



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH**

**SPEECH BY THE CABINET SECRETARY FOR HEALTH**

**DURING THE COMMISSIONING**

**OF**

**THE RENOVATED KENYA MEDICAL RESEARCH  
INSTITUTE (KEMRI) LABORATORIES**

**ON SEPTEMBER 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021,**

**NAIROBI.**

- **Charge 'd' Affairs, US Embassy, Mr. Eric Kneedler,**
- **Chairman, KEMRI Board of Directors, Dr. Daniel Mbinda,**
- **Acting Director General, KEMRI, Prof. Sam Kariuki,**
- **Partners and collaborators,**
- **Members of the Press,**
- **Distinguished guests,**
- **Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am pleased to join you this morning as we officially commission the renovated KEMRI Laboratories. This renovation is part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the collaborative project between KEMRI and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency whose purpose is to reduce the threat from naturally occurring diseases or unintentional release of biological pathogens.

I would like to start by thanking the US government for the cordial relationship that we have had over the years. Indeed, it is one that keeps on giving and we appreciate that the commissioning of these laboratories increases Kenya's ability to comply with the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 and the Biological Weapons Convention through a demonstrated ability to properly control, handle, and account for biological materials. I also wish to congratulate KEMRI for 40 years of conducting research "In Search of Better Health".

From a Health perspective and coming at a time during which we are enduring a pandemic, the completion and handing over of these facilities couldn't be more apt. As our experience and indeed the global response to COVID-19 has shown, today more than ever, there is an urgent need for nations to escalate their Research &

Development in order to improve pandemic preparedness and to prevent the drastic losses of life and livelihoods such as what has been witnessed with Covid 19, should a similar occurrence arise.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

Infectious diseases pose huge risks to the world's population. For years, humanity has been plagued by all manner of illnesses ranging from common infections to emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases and chronic illnesses. Diseases such as smallpox, H1N1, influenza, cholera, measles, malaria, HIV Aids and SARS among others, have been global public health concerns and have had great impact on mortality rates and economies all over the world.

There is a broad range of possible scenarios in which the population can encounter the causative pathogens including the simple exposure to a microorganism, unintentional release from laboratories and research centers as well as intentional release of biological agents to cause epidemics. The prevention and



management of such events require dedicated measures at national and international level, in terms of biosafety and biosecurity.

Research is a key component of public health. It is a well-known fact that medical research can have an enormous impact on human health and longevity, and that the resulting increased productivity of the population contributes greatly to the national and global economy. The Government of Kenya recognizes the importance of research as it relates to health and its role in improving the health outcomes of its people and has as a matter of policy committed funding towards research and development.

On my part as Cabinet Secretary of Health, I am determined to play my part in ensuring we achieve globally recognized R&D facilities not only through expanding our partnerships with global stakeholders, but also by ensuring that our ecosystem is intact when it comes to policies and laws on the funding of R&D, investment in human capital formation, the extension of patents protection and tax credits for R&D.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen**

As important as research is to public health, it is important to minimize the risks associated with accidental release of pathogens from research institutions as they can cause grave disease outbreaks. The British smallpox escape of 1978, and the SARS laboratory escapes outbreaks after the SARS epidemic in 2003 and 2004 were unintentional and could have been avoided had the involved laboratories been more stringent on biosecurity procedures in the handling of dangerous pathogens. I am glad to note that KEMRI has a sample management facility that will go a long way in mitigating such incidences.

I do hope that the training and research that will be conducted in these new facilities will take into account the possibility of such outbreaks and ensure that we are well prepared to handle such a situation should it arise.

### **As I conclude,**

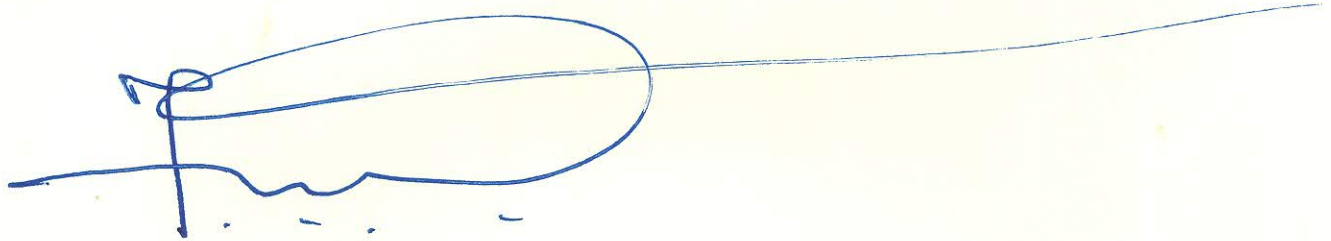
It is my hope that DTRA and KEMRI will continue working together to make Kenya and the world safer from illicit acquisition, distribution, or attack from biological materials.

It is also my prayer that KEMRI has a costed maintenance plan for these magnificent new facilities because without such plans, we will be setting ourselves up for failure which we cannot afford at any cost.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It's now my pleasure to declare these laboratories and the linked facilities officially commissioned.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop followed by a long horizontal line that tapers to the right.

**SEN. MUTAHI KAGWE, EGH,  
CABINET SECRETARY.**