HIS GRACE, THE ARCHBISHOP’S PASTORAL LETTER TO THE NATION DURING THE 2021, JUNE 1ST ANNUAL MADARAKA DAY CELEBRATION

HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NATION TO UPHOLD CONSTITUTIONALISM

Psalms 46:1 God is our refuge and strength a very present help in trouble.

PREAMBLE

Dear Kenyans, we send you Good will greetings as we celebrate Madaraka day. We send our condolences to the families who have lost dear ones due to Covid-19 and other causes. For those who are at home or hospitals due to the virus we pray for quick recovery. We pray and commend all our frontline staff who have helped us manage the Covid-19 pandemic so far, for their selfless dedication and commitment in serving fellow Kenyans. As we celebrate this year’s Madaraka Day, let us renew our faith and patriotism but also pray and reflect, both individually and collectively, on the state of our country.

1. State of the Nation

Our story as a nation is aptly captured in the words of the Psalmist that, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). This is our testimony. God has remained the source of our hope. Our people struggle with all forms of hardships including lost livelihoods, unemployment and lack of sustainable income. Political squabbles, deep seated divisions, dishonest politics and unending war of words continue to undermine service delivery including timely access to justice. The covid-19 pandemic has further exacerbated an already bad situation. As a result, we are witnessing a steady rise in crimes and domestic violence. We call upon the Government and the political leaders to:

1.1 Work harder in the fight against corruption,
1.2 Making good on the promise of universal health care and expand access for all,
1.3 Facilitate the smooth running of the judiciary and timely release of resources to the counties so that basic services will flow with requisite capacities.
2. The State of our Health Care Services

We commend the government’s efforts in containing the spread of the covid-19 infections through the Ministry of Health. We pray that the effort being made to secure sufficient vaccination succeeds; and also:

2.1 Encourage the government to do everything possible to ensure that vaccination reaches acceptable percentage of population and within the required period, and to move with speed and allay anxieties among those who received the first dose and are still waiting for their second dose.

2.2 We take note that the government has done well in promoting home based care for those who are asymptomatic or are not seriously ill. Unfortunately, intense follow-ups are not being done. We recommend that a rigorous trace and test program is put in place with a surveillance team working closely with the families and communities. As many have recommend before us, we emphasize the need, “To find, test, trace and isolate,” in order to break the chain of transmission.

2.3 We call upon the Ministry of health to work closely with respective county health authorities and strengthen proper home-based care and isolation protocol so as to enable proper monitoring of such cases. Such activities should include intentional use of pulse oximeters to monitor oxygen levels of patients at home.

2.4 We observe that the greatest challenge to the counties has been perennial delays in funding. We urge that the counties be resourced adequately and funds are disbursed in time for better results.

2.5 Alongside the ongoing activities, the government should accelerate reforms at the National Hospital Insurance Fund to ensure majority of Kenyans can access services. The State should also reform the Public Finance Management Act of 2012 to give health facilities financial autonomy. If our already bad situation may evolve for worse, it is abundantly clear that our facilities will not be able to handle the situation if they lack the autonomy they need for effective response.

3. The State of our Economy

We take note of the recent pronouncement² by the National Treasury, that Kenya’s economy is expected to grow by 7.0 percent in 2021. Resumption of international trade and strategic investments in the country’s development priority areas were given as reasons for this optimism. Given the current economic situation and the

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² April 4, 2021 Announcement by Minister for Finance
growing uncertainty in the market, we need to treat such predictions with great caution. In fact, the same Ministry stated that the economy grew by 0.6 percent in 2020 due to the triple threats of COVID-19, locust invasion and floods. This situation is far from over given the potential threat of a fourth wave of the virus. The reality is that the 2021/2022 financial year will be a difficult one by any measure. With the COVID 19 pandemic, its unpredictable variants and at best, an unstable global economy, Kenya’s economic progress will depend on identifying all past, current and future economic shocks to create a catalogue of how to expeditiously deal with each and every one of the shocks. The latest National Treasury report on public indebtedness, which was submitted to the National Assembly, contained disturbing statistics. More than Sh132 billion in 10 new loans were procured between September 1, 2020 and March 31, 2021.

There continues to be a glaring disproportion between revenue and expenditure, especially in the 2021/2022 fiscal year. It is expected to spend Sh3.02 trillion with a budgetary deficit of Sh930 billion, hence foreign and domestic borrowing of Sh399.1 billion and Sh530 billion, respectively. The public debt stands at Sh7.2 trillion, which is at 71.2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). The debt-to-GDP ratio has surged from 39 per cent of GDP in 2013 to 71.2 per cent in 2021. In March, the National Assembly passed the Budget Policy Statement (BPS) of Sh3.02 trillion only for the Treasury to later present a Sh3.6 trillion budget. In the circumstances:

3.1 There is indeed no short cut for us. The reality is that the health of our economy depends, in part, on what we do right now to create the conditions where businesses can hire, and middle-class families can feel a basic measure of economic security. However, in the long run, our prosperity also depends on our ability to reduce the massive debt accumulated over the past decade in a way that allows us to meet our responsibilities to each other. Borrowing should be capped and repayment prioritize with a view to reducing the burden as quickly as possible.

3.2 We must be ready to address the persisting corruption, laying the foundation of a strong and predictable fiscal policy, reduction of domestic borrowing, expanding the tax base, creating a level playing field for all businesses and creating a business climate that is competitive globally and that encourages innovation for our talented pool of youthful populace.

3.3 If we don’t act now, that burden of debt will ultimately fall on our children’s shoulders and we too shall not be spared the hardship either. We need to go through the budget, line-by-line and eliminate waste, without short-changing investment in health, education, agriculture, manufacturing and

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3 E&Y Budget Synopsis 2021
basic scientific research because these are essential to our future. We shouldn’t balance the budget on the backs of the poor and the middle class; everyone, including the wealthiest Kenyans and biggest corporations, must pay their fair share and government must lead from the front by prioritizing service delivery over and above recurrent expenditure.

4.0 Reforms and 2022 General Election

Whereas the country needs to reform certain aspects of our constitution and institutions, the court ruling regarding BBI process must be respected. We advise that since the matter of constitutional reforms through BBI proposed changes is now in court, other urgent legislative matters should be prioritized by Parliament. In this regard, we call upon Parliament to urgently finalize the development and enactment of the various laws that touch on elections, including:

(i) Political Party Primaries Bill
(ii) Referendum Bill
(iii) Campaign Finance (Amendment) Bill
(iv) Gender Parity Bill

We urge all key stakeholders to ensure preparation towards the election in 2022 is well planned for peaceful, credible, free and fair elections in August 2022. We strongly discourage any discussion or attempts at postponing the 2022 elections. We also make earnest appeals to people in areas where currently there are by-elections to observe peace and model good example of mature politics and tolerant of divergent views.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we urge all citizens strictly to adhere to Covid-19 guidelines and avoid crowded place occasioned by political activities. We also urge the political class to minimize political rallies and meetings that expose the citizens.

God bless all of you

Signed on this 31st May 2021 at the All-Saint’s Cathedral Church, Nairobi

The Most Rev. Dr. Jackson Ole Sapit,
Archbishop of Kenya, Bishop of All Saints Cathedral Diocese,  
Bishop-in -ordinary to the Kenya Defence Forces