill; it also depends on administrative competence, ethical leadership and effective communication.

2. THE JOURNEY OF DEVOLUTION

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The journey of devolution in Kenya is anchored firmly in the transformative vision of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. When Kenyans overwhelmingly adopted the Constitution on August 27th 2010, they did more than create 47 counties; they redefined the architecture of governance. They sought to decentralize functions, power and resources in order to promote equitable development to enhance accountability and to bring critical services, such as agriculture, water, health, early childhood education, urban planning and management, as well as micro, small and medium enterprises support services closer to the people.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

From my own experience, the journey of devolution has been both inspiring and demanding. It has required persistence, careful institution-building, and, at times, firm resolve, especially where entrenched interests were uneasy

about the shift from a highly centralized system to a devolved one.

I was privileged to serve as a member of the **Task Force on Devolved Government (TFDG)**, which was mandated to develop the policy and legal framework for the operationalization of the devolved system of government.

The TFDG developed the **devolution policy** for the country and key bills that were enacted into the following laws:

- the **Urban Areas and Cities Act, 2011**;
- the **County Governments Act, 2012**;
- the **Intergovernmental Relations Act, 2012**;
- the **Transition to Devolved Government Act, 2012**; and
- the **Public Finance Management Act, 2012**, which established a unified framework for managing public finance at both national and county levels.

The Task Force which was chaired by **Dr. Mutakha Kangu** had representatives drawn from public sector, private

sector, faith-based organizations, academia and the civil society.

Some of the members of this Task Force were keen to ensure that the laws developed respected both the letter and spirit of the Constitution and entrenchment of devolution. This entailed making sure that devolved functions were appropriately unbundled and transferred to county governments and the requisite resources followed the transferred functions.

However, some members were apparently hesitant in embracing the new system of governance that required decentralization of powers and resources from the centre presumably because they viewed the new system as weakening their hold onto power and control of national resources. Ultimately, those who were in support of the implementation of the new Constitution prevailed. This was achieved with the support of the **Charles Nyachae** led Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution (CIC) and the Parliamentary Committee on the

Implementation of the Constitution led by **Hon. Abdikadir Mohamed**, the then MP for Mandera Central Constituency.

It is during my time at the task force that I developed an interest in seeking the elective position of Governor in Kitui County and so was a colleague member of the Task Force **Kipchumba Murkomen** who then expressed interest of becoming Senator of his home county Elgeyo Marakwet. Eventually, our desires came to pass when both of us were elected in the 2013 General Election.

Election as a Pioneer Governor in 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the said 2013 gubernatorial elections, I competed against **Hon. Kiema Kilonzo**, who had served for two terms as a **Member of Parliament**, and **Nzamba Kitonga**, the former **Chair of the Committee of Experts**, who hailed from a family with deep political heritage.

Transition Authority Seconded Staff to County Government

At the onset of operationalizing county governments, the **Transition Authority** provided county governments with **skeleton staff drawn from the national government** to assist in establishing county structures. These included: a Transition Authority Coordinator, Acting County Secretary, Acting Procurement Officer, Acting Internal Auditor, Acting Accountant, Acting ICT Officer, Acting Human Resource Management Officer and Acting Payroll Manager. Eventually, county governments began recruiting their own staff.

Constituting the Initial County Governments

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Those of us who were elected as pioneer Governors in 2013 faced a myriad of challenges as we endeavoured to constitute our initial county governments. These challenges included:

- a)** the identification and appointment of a balanced team of qualified and competent County Executive Committee Members whilst ensuring regional representation, gender balance, intergenerational representation, inclusion of minority and marginalized communities within the county executive committee, is achieved – and getting them successfully vetted and approved by the County Assembly;
- b)** constitution of a Selection Panel and appointment of the members of the County Public Service Boards;
- c)** constitution of a Selection Panel and appointment of the County Secretary;
- d)** competitive recruitment and appointment of Chief Officers; and
- e)** preparation of a range of basic documents such as the County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP), Annual Development Plan (ADP), County Fiscal Strategy Paper (CFSP), annual budget, procurement plans etc.

The above processes took varied periods for different counties ranging from **6-9 months**. Some counties reportedly took up to **15 months** to be fully constituted and prepare the CIDP and related planning documents.

The first County Secretary in Kitui was competitively recruited through a selection process undertaken by a selection panel appointed by the Governor.

