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Ladies and Gentlemen

I welcome you all here this morning to inform you about preparations for the staging of Kenya's biggest annual international sporting event.

The immensity of Kenya rugby's **Safaricom Sevens** tournament is unrivalled by any other sporting event organised by this country, year-in-year-out. Only when our country used to regularly host the World Rally Championship [WRC] Safari Rally, would one think of anything comparable.

Kenya's most successful company, Safaricom, fittingly drives Kenya's biggest international sports festival. And we are here today, to sincerely thankfully appreciate the company's injection of a huge amount of money to organise the Safaricom Sevens.

This year's tournament promises several radical approaches to its organisation. The organising committee is racing in overdrive to see that the event surpasses all past ones in excellence on all aspects.

For example, the committee can soon confirm the attendance of such top-flight playing nations as Manu Samoa, Spain, La Blues and Samurai and as usual a strong team from South Africa. These will be hot challengers to our own World Class Kenya Sevens team.

In terms of personalities, the great Gavin Hastings, Naas Botha, Chester Williams, Waisele Serevi and , only last year, New Zealand legendary coach, Gordon Tiejtans, have been our celebrity chief guest at the Safaricom Sevens. This November, we shall be bringing on another interesting visitor...watch this space.

It needs no emphasizing that the following of Kenya rugby has "boomed" so phenomenally that attendances at the Safaricom Sevens have outstripped facilities to accommodate the crowds at the traditional venue, the Rugby Union of East Africa ground on Ngong Road.

For the first time, therefore, we shall be moving the three-day event to the Nyayo National Stadium. There will be more seating space, more shaded area, more ablution rooms and parking, in addition to conducive breathing space and an ideal playing pitch.

At the large public stadium, Kenya rugby will also be deliberately marketing itself to more Kenyans who previously heard about the game from "afar". That Kenya rugby will be shedding a perceived "elitist" face, cannot be gainsaid.

Indeed the rugby fraternity is reaching out to the Government to assist so that the Kenya Rugby Union can put up a large, comfortable 30,000 seater multi-purpose stadium at our Ngong Road property which can host rugby, football and cricket matches. Large-scale Government or major investor partnership is required because the Kenya Rugby Union cannot even dream of raising the huge financial outlay for this infrastructure development. The little money that the Union raises at the moment goes into its core business, that of organizing competitions and maintain national teams - basically run the sport.

Thanks to sponsors like Safaricom, I can confidently tell you that the rugby fraternity is extremely happy and upbeat about current competitions and many more events in the new season, already a few weeks in, with the current National Sevens Circuit which reaches the fourth round on the weekend.

I urge the young people to embrace the opportunities in a vibrant era of expanded rugby. If you take a count of the teams that have already taken part in sevens' competitions in Kisumu, Nakuru and Nairobi, you will note that the total number of rugby clubs in the country is hovering on the 40s mark. Not too many years ago, the game was played by only three clubs on Ngong Road and only two others in the rest of the country.

I am indeed happy about the enthusiasm of a lot of people in this country to develop sport and create good sporting and recreation activities for Kenyan youth. May I at this juncture tell you how I was involved, last week in a sad incident quite relevant to the topic of recreation. Driving home on Saturday night, I was involved in a most regrettable motor accident and I thank those called and emailed to console me over the matter. Unfortunate young Kenyans were in the other car.

I would appeal, to especially young people, in which category our rugby players fall, to be extremely careful on roads when coming from recreation spots, our game's venues being included. Losing young lives is one of saddest occasions for any community.

Back to the Safaricom Sevens, i take the opportunity to take members of the rugby fraternity to make a flash back at history, to appreciate the pioneers who launched this great event;

To the amazing Watembezi Pace setters who pioneered travels to compete in Dubai and Hong Kong Sevens before bringing the idea back home to start the Safaricom Sevens in Kenya. Special mention goes to Richard Njoba, Cliff Mukuru, Dan Kimoro, George M'Odawa, Bill Okwiri, Ted Kabetu, Jacko Omido and his brother the Late Walter, Bibo Mutere (Late), Chris Osonti (Late), Jimmy Owino, Dr. JJ Masiga, Evans Vitisia among others. The members of past KRU committees, of gentlemen such as George Kariuki, Ambassador Dennis Awori and recently Richard Omwela, members of the Rugby Patrons Society and indefatigable individuals involved in the organization of the Sevens such as the late David Round-Turner, Robin Cahill and Tony Parfitt and of course the list is incomplete without mentioning John Lloyd, Allan McKittrick and RGR Dick Evans among many more.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the 16th Edition of the Safaricom Sevens, in a brand new packaging at the Nyayo National Stadium promises to be a unique experience. You are all welcome.

Mwangi Muthee

Chairman, Kenya Rugby Union