

SPEECH BY THE PROF KIHUMBU THAIRU, FOUNDER CHAIR OF THE KEMRI BOARD OF MANAGEMENT, DURING THE OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 10th KEMRI ANNUAL SCIENTIFIC AND HEALTH (KASH) CONFERENCE AND KEMRI'S 40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS ON MONDAY, 10TH FEBRUARY, 2020 AT SAFARI

*Senior Government officials from both National and County Government,
Chairman KEMRI Board of Management, Dr. Naphtali Agata,
The Director General, KEMRI, Prof. Yeri Kombe,
The Director, Research & Development, Prof. Samuel Kariuki,
Chairman, KASH, Conference Organizing Committee, Prof. Charles Mbogo,
Members of the Press,
Invited Guests;
Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good morning,

It gives me great pleasure to join you all, in the Official Opening of the 10th KEMRI Annual Scientific & Health (KASH) Conference and the KEMRI's 40th Anniversary celebrations.

First, let me take this opportunity to congratulate KEMRI for attaining 40 years of research excellence in Africa as well as the recent Top Ranking in Africa of KEMRI in terms of health research output by Scimago and Elsevier, one of the leading ranking organizations in the world. We take pride in this, and we are deeply humbled by this achievement by our very own world class research institution. **Congratulations to KEMRI!**

Ladies and Gentlemen allow me to also congratulate KEMRI for starting this KASH Conference ten years ago. I am informed that the KASH Conference brings together both policy makers and scientists to show case and disseminate cutting edge research results from Kenya and beyond the borders.

Congratulations to the KEMRI Board of Management and the KASH Organizing Committee for coming up with this brilliant theme: ***Towards Sustainable Universal Health Care in Kenya: Utilization of Research Evidence through Multi-sectorial Collaboration***” which demonstrates KEMRI’s commitment, capabilities and zeal towards implementation of the Governments Big Four Agenda in the area of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Millennium Development Goals.

I am equally well-versed that this conference is an excellent opportunity for us as a Nation to take stock of KEMRI’s achievements and the work ahead, in the realization of the vision of reaching out to all Kenyans to enable them to access better health services.

Ladies and Gentlemen, over four decades, KEMRI has played a sterling role in informing health policy through its research activities. I am equally aware that KEMRI has established itself as a premier research institution globally and this conference is a clear show that KEMRI is equal to the task of continuing to provide leadership in the area of human health and particularly the implementation of UHC. As a world class research institute KEMRI has developed immense capacity in carrying out research through the development of both infrastructure and human capacity that is vital to the country’s achievement of the vision 2030.

Over the last 40 years, it has developed and nurtured a comprehensive Laboratory Support System for the Kenya Ministry of Health (MOH) on various aspects of Health Care and delivery. KEMRI Laboratories have played a critical role in saving thousands of lives of infants born to HIV positive mothers through its Early Infant Diagnosis (EID) Laboratories and active follow-up to ensure adherence to treatment regimes.

In addition, the Institute is home to various Reference Laboratories (i.e NTD Regional Reference Lab, East Africa Influenza Reference Lab, Polio/Measles Reference Lab, Viral Hemorrhagic Fever Reference Lab) to mention just a few, that are critical in dealing with Public Health Emergencies in Kenya and the region. The National Cancer Registry domiciled in KEMRI has been important in identifying the types of cancers and

populations at risk and continues to be a great asset that is informing intervention measures that need to be put in place to address this threat. The six active Demographic Health Surveillance Systems associated with KEMRI in Nairobi, Kilifi, Kwale, Kisumu (Kombewa/ Ahero), Mbita, and Busia have cemented KEMRI's capabilities in the Big Data Management which is an important element in research for human health.

We also acknowledge KEMRI's role in numerous National Surveys: Kenya Micronutrient Survey; National TB Survey, AMR Survey, National School-based De-worming Program that have provided critical baseline information that have informed health needs and delivery priorities towards achieving UHC. Moreover, KEMRI has continued to provide Technical and Research support for Emergency Care for critically ill children (ETAT) guidelines. I also note that KEMRI has continued to provide Technical Facilitation of National Guidelines for prevention of cervical, breast and prostate cancers. These numerous contributions have enhanced the quality of life of Kenyan citizens and set a benchmark for other countries to mimic. And for this, **I say once again congratulations to KEMRI**, your forty years of existence has been worthwhile.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the establishment of the KEMRI Annual Scientific and Health (KASH) conference as a platform for disseminating scientific findings and one that brings together policy makers and scientists to share scientific trends and breakthroughs is a clear indication that the institute is prepared to its task in the coming decades.

In conclusion, **Ladies and gentlemen**, the task ahead is much bigger than what has already been accomplished. We all have a role to play individually so as to achieve the country's big 4 agenda. We all need to ask ourselves what we can do for our beloved country? What can we do about numerous children who are dying every day of diseases? What can we do about mothers dying of complications during delivery? What can we do to those vulnerable groups in promoting their quality of life? Why should a

woman die while giving birth? Those are critical questions that KEMRI should answer going forward. We must stop at nothing to stop this menace.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I call upon all stakeholders in the Health Research to pool efforts towards achieving the local, regional and global agenda. May God bless KEMRI. May God bless Kenya. With those few remarks, Ladies and Gentlemen, **it is now my pleasure to declare the 10th KASH Conference officially open and to once again Congratulate KEMRI on their 40th anniversary.**

Prof. Kihumbu Thairu