

SPEECH BY H.E PROF. HILLARY BARCHOK GOVERNOR BOMET COUNTY DURING THE 1ST BOMET UNIVERSITY ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Chairperson and Honourable Members of Bomet University Council,

The Vice Chancellor, Prof. Charles Mutai, and the Deputy Vice Chancellors of Bomet University,

Distinguished Keynote Speakers, Scholars, and Academic Partners,

Conference Participants, Invited Guests, Staff and Students,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an immense honour and a profound personal privilege to stand before you as the Chief Guest at the inaugural 1st Bomet University Annual Conference. I warmly thank the Vice Chancellor, the University Council, and the entire Bomet University fraternity for the distinguished invitation to grace this historic academic occasion. I also extend a most cordial welcome to all our distinguished guests, scholars, researchers, and partners who have journeyed from near and far to be part of this milestone. Your presence here is a powerful affirmation of the growing academic and intellectual stature of Bomet University, and indeed, of Bomet County itself.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I speak not merely as a political leader, but as a fellow academician and an unapologetic champion of education. My own journey — from the lecture halls of Chuka University, where I served as Dean of the Faculty of Education and Resources Development — has given me an intimate understanding of what institutions like Bomet University mean to our society. It is precisely because of this background that I hold the mission of this University close to my heart, and why my administration has committed, without reservation, to see this institution flourish.

Before I speak to the theme of this conference, allow me to pause and celebrate what is perhaps the greatest recent achievement in this institution's history — the award of the University Charter by His Excellency President Dr. William Samoei Ruto. This is a moment that the people of Bomet County have long awaited, and it fills us all with immense pride. From its humble beginnings as a constituent college of Moi University, Bomet University has grown in leaps and bounds to merit this recognition.

Distinguished guests, it is also a matter of great pride that Bomet University has earned distinction as the only Green University in Sub-Saharan Africa. This remarkable achievement places our county on the international map, demonstrating that we are not only building centres of learning but leading in sustainable institutional development. I commend the University's leadership for this visionary commitment to environmental stewardship.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the County Government of Bomet has never seen its relationship with Bomet University as a peripheral concern. From the very outset of my administration, I pledged

to work closely with the University's leadership to advance its mission and to ensure that it becomes one of the premier institutions of higher learning in Kenya and beyond. I am glad to reaffirm that pledge today.

A tangible expression of this commitment is the recently signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the County Government of Bomet and Bomet University. This MOU is not merely a ceremonial document. It is a living framework for collaboration that will drive joint research, generate practical solutions to the challenges facing our county and region, and position the University as a key engine of Bomet's development agenda. Through this MOU, we envisage co-developed research addressing critical county priorities – from agriculture and food security to health, environment, and economic transformation.

Our education support does not end there. My administration has long championed access to higher education through the County Education Revolving Fund, through which we committed Kshs 30 million in its inaugural phase, benefiting over 2,774 university students across the county. We intend to grow this fund progressively so that no talented young person from Bomet is denied a university education due to financial constraints. We have also maintained a robust bursary and scholarship programme for needy students in secondary schools and universities, reflecting our belief that education is the surest ladder out of poverty.

Furthermore, my administration has been actively pursuing international academic partnerships that directly benefit Bomet University. Recently I pursued academic exchange program with the Republic of Greece. Through our partnership, we envisage to establish an academic exchange programmes between the University of Athens and the academic fraternity of Bomet where students from both institutions will collaborate on innovations addressing challenges in agriculture and related sectors. This is only a foretaste of the global positioning we envision for this University.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the theme of this conference – "Artificial Intelligence as a Transformative Technology: Unlocking the Opportunities for Sustainable Development" – could not be more timely or more relevant. We live in an era defined by rapid technological disruption, and artificial intelligence is at the very heart of this transformation. AI is already reshaping agriculture, healthcare, education, finance, and governance – all sectors that are central to our development agenda in Bomet County and Kenya at large.

I am particularly gratified that this conference brings together scholars, innovators, and policymakers to interrogate how AI can be harnessed not merely for economic efficiency, but for sustainable and equitable development. My administration has already demonstrated its commitment to this digital future – through the establishment of an ICT software factory in Mulot to tap into the talent of our tech-savvy youth, and through our investment in competency-based education and training across our 33 Vocational Training Centres. AI must be part of the solution to youth unemployment, and it must be accessible to communities across the social spectrum, not only to the elite.

I challenge the scholars and researchers gathered here to ensure that the deliberations of this conference produce tangible, actionable recommendations – recommendations that county and national governments can adopt, that communities can benefit from, and that will contribute Kenya's voice to the global AI governance conversation.

In closing, I salute the leadership of Bomet University for its visionary stewardship of this institution. Under the able guidance of the Vice Chancellor and the University Council, Bomet University is not just growing – it is soaring. The trajectory of this institution – from a constituent college to a fully-fledged, chartered, internationally recognised university and the only Green University in Sub-Saharan Africa – is a story of resilience, ambition, and excellence that the people of Bomet County celebrate with immense pride.

To the students: you are the reason this University exists. You are the reason this conference matters. The knowledge and skills you acquire within these walls must serve not only your personal advancement, but the transformation of your communities, your county, and your nation.

To our guests, scholars, and partners: I wish you a fruitful, stimulating, and impactful conference. I also invite you to enjoy the warmth, the natural beauty, and the hospitality of Bomet County during your stay.

The County Government of Bomet remains your steadfast partner. We are committed to this University. We are committed to this community. And we are committed to building a future worthy of the aspirations of our people.

Hongera Bomet University! Hongera wananchi wa Bomet!

It is now my singular honour and great pleasure to officially declare the 1st Bomet University Annual Conference open.

Thank you. Asante sana. God bless you. God bless Bomet County. God bless Kenya.