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**SPEECH BY HON HARRIETTE CHIGGAI AT THE
6TH WOMEN IN ENGINEERING SUMMIT –
MOMBASA KENYA.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Esteemed Guests, and Distinguished Engineers,

1. This 6th Women Engineers Summit reminds me of a quote by Shirley Chisolm she said and I quote “ You don’t make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas.”
2. Shirley was the first African American woman nominated to run for President. As women engineers in this summit I believe we are here today to make progress and implement ideas. This summit is a testament that women engineers refuse to stand on the sidelines, you refuse to complain and you choose to make progress!
3. As you convene under the theme, ‘Beyond Excellence: The Future of Women in Engineering’ , I am encouraged because engineering is a field that holds immense promise, innovation, and



transformative power for our country. More so if women are part of it.

4. This Summit is a testament to the progress Kenya has made in recognizing and celebrating the contributions of women in the engineering profession. It also serves as a platform to address the challenges that continue to impede the full realisation of gender equality in this field.
5. History reminds me that it is in the late 90s that the University of Nairobi engineering school realised the need to have ladies washrooms to accommodate female students. Clearly the world wasn't prepared for female engineers. I am glad that I can stand in a room filled with women engineers! Please appreciate yourself for having defeated obstacles known and unknown to re-write history and be here.
6. Having said that, we are not there yet. Despite Africa's history of technological innovation, the gender and skills gap in engineering remains a significant barrier. Women constitute less than 20% of scientists and engineers on the continent, contributing to a 2.5 million-engineer shortage to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals.



7. In Kenya the story is not different. Data from the Engineers Board of Kenya, