

**SPEECH BY HEALTH CABINET SECRETARY MR. JAMES MACHARIA DURING
THE WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY ON SATURDAY, 14TH JUNE 2014 AT UHURU
PARK, NAIROBI.**

Your Excellency the First Lady of the Republic of Kenya, MARGARET KENYATTA
Your Excellency the American Ambassador to Kenya, ROBERT F GODEC
Rockefeller Foundation Managing Director, Africa Region, MR. MAMADOU BITIYE
World Health Organization Kenya Country Director Dr. CUSTODIA MANDLHATE
Nairobi Governor, Hon Dr. EVANS KIDERO
Transport and Infrastructure Principal Secretary, Mr. NDUVA MULI
CDC Kenya Country Director, KEVIN De COCK
PEPFAR Coordinator, CATHERINE PERRY
Representatives of the Development Partners
Distinguished Blood Donors
Senior Government Officials
The Media

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to join you during the World Blood Donor Day 2014. From the onset let me acknowledge our blood donors who have made us gather here to celebrate their invaluable donation of blood that over the year have saved many lives. The blood donors are indeed our heroes and heroines today. Allow me, once again to thank you for your gift of life.

As a country we gave ourselves the Constitution of Kenya 2010 that outlined the Kenyans vision on health systems, my Ministry is committed to offering the highest attainable standards of health to all Kenyans irrespective of their geographic location, ethnicity or religious affiliation. This includes; access to emergency care and reproductive health. To realize this, sufficient supply of safe blood in a timely manner is imperative. When a mother bleeds excessively after child birth or after a miscarriage or an accident victim is bleeding at a Hospital casualty unit, readily available blood is often the only remedy to save her life. Indeed, Blood sufficiency is critical to achieving millennium development goals (MDGs) 3 and 4 that target to reduce child

and maternal mortality by two thirds. We have only 563 days left ahead of the 2015 United Nations deadline.

Your Excellency, ladies and Gentlemen, In Kenya 60% of blood is used to transfuse children and women due to bleeding just before or after childbirth or due to a miscarriage, induced abortions and other pregnancy related complications such as tubal pregnancy. Children often need transfusion because they suffer from severe anemia due to malaria, malnutrition, worm manifestation, sickle cell disease among others.

There are also other reasons for blood transfusion such as road traffic accidents including increasing *bodaboda* accidents; violence and terror related injuries; Cancer related treatment and leukemia; Major surgical procedures and medical conditions including specific blood related diseases like hemophilia.

Further, Blood is a national resource which many countries protect jealously with strict control of imports or exports of blood related products. This ensures that the nation's health is neither compromised by incoming diseases or by drainage of this irreplaceable resource. Adequate blood stock is of national strategic and health security importance especially in case of a major disaster or terrorist attack that requires blood for transfusion as was witnessed during the Westgate shopping Mall incidence last year.

Your Excellency, ladies and Gentlemen, Based on these facts it is of utmost importance for a country to have a continuous supply of blood and sufficient stocks at points of use. The only way to guarantee this, is to inculcate a culture of regular voluntary blood donation. A healthy adult male can donate blood four times in a year while a healthy female can donate up to three times in a year. Blood donation has various benefits: the donor gets some health information and gets a medical check-up but above all he or she is gratified by knowing that he or she has shared a part of himself to save one or more lives. This is at no loss to the donor since the body quickly replaces the donated blood.

It is only through voluntary donations that a country can accumulate a supply of safe blood that is available exactly when and where needed. Blood is a national resource that cannot be owned by one county or another. The Ministry of Health is currently receiving multiple requests from different counties to provide technical support in building Blood Banks. What is important is that every Kenyan can access blood from anywhere they are in the country. It is therefore incumbent upon KNBTS and indeed the Ministry to continue playing a national role of ensuring sufficiency and safety of blood and blood products.

I am happy to note that the free maternity services that the Ministry of Health is offering in line with the Jubilee government manifesto could not have achieved the over 60% success without safe and sufficient blood for delivering mothers.

Your Excellency, ladies and Gentlemen, as I conclude, Kenyans need to get patriotic, altruistic and compassionate to engrain the habit of donating blood regularly. Currently most Kenyans donate only when a relative or friend is admitted in hospital but in most cases it may be too late to save that patient. Additionally most donations are from students while Kenya's large healthy working population remains unmotivated to support this national need. It is important to note that when blood is donated in non-emergency situations, the Kenya National Blood Transfusion Service has sufficient time to test it thoroughly ensuring that no infectious agents are present. Blood recipients are thus protected from infections such as HIV and Hepatitis.

Finally, **Your Excellency, ladies and gentlemen,** The Ministry of Health is reviewing the various strategies that will ensure adequate blood supply. These include reviewing the National Blood Transfusion Policy of 2001 to align with the New Constitution; developing the Kenya National Blood Transfusion Service Management Bill 2014; increasing financing to KNBTS to reduce over reliance on donor funding; involving the private sector in mutually beneficial public-private partnerships and in using new approaches to get services closer to the people. Once again let me thank our development partners including the Presidential Emergency Fund for Aids Relief (PEPFAR), World Health Organization (WHO) Centre for Disease Control (CDC), USAID and Population Services - Kenya (PS-Kenya).

“Safe Blood for Saving Mothers” Thankyou.