



**SPEECH BY H E SUSAN KIHKA, NAKURU COUNTY GOVERNOR,
DURING THE VISIT BY H E THE FIRST LADY MAMA RACHEL RUTO
TO THE NAKURU NATIONAL PARK ON 9TH OCTOBER, 2025**

Your Excellency, Mama Rachel Ruto, the First Lady of the Republic of Kenya

**Hon Deborah Barasa, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change
and Natural Resources**

Mr John Olotua, Principal Secretary, State Department of Tourism

Prof Erastus Kanga, Director General, Kenya Wildlife Service

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

It is a great honour and privilege to welcome you, Your Excellency, to Nakuru County – the heart of the Great Rift Valley and one of Kenya’s premier tourism destinations. On behalf of the people of Nakuru, I wish to express our deepest appreciation for your visit today. Your presence not only inspires us but also affirms our shared vision of promoting sustainable tourism, cultural preservation, and community empowerment.

Your Excellency, over the past few years, Nakuru County has made significant strides in transforming our tourism sector. Today, I am delighted to share some of the key milestones we have achieved in positioning Nakuru as a vibrant, inclusive, and competitive tourism destination.

To begin with, we established the Nakuru Tourism Board, a strategic move to coordinate, regulate, and market our county’s tourism potential. The Board is charged with enhancing service quality, setting hospitality standards, and championing Nakuru as a leading destination. Through its initiatives, we are witnessing increased interest in our sites, improved visitor experiences, and a boost in tourism-related investments.

Secondly, understanding the value of people in driving the tourism agenda, we have invested in capacity building, especially within the creative sector. In partnership with stakeholders including UNESCO, Kenya Wildlife Service, our

Environment Department, and local communities, we trained 300 artists on online content creation, branding, marketing, and financial literacy.

We also conducted a 3-day collaborative data collection exercise to document creative and environmental assets in the county. These initiatives have enhanced skills, promoted knowledge transfer, and empowered our communities socially and economically.

Thirdly, Your Excellency, we have also embarked on an ambitious mapping and activation of both new and existing tourism destinations. Among the notable sites are:

- The majestic Njoro River and its ancient caves,
- The world-renowned Lake Nakuru National Park,
- Kainaine Springs and Kilo Falls,
- Bahati Forest and its mysterious caves,
- Go-carting activities that attract adventure enthusiasts,
- Historic landmarks like Lord Egerton Castle and Kariandusi Museum,
- The beautiful Utamaduni Nature Park and Kiptunga Forest,
- And the scenic Cider Falls in Dundori.

These sites are not only natural treasures but are also being developed into community-driven tourism hubs, promoting local ownership and economic empowerment.

Fourthly, to ensure visibility and increased tourist traffic, we launched the Tembea Nakuru campaign. This initiative has significantly boosted domestic tourism, improved the county's profile, and created economic ripple effects in our hospitality, transport, and retail sectors. The campaign also fostered deeper community engagement and encouraged stakeholder participation.

Fifthly, tourism development cannot thrive in isolation. We have convened multiple engagement forums with stakeholders such as the Kenya Tourism Board, the Great Rift Association of Tour Operators, the Nakuru County Tourism Association, and academic institutions like Kenyatta University. We are also proud to have signed an MoU with Naxcity and participated in the Nakuru Box Policy Dialogue that brought together county officials, MSMEs, investors, and civil society. These forums have fostered collaboration, informed policy, and enhanced our strategic direction.

To sustain our gains, we are formulating robust policies – including the Nakuru County Culture and Heritage Policy and the Nakuru Tourism Policy – both currently in draft form. These policies will provide a legal and institutional framework to guide growth, preservation, and innovation in the tourism and cultural sectors.

However, Your Excellency, even as we make progress, we are facing pressing challenges within the Lake Nakuru National Park, particularly around the interface between the Kenya Wildlife Service and local fishing communities.

Tensions have emerged due to conflicting interests around resource access and livelihood sustainability. Fishermen operating around the park have raised concerns over restrictions and enforcement approaches, which they feel are affecting their ability to earn a living. On the other hand, the Kenya Wildlife Service is tasked with enforcing conservation measures and ensuring ecological balance.

These tensions risk undermining the collaborative spirit we are working hard to foster. We, therefore, appeal to your office and the National Government to intervene and support a mediated, inclusive solution that recognizes both conservation priorities and the socio-economic rights of the local communities. A harmonized framework will not only restore trust but also safeguard the long-term sustainability of the park and its communities.

In conclusion, Your Excellency, the journey of transforming Nakuru's tourism landscape has been bold, inclusive, and community-centred. We are proud of how far we've come, but we also recognize the work ahead. With your continued support and the partnerships we continue to build, we are confident that Nakuru will not only thrive as a tourism hub but also as a beacon of cultural pride, sustainability, and economic resilience.

Thank you once again for honouring us with your presence. *Karibu Nakuru* – the land of flamingos, waterfalls, forests, and warm-hearted people!

Thank you

H E SUSAN KIIHIKA, EGH

GOVERNOR, NAKURU COUNTY

