

1. It is a great honour and privilege for me to officiate the Heart Team Africa - Cardiotan 2024 Conference. On behalf of Her Excellency Dr. Samia Suluhu Hassan, President of the United Republic of Tanzania, I wish to welcome all our guests to Tanzania and this beautiful island of Zanzibar. It is my sincere hope that you will enjoy your stay and sample the warmth and hospitality of the people of this spicy island. **Karibuni Zanzibar!**
2. Tanzania is delighted to host this auspicious Conference. In this regard, I wish to commend our Ministers of Health Hon. Ummu Mwalimu and Dr. Ahmed Mazrui. I commend the Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute (JKCI) for making it possible for this international cardiovascular scientific conference to take place in Zanzibar. I wish also to congratulate all the Conference Organisers, led by Dr. Peter Richard Kisenge, the Executive Director of the Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute.
3. I am also very pleased to see an impressive turnout of experts (around 300) from nearly 40 countries including Egypt, Germany, India, Israel, Kenya, Malawi, Poland, South Sudan, Spain, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, United States and Zambia. This attendance demonstrates strong international interest and commitment to advancing cardiovascular care. It is my hope that the distinguished experts in this room, will undoubtedly conduct fruitful discussions and forge collaboration that will ultimately benefit cardiovascular patients here in Tanzania and other countries around the world.
I beg your indulgence in advance in case I mispronounce some cardiovascular jargons, since this is a foreign territory to an economist like me.

Distinguished Delegates,

4. The theme for the Heart Team Africa - Cardiotan 2024 Conference is "Advances in Cardiovascular Care in Africa". This conference therefore, has been convened at a very critical time when cardiovascular diseases are at the top of causes of deaths in the world (WHO). It is estimated that cardiovascular diseases account for 7-10% of all adult hospital admissions in Africa, with heart failure accounting for about 3-7%. Despite this, few countries are adequately equipped with drugs for cardiovascular disorders – due to relatively high prices of drugs and cost of transportation to respective centres. I am glad to note that this Conference has brought together key players and practitioners for cutting-edge learning experience in cardiovascular diseases and care. I hope that this Conference will come up with innovative solutions and ideas for combating this problem; thus, contributing to improving the overall health outcomes for our people.

Distinguished Delegates,

5. Tanzania like many other countries in Africa is faced with high prevalence of cardiovascular diseases and other non-communicable diseases. Presently, the prevalence of high blood pressure for people aged 25 and above, ranges between 30 and 40%. In response to this situation, several preventive measures and care have been taken by the Government to deal with cardiovascular cases. They include: (i) strengthening of the Jakaya Kikwete Cardiac Institute (JKCI) through establishment and strengthening of surgical services including open heart surgery (ii) undertaking strategic health research to find solutions to health problems facing citizens and acquiring scientific and reliable information to inform policy decisions; and (iii) educating and sensitizing Tanzanians on prevention and management of Non communicable and other rare diseases.
6. In that regard, I am delighted to note that JKCI has been performing well in managing cardiovascular cases. During the initial years of its establishment, the Institute was able to perform only 200 cardiovascular procedures annually compared to more than 800 currently, including open heart surgery and more than 2,000 Catheterization procedures, some of which are complex and done in very few countries in Africa. More than 200,000 patients are attended to annually, out of which 2,400 or more are from neighboring countries including Comoro, DR Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia. This has made the Institute a leading public cardiac Institute in Eastern and Southern Africa thus attracting participants from neighboring countries such as Malawi, Rwanda and Zambia for mentorship opportunities.

Distinguished Delegates;

7. Through JKCI, the Government has managed to make a huge saving of approximately TZS 63 billion per annum. Prior to establishment of JKCI, the Government used to spend around TZS 74 billion per annum for cardiovascular related referrals abroad. To expand its outreach and early detection, the JKCI has introduced a programme dubbed "Her Excellency Dr. Samia Outreach Cardiovascular Services". Through this programme, services are provided to patients in various regional hospitals as well as capacity building to medical staff and other health professionals of the respective hospitals. These developments are a result of the Government's efforts to improve healthcare services in the country and I assure you that the Government will scale up investments in the provision of cardiac services and pioneer initiatives, innovations, collaboration, research, training, prevention, and treatment of cardiovascular diseases.

8. I have noted the JKCI's request for support in the construction of a state-of-the-art cardiac centre at the JKCI Dar Group, which is an initiative to enhance accessibility of cardiac services. I commend the initiative and I would like to use this podium to assure the JKCI administration team that the Government will avail all necessary support in this endeavor. I therefore direct the Ministry of Health (URT) to take up the issue and liaise with stakeholders to establish the funding modality of this project, as soon as possible.

Distinguished Delegates;

9. As pointed out, to succeed in overcoming cardiovascular diseases, people must adhere to preventive measures against risk factors such as smoking, inactivity, excessive alcohol intake and obesity. I therefore, call upon public health and primary care physicians to put more emphasis on reducing these risk factors. Furthermore, there is need to scale up promotion of health awareness by physicians, educators, policy-makers and media. Since cardiovascular diseases affect all of us, I encourage everyone to adhere to proper lifestyles - diet, exercises, regular health check-up and so on.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

10. For a long time, cardiovascular diseases have not been given proper attention in Africa, compared to recent times where increased efforts to gather information on their epidemiology, clinical characterization and outcomes are being made. Owing to the growing prevalence of heart failure in this region, research into the determinants of cardiovascular diseases must go beyond the conventional risk factors, and shed light on the role of local practices and cultural habits in determining the incidence of conditions that are particularly common in Africa.
11. Let me once again acknowledge the presence of representatives of our partners from Egypt, Germany, India, Israel, Kenya, Malawi, Poland, South Sudan, Spain, Turkey, Uganda, United States and Zambia. Thank you for joining us. Your presence in this conference demonstrates our common interest and commitment to advancing cardiovascular care globally.

With these remarks, I now have the honor to declare the **Heart Team Africa - Cardiotan 2024 Conference** officially opened.

Thank you.