

World Kiswahili Language Day

7 July 2023

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

“Habari Zenu!”

Today, we’ve come to celebrate the beauty and significance of the Kiswahili language. Kiswahili, deeply rooted in the African family, has emerged as one of the most widely used languages on the continent. With over 200 million speakers, it proudly holds a place among the top ten most spoken languages worldwide. Its reach extends across sub-Saharan Africa, serving as a lingua franca in numerous countries in East, Central, and Southern Africa, as well as in the Middle East. Kiswahili's growing influence and relevance in our interconnected world are evident by its inclusion in major universities and colleges around the globe.

This language is also recognized by influential regional and international organizations. Kiswahili holds the status of an official language within the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, and the East African Community. This recognition highlights its indispensable role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and its crucial contribution to regional integration, particularly in the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACFTA).

The 41st session of the General Conference of UNESCO marked a significant milestone for Kiswahili. It established the World Kiswahili Language Day on the 7th of July each year which we are celebrating today and acknowledged the crucial role Kiswahili plays in promoting cultural diversity, fostering dialogue among civilizations, and nurturing international understanding and tolerance. Kiswahili became the first African language to be recognized in such a manner by the United Nations, which is a remarkable honor.

Kiswahili's significance goes beyond its political influence; it has also contributed immensely to the world of art and expression. Iconic Kiswahili words and expressions like the rallying cry "Harambee" used by the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, the Father of the Nation of Kenya, in the fight against colonialism, or the beloved Kiswahili love

song "Malaika," have left an indelible mark on our cultural fabric. Kiswahili also offers profound concepts such as "Amani," meaning peace, which resonates universally.

Today, the stakes have shifted to the digital era.

In the context of the digital economy, incorporating Kiswahili into e-commerce platforms, online marketplaces, and digital marketing strategies can help businesses navigate regional markets and establish strong connections with consumers.

Embracing Kiswahili in the digital realm fosters inclusivity and accessibility. It not only expands the reach of businesses but also promotes equitable opportunities and empowers local communities.

As we celebrate World Kiswahili Language Day, let us recognize that language is not simply a means of communication. It is a vital tool that shapes identities, connects people, and bridges cultures. It is also a powerful tool in the digital economy tapping into a vast market, promoting regional integration, and fostering inclusivity and accessibility.

Let us leverage the power of Kiswahili and multilingualism to drive economic growth, empower communities, and promote a more connected and prosperous digital world.

“Asanteni Sana”