

SPEECH BY H.E. PROF. HILLARY BARCHOK, GOVERNOR OF BOMET COUNTY, DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE ALTERNATIVE JUSTICE SYSTEM (AJIS) COUNTY ACTION PLAN, MODEL AND SUITES

The Hon. Chief Justice of the Republic of Kenya, Her Ladyship Martha K. Koome,

Hon. Judges and Judicial Officers,

Hon. Vice-Chair of the Judicial Service Commission,

Hon. Members of Parliament and the County Assembly,

Our Distinguished Council of Elders and Community Mediators,

Religious Leaders,

Members of the Legal Fraternity,

Development Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is my distinct honour and privilege to welcome you all to Bomet County for this historic occasion, the official launch of the Alternative Justice Systems County Action Plan, Model and Suites.

We are particularly honoured by the presence of the Hon. Chief Justice, whose leadership continues to advance a Judiciary that is accessible, people-centred, and responsive to the needs of every Kenyan.

On behalf of the people of Bomet County, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Judiciary for selecting Bomet as the 16th County to launch this important milestone in the advancement of access to justice. This initiative demonstrates the Judiciary's commitment to implementing Article 159 of the Constitution by promoting alternative forms of dispute resolution that complement the formal justice system.

Justice is one of the cornerstones of development. A society that resolves disputes fairly, efficiently, and peacefully creates the stability necessary for investment, economic growth, and social cohesion. As a County Government, we recognize that lasting development cannot be achieved where conflicts remain unresolved or where citizens face barriers in accessing justice.

Bomet County is proud of its rich heritage of community dialogue, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. For many years, our elders, religious leaders, and community institutions have played an important role in resolving disputes and fostering reconciliation. The unveiling of the Alternative Justice Systems Action Plan, Model and AJS Suites gives these traditions a structured constitutional framework that respects human rights, promotes equality, and complements the work of our courts.

Alternative Justice Systems are particularly valuable because they emphasize restoration rather than confrontation. They encourage parties to listen to one another, rebuild trust, and arrive at mutually acceptable solutions. This approach not only saves time and resources but also strengthens families, preserves community relationships, and promotes lasting peace.

Land disputes alone account for a majority of court cases across this country. Families have been torn apart, generations have been locked in bitter feuds, and

communities have been divided, all because of land. The courts are overwhelmed. Cases take years, sometimes decades, and even when a judgment is delivered, the wounds often remain. AJS has proved to be an effective, restorative, and humane way of resolving these long-running land disputes, especially those that have piled in courts for years. Unlike the adversarial court process that often creates winners and losers, AJS allows people to be heard in their own voices, in familiar spaces, and in culturally resonant ways. It is this unique ability to combine justice with healing that makes AJS such a vital complement to the formal justice system.

As a County Government, we remain committed to supporting initiatives that bring justice closer to our people. In pursuit of this noble cause, my government has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Judiciary through the National Steering Committee on Implementation of Alternative Justice Systems. This partnership demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that justice is not a distant ideal but a lived reality for every citizen of Bomet.

We will continue collaborating with the Judiciary, the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the County Attorney, law enforcement agencies, community leaders, and civil society organizations to promote legal awareness, strengthen mediation initiatives, and ensure that our residents understand and utilize appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms.

We have already taken action. We are empowering our village managers and council of elders to take charge at the grassroots level. We are ensuring that our people have access to mediators who are trained, fair, and accountable. But we must do more. We must allocate resources to support AJS centers. We must train our elders on human rights and constitutional compliance. We must create awareness so that every citizen knows that AJS exists and is available to them.

I also wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of our traditional elders, religious leaders, and community mediators. Their wisdom and dedication have long contributed to peaceful conflict resolution across our county. The success of Alternative Justice Systems will depend on continued collaboration between these community institutions and the formal justice sector.

To the people of Bomet, I encourage you to embrace these facilities. Let us choose dialogue instead of hostility, understanding instead of division, and reconciliation instead of prolonged conflict. Justice is not only about determining who is right or wrong, it is also about restoring relationships, healing communities, and strengthening our social fabric.

However, as we celebrate this milestone, I must also address a crisis that is tearing our county apart. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and child abuse have reached alarming levels in Bomet. Statistics show that gender-based violence prevalence in our county stands at 44.4 percent. Defilement cases account for 34.9 percent, assault cases at 44.4 percent, and murder prevalence at 11.1 percent. These are not just numbers, they represent our daughters, our sisters, our mothers, and our children.

Between January and June 2026 alone, over 40 cases of GBV were reported in Bomet County, and out of these, 26 cases constituted direct murder threats. Security agencies are now receiving reports of GBV incidents almost daily, with cases of defilement, domestic violence, wife battering, and sexual offences on the rise across our five sub-counties.

According to county statistics, Bomet recorded a total of 4,365 teenage pregnancies among girls aged 15 to 19 over a nine-month period covering 2024 and 2025. The situation has not improved, with reports indicating that cases of

teenage pregnancies, defilement, domestic violence, and other forms of abuse continue to surge.

We have seen fathers defile their own daughters. We have seen lecturers hold young girls captive. We have seen children killed by their own parents. These are our children, our sisters, our future, and we must protect them.

What makes this crisis worse is a harmful tradition called 'Kipkaa'. This is a practice where sexual assault cases are settled privately between families, with perpetrators paying small fines to avoid the justice system. A significant number of GBV cases in Bomet are still quietly settled between families, shielding perpetrators from facing the law. Let me be clear: no amount of money can compensate for the violation of a child. When we settle these cases in secret, we deny victims the justice they deserve, and we allow perpetrators to walk free and abuse again. This practice must end.

My government is taking this crisis seriously. We have established a Holding Ground at Bomet Police Station offering psychosocial, legal, and medical support to victims. The holding ground also provides a safer and more dignified environment for sexually assaulted minors. I have directed our security agencies to crack down on all perpetrators of GBV and defilement. Anyone found culpable will face the full force of the law. And to parents and guardians, report these crimes. Do not hide them. Do not settle them in secret. Justice for your child begins the moment you report to the police.

Cases involving sexual and gender-based violence cannot be handled through mediation. These are serious crimes that must face the full force of the law. The AJS we are launching today is not for defilement. It is not for rape. It is not for GBV. These crimes belong in our courts, where perpetrators will be prosecuted

and punished. What AJS will do is help us resolve community disputes, land issues, family conflicts, neighbor disagreements, before they escalate. It will strengthen our communities and reduce the burden on our courts. But it will never be used to shield criminals. That is not justice. That is betrayal.

To our elders and community mediators: you hold a sacred responsibility. Do not accept 'Kipkaa' cases. Do not mediate sexual offenses. If anyone brings such a case to you, your duty is to report it to the police. Act fairly in all matters. Do not favor the rich over the poor. Do not favor your relative over a stranger. And let me say it plainly, do not take bribes. We will not allow the very system meant to heal our people to be destroyed by greed.

Your Ladyship, the Chief Justice, the County Government of Bomet values its partnership with the Judiciary. We appreciate your continued efforts to decongest our courts, improve access to justice, and ensure that justice reaches every Kenyan, regardless of social or economic status. We are particularly grateful that the Environment and Land Court (ELC) is already operational here in Bomet, providing our people with access to specialised justice on land and environmental matters.

On our part, we are committed to supporting the expansion of court infrastructure. The proposal by our County Assembly leadership to establish law courts in Konoin, Bomet East, and Chepalungu sub-counties remains active, and my administration is working to finalise the donation of land for these crucial facilities. This will ensure that justice is not a distant ideal but a lived reality for every citizen of Bomet.

As we officially open these Alternative Justice Systems Suites today, may they become centres of dialogue, fairness, reconciliation, and hope. May every person

who seeks justice here find not only resolution but also dignity, healing, and renewed confidence in our justice system.

With those remarks, I once again welcome the Hon. Chief Justice and all our distinguished guests to Bomet County. We thank you for your partnership and assure you of our continued cooperation in building a just, peaceful, and prosperous county.

May God bless the Judiciary.

May God bless the people of Bomet County.

May God bless the Republic of Kenya.

Thank you.
