

SPEECH BY PROF. GEORGE A. O. MAGOHA, EGH, CABINET SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION DURING THE OPENING OF THE 10TH ANNUAL
NATIONAL BIOSAFETY CONFERENCE ON 4TH NOVEMBER 2021, AT
SAWELA LODGES, NAIVASHA

Distinguished participants;

Members of the press;

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning,

It is my greatest pleasure to be with you to preside over the opening of the 10th Annual Biosafety Conference, one of the events that provides a platform for us to discuss issues that are significant to accelerating Kenya's long term development plan, the Kenya Vision 2030 and the Big Four Agenda.

I am also glad that this conference supports part of the Ministry of Education's mission of enhancing the integration of Science, Technology and Innovation into national production systems for sustainable development.

In my view, there couldn't be a better time for this conference. It has come when, as a nation, we need to evaluate our achievements towards attaining our country's development agenda sustainably. In this case, the primary focus is on how various

government entities work together to deliver the government's brainchild - the Big Four Agenda.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Science and technology play a critical role in enhancing agricultural productivity and economic growth in Africa and the world. In Kenya, it plays a significant role in the realization of the Big Four Agenda.

As we are all aware, the 'Big Four Agenda' focuses on:

Universal Health Coverage to ensure access to quality and affordable healthcare for all Kenyans;

Quality and affordable housing;

Food security to all Kenyans; and

Manufacturing to promote value addition to products whilst creating employment opportunities for the citizens.

The focus is on improving the living standards of Kenyans, growing the economy and leaving a lasting legacy by 2022. The projects directly relate to Kenya's Vision 2030.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, after a decade of biosafety regulatory excellence, I commend the National Biosafety Authority for approving the BT-cotton for Environmental Release. I am aware that this will result in high yields in Cotton, thus putting the nation at the forefront in textile production in Africa and the world. Furthermore, it will enhance Kenya's apparel production industry, a significant milestone in attaining manufacturing as one of the Big Four Agenda items.

The Authority also approved BT maize for National Performance Trials. This genetically modified maize variety, once available to our farmers, will significantly

improve food security in Kenya, reduce environmental damage and help smallholder farmers achieve significant gains in their earnings.

About four months ago, the Authority approved the application for the environmental release of genetically modified (GM) cassava. We are delighted that through this GM Cassava, farmers will be protected from devastating losses caused by cassava diseases. In addition, together with consumers, farmers will benefit from increased cassava root quality and marketable yield.

The three interventions that I have mentioned will significantly contribute towards addressing Food Security and Nutrition, and Manufacturing through promoting value addition hence opening up employment opportunities to Kenyans.

Again, the development and subsequent approval of the GM Cassava for National Performance Trials clearly indicates that Kenya can develop homegrown

biotechnology products. Our scientists are doing an excellent job making us visible across the globe through innovations in biotechnology.

This would not have been possible without the facilitation of the National Biosafety Authority as a regulatory agency for the technology. Now, Kenya is part of the few African countries that are progressively developing biotechnology products, thereby slowly drifting away from being recipients of technology developed elsewhere.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many African states cannot harness the full potential of biotechnology crops and products because of the weak capacity to regulate biotechnology crops and products. Kenya has not been spared either. I am conscious of our nation's key challenges, especially regarding the relevant regulations that govern GM products.

Kenya needs biosafety, which goes hand in hand with biotechnology. Yet we face regulatory challenges in adapting to new and emerging technologies. I have taken note of these challenges including the Government ban on importation of GM foods and the overlaps in regulatory mandates. I undertake to explore ways of addressing this through consultations with relevant Government agencies.

As a Ministry, we will try our best towards working with Parliament in ensuring that Kenya obtains a harmonized regional biosafety regulatory framework. We will also explore a co-evolutionary approach in which a particular technology is developed alongside its regulatory framework.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As stakeholders, this conference presents an opportunity of looking at the experiences and lessons learnt during the decade of Biosafety Regulatory Excellence in Kenya.

The exchange of experiences amongst ourselves and other facilitators from diverse countries is the healthiest treasure we can bet on to arrive at our desired goals at the end of the conference.

With these remarks, I wish you all the best in your deliberations.

It is now my pleasure and honour to declare the 10th Annual Biosafety Conference officially open.