

INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION;

A PLATFORM FOR RECOGNITION OF GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

Paul Kogi Mburu (Soberlife Mentorship Society)

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is both a pleasure and privilege to address this gathering today. My name is Paul Mburu, hailing from Nairobi Kenya, Founder and Real Life Mentor of the Soberlife Mentorship Society. I do not only represent my organization or country but in many ways represent the voices of many African Youth and groups which could not make it here physically. These are the small, unknown self help groups, community based organizations and other action groups which are mostly unknown beyond their area of operations. They are found in the slums of Kibera in Kenya and Soweto in South Africa, in the jungles of Congo and Ethiopia, in the deserts of Sudan and Namibia or in the cities of Cairo and Lagos. They have no marble offices or parking lots in their yard and their meetings are sometimes done under the shades of a tree, in a members' house or in a church compound. Yet they are all united in fighting the common enemy which has gathered us here and striving to achieve the same results that this meeting here is also trying to achieve. We are referred to as "grassroots organizations." That is quite a good name since we cannot have grass unless we have roots. So despite the fact that the roots are invisible, yet that is they which give life to the grass upon which all other life depends upon. So we are life givers.

Despite their direct interactions and great impacts in their local communities, these organizations face many limitations and mostly go unheard of. As a recovered addict, who never afforded a medical recovery intervention but got a tough rehabilitation in the streets and the prison, I understand the challenges of those who are currently affected by drug abuse, those who are struggling to come out of the habit yet cannot even afford the costs of rehabilitation. Together with like-minded individuals, groups and organizations, we have chosen to nurture, to encourage, to mentor and to transform our communities. Many of our groups have never received any external funding but that has not and will not hinder us from pursuing our objectives of bringing change to our people. We are united in purpose and we shall not relent in achieving this purpose. Recently, we formed the Prevention Practitioners Network of Kenya, comprising of organizations whose objectives are to prevent initiation of young minds into the dragon of drug abuse and support those who are in the habit to start their full recovery journeys and find meaning to their lives. We wish to spread out this spirit of unity to the rest of the African continent in order to uplift our voices and our influences.

After my University studies where I pursued International Relations, I did not seek for an office job as did most of my friends. When my Lecturer asked why I had not applied for a big local or international position, instead choosing to work in the slums of Nairobi, I responded that there is nothing international if it is not local to begin with. I needed to work in and with my community then represent that local community to the international community. Thanks to the international cooperation; that day has come to pass. We are being recognized, not just that we exist, but that we are working and succeeding. We are able to sit with our governments discussing and deliberating on

critical issues that affect the citizens. We are participating in policy matters and projecting progressive ideas.

To remind ourselves, Kenya and Africa in general is entering the realms of the fourth generation; from the Liberators of the 1950s and 60s, to the Authoritarians in the 70s and 80s, to the Reformers at the beginning of the Millennium and now currently the Transformers. Many States are at the development stage of universal provision of basic amenities including food security, education, general healthcare, and better infrastructure among others. We need young, energetic and visionary people who can initiate or innovate ideas and turn them into realities. Yet the enticing, adverse influences of drug habits are derailing this progress. It's a battle between development and retrogression; between health and sickness; between economic empowerment and banishing poverty. It's a battle between life and death. This battle cannot and will not be won by a single person or organization or Nation. This is an international affair that needs International Corporation.

Corporation means agreement, it means acknowledging each other, and it means supporting everyone irrespective of their social, cultural, political and economic backgrounds. We are all affected. Families are broken, the youth have lost direction and children are living in a hopeless atmosphere. Drugs are taking hold of the society, weakening and destroying tender, valuable lives. We need healing. We need strength. We need each other to restore a hope and a home for humanity. We therefore need unity. We can no longer take for granted the potentials we can achieve if we unite our hands and resources. We need a United Nations that is truly united.

I convey special regards to World Federation against Drugs, EURAD, UNODC and fellow partners for supporting me and other organizations to such forums. This has given us a voice back at home and where we are able to engage our governments and present our opinions which are now being strongly regarded. It has also opened up many networking opportunities. I've been able to travel through many African Nations including Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia, Egypt and also here in Europe, sharing the experiences gained in these forums as well as enlightening communities of the developments on the international stage.

Finally, I welcome each of you in Nairobi for "Africa for Her Woman and Youth Leadership Conference" scheduled for March 8th and 9th 2019 during the International Women's Day as well as the "Cycling Marathon and Wellness Summit" on June 3rd in marking the World Bicycle Day. Both events will be highly valuable as well as memorable. Your presence, your partnership, your support and indeed your corporation will be highly regarded.

With many appreciations I say Shukrani and Karibu Kenya,

Hakuna Matata