Following the **2017 General Election**, the then Governor did not appoint a substantive County Secretary but instead had persons serving in acting capacity. She also got a former provincial administrator seconded from the national government and appointed the person as the county secretary without being vetted by the county assembly. The County Assembly took the matter to court alleging unprocedural appointment. The court adjudged the appointment as irregular and unlawful and declared the same as null and void. Consequently, the officer vacated office.

Recruitment of the Current County Secretary

The recruitment of the current County Secretary began on **23rd December 2024**, when I forwarded to the County Assembly the names of **five nominees** for appointment to the **Selection Panel** tasked with recruiting the County Secretary, for vetting and approval consideration.

The County Assembly delayed consideration of the nominees to the Selection Panel for **six** months due to House leadership wrangles, until **11th June 2025**, when the Selection Panel nominees were finally vetted and approved.

Following that approval, the Selection Panel immediately commenced the recruitment process. On **30th June 2025**, it placed an advertisement for the position of **County Secretary** in two daily newspapers of nationwide circulation — **The Standard** and **The Star** — and also on the **Kitui County website**, inviting interested and qualified persons to apply.

The Selection Panel received **29 applications**, shortlisted **five candidates**, interviewed them and on **5th August 2025** presented to the Appointing Authority a report detailing the **performance scoring and ranking** of the candidates during the interviews publicly in the presence of members of the **Fourth Estate**, who witnessed the presentation of the report first-hand including how the five shortlisted and interviewed candidates were scored and ranked.

Thereafter, on **6th August 2025**, I forwarded to the County Assembly the **nominee ranked highest** for vetting and approval. The Honourable Speaker committed the matter to the **County Assembly Committee on Appointments** on **7th August 2025**.

The County Assembly took a further **six** months to invite the nominee (*alongside the County Attorney and the Secretary to the County Public Service Board nominees, whose selection was considered by the same Selection Panel*) to appear before the Committee on Appointments on **19th January 2026** for approval hearings. The hearings

were open to the public — some attended physically in the public gallery, while others followed the proceedings through the Assembly’s official social media platforms.

Thereafter, the Appointments Committee retreated to prepare its report on the approval hearings. On **26th January 2026**, the report was laid before the House and was debated on the **27th January 2026**. The County Assembly of Kitui **unanimously adopted** the report of the Appointments Committee, recommending the appointment of the Governor’s nominee.

The approval was officially communicated to the Governor by the Honourable Speaker on **28th January 2026** – some **13 months** after the names of the Selection Panel were submitted to the County Assembly for their approval consideration. On the same day, I issued the successfully vetted officers with appointment letters and had their appointments published in the ***Kenya Gazette*** of **30th January 2026**.

Key Lessons Learnt from the Foregoing

A couple of key lessons emerged from the foregoing processes:

- a)** Disharmony in County Assemblies, politics and vested interests can stall recruitment processes for County Executives;
- b)** Competitive recruitment processes devoid of undue influence from all quarters can result in the identification and appointment of qualified and competent staff;
- c)** It is also important to ensure the recruitment of qualified and competent staff with requisite management and administrative skills for the performance of duties such as overseeing preparation of CIDP, ADP, and other county planning documents to avoid inordinate delays; and
- d)** Having persons elected as governors with the relevant political acumen, management and administrative

exposure, experience and capacity has a bearing on the effectiveness and success of a county government.

- e) The Public Appointments (County Assemblies Approval) Act, 2017 should be amended to provide for clear timelines for County Assemblies to consider and vet both Selection Panels and senior county staff that are required to be recruited via Selection Panels. Similar amendments should also be made to provide clarity on timelines for other appointees who require the approval of the County Assembly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the first county governments were inaugurated in March 2013, we have witnessed significant milestones. Counties have expanded access to healthcare through the construction and equipping of health facilities. For instance, public health centres and dispensaries grew from **8,466** in 2013 to **14,710 (73.6%)** operational facilities in 2025. The healthcare workforce increased from **874** to **4,651**

(432%) medical doctors, while the number of nurses rose from **6,620** to **34,220 (417%)** in our public county health facilities within the same period. A total of **107,831** community health workers has been engaged by the **47** devolved units in collaboration with the National Government, thus promoting health care in our communities.

In **Kitui County**, we have equally witnessed significant progress in strengthening our health system since the advent of devolution. In **2013**, the county had **216 health facilities**; by **2025**, this number had grown to **326 health facilities (50.1%)**. The number of **doctors** increased from **60 in 2013** to **144 (140%) in 2025**, while the number of **nurses** rose from **545 in 2013** to **677 (24%) in 2025**.

Nationally, Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) centres have increased from **5,951** in 2016 to **48,721 (718.9%)** in 2025, with a corresponding growth in the number of ECDE teachers from **30,049** to **78,101 (159.9)** within the same period.

In Kitui County, we have constructed a total of **1,341** ECDE centres across the county since 2013 and employed **1,688** ECDE teachers on permanent and pensionable terms.

Across the country, the number of farmers supported with extension services has risen from **541,000** in 2016 to **6.5 million** in 2025. Counties have increased the number of extension workers from **835** to **6,684** - an **eight-fold** increase in nine years.

The journey, however, has not been without challenges. Fiscal constraints, delayed disbursements, capacity gaps, overlapping mandates, and at times strained intergovernmental relations have tested our resolve as county governments to achieve the objectives of devolution. Questions have arisen around the delineation of functions between the national and county governments, the sustainability of county wage bills, and the harmonization of policies.

Yet despite these hurdles, devolution remains one of the most successful governance reforms in our nation's history.

It has democratized development. It has amplified local voices. It has made leadership more accessible and more accountable.

In this journey, County Secretaries have played pivotal roles. You have facilitated county ministries, department and agencies and ensured that executive decisions are translated into actionable programs.

3. THE STATUTORY ROLE OF COUNTY SECRETARIES IN KENYA

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Section **44** of the County Governments Act, 2012 establishes the office of the County Secretary who shall be appointed by the Governor with the approval of the County Assembly following a competitive selection process. The recruitment process of the county secretary, unlike that of the County Executive Committee Members and chief officers, is rigorous to ensure appointment of a person with requisite skills and competences to function as county secretary.

Under the County Governments Act, the roles of the county secretary are:

(a) Be the head of the county public service

As the Head of the County Public Service, the County Secretary plays an important role in matters relating to human resource management, working in collaboration with the County Public Service Board and relevant county ministries and departments to ensure that the public service is appropriately staffed, professional, disciplined, and compliant with applicable laws and policies.

The County Secretary also promotes staff welfare and supports initiatives for training and professional development within the county public service.

In addition, the County Secretary supports the Governor by providing administrative advice and information on matters relating to the functioning and overall performance of the county public service.

(b) Be responsible for arranging the business, and keeping the minutes, of the county executive committee

The County Secretary as Secretary to the County Executive Committee, and in consultation with the Governor, facilitates the preparation of agendas and notices for meetings of the Committee. The office also ensures that accurate minutes are taken and properly maintained and serves as the custodian of official records and registers relating to the proceedings and decisions of the County Executive Committee.

Through this administrative function, the County Secretary supports orderly decision-making, continuity of institutional memory, and structured follow-up on resolutions adopted by the Executive Committee.

(c) Conveying the decisions of the County Executive Committee to the appropriate persons or authorities.

The County Secretary, acting on the direction of the County Executive Committee (CEC), communicates its decisions to the relevant persons, institutions, and authorities for implementation. In addition, the County Secretary may, at the direction of the Governor, convey the Governor's directives to County Executive Committee Members, Chief Officers, departments and agencies of the county government, as well as to other institutions that may be responsible for executing or supporting those decisions.

In this way, the office serves as an important administrative channel through which decisions of the County Executive Committee and directives of the Governor are formally transmitted, recorded, and followed through within the machinery of county government.

(d) Other functions performed by the County Secretary

The County Secretary also supports the Governor by providing timely updates on significant developments that may affect the county government. This includes analysing emerging issues, outlining their potential implications for governance and service delivery, and where necessary, presenting options that may assist the Governor and the County Executive Committee in making informed decisions.

In many respects, the position of County Secretary bears similarities to certain roles within the national government's executive administration. At the national level, for example, the **Head of the Public Service** plays an important role in supporting the functioning of the public service and facilitating the implementation of government decisions across ministries and state departments.

However, there are also important institutional distinctions. The **Head of the Public Service is not the Secretary to the Cabinet**, whereas at the county level the **County**

Secretary serves as the Secretary to the County Executive Committee.

For instance, at the national level **Mr. Felix Koskei serves as the Head of the Public Service**, while **Ms. Mercy Wanjau serves as the Secretary to the Cabinet**. The two offices are constitutionally distinct. The Secretary to the Cabinet is nominated by the President and must be approved by the National Assembly before appointment, as provided for under **Article 154(2) of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010**, whereas the Head of the Public Service is appointed directly by the President as part of the executive administration.

To serve effectively as a County Secretary requires the exercise of impartiality, professionalism and integrity. The role calls for a solid understanding of public administration, intergovernmental relations, legal and regulatory frameworks, financial management and human resource management.

It also requires an appreciation of the political environment within which county governments operate and the ability to navigate that environment while upholding the principles of professionalism and good governance.

4. SURMOUNTING THE CHALLENGES IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF COUNTIES

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The administration of counties is complex. There are challenges that can derail even the most well-intentioned leadership.

One of the most common challenges is the **erosion of professionalism through undue influence**, where administrative officers feel pressured to compromise rules, standards, and merit in order to satisfy short-term political interests. The County Secretary must respect the political mandate of elected leaders while firmly safeguarding the professional independence of the public service.

Another pitfall is **weak communication within the public service**. Executive decisions must be clearly communicated, interpreted accurately, and implemented consistently. Ambiguity breeds confusion and slows service delivery. The County Secretary must ensure that internal and external correspondences are clear, lawful and properly documented.

There is also the **danger of complacency**. Devolution is dynamic. Laws evolve. Fiscal realities change. Citizen expectations grow. County Secretaries must be agile and commit to continuous learning and innovation.

Equally important is **the need to nurture morale** within the public service. A demotivated workforce cannot deliver quality services. Fair human resource practices, timely remuneration, performance management systems, and recognition of excellence are critical.

At the same time, we must **avoid politicizing the public service**. Recruitment, promotion and disciplinary processes must be merit-based and fair. This is what sustains public

trust, institutional stability and the legitimacy of devolved governance. The integrity of the county administration depends on fairness and objectivity. When merit collapses, morale declines, accountability weakens and service delivery suffers.

5. THE ROAD AHEAD

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we look to the future, the role of County Secretaries will become even more critical.

First, we must strengthen institutional linkages between county governments and national institutions. Cooperative governance must move from rhetoric to practice. Since both national and county governments serve the same *'mwananchi'*, regular consultations, shared platforms for policy dialogue and harmonized frameworks for implementation will enhance service delivery.

Second, we must embrace digital transformation.

Technology can streamline procurement, enhance transparency, improve revenue collection and facilitate data-driven decision-making. County Secretaries should champion digitization as a tool for efficiency and accountability.

Third, performance management and productivity mainstreaming must be institutionalized.

Clear targets, measurable indicators and regular evaluations will help align departmental activities with county development plans. Citizens deserve to see tangible outcomes.

Fourth, we must invest in capacity building and leadership development within the public service.

Mentorship, training and exposure to best practices will build a resilient cadre of public officers capable of sustaining devolution into the future.

Finally, we must cultivate a citizen-centric culture.

The ultimate measure of our success is the satisfaction of our citizens. Public officers must be accessible, responsive,

prompt, effective and respectful. Service delivery must be timely and inclusive.

Devolution is not an event; it is a process. Its sustainability depends on the strength of our institutions and the integrity of those who lead them and County Secretaries will continue to be key players in this process.

6. CONCLUSION

County Secretaries, you are the guardians of administrative order in our devolved system. You are the bridge between vision and action, between policy and practice, between promise and performance. The people of Kenya entrusted us with devolution because they desired accountable leadership and equitable development. That trust must not be betrayed. It must be honoured daily through professionalism, transparency and results.

Let us recommit ourselves to the constitutional ideals that birthed devolution. Let us strengthen institutional linkages and uphold the highest standards of public service. If we do so, the journey of devolution will not merely endure; it

will flourish. And generations to come will look back at this era and say that we laid a firm foundation for a responsive, accountable and transformative system of governance.

Let me conclude with the timeless wisdom of John C. Maxwell, an American author and orator, who said and I quote:-

"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way." – End of quote.

As County Secretaries, you know the way of administration. You go the way of service. By embracing integrity and professionalism in public service, you show the way for our counties and for our country.

I thank you all and wish you fruitful deliberations.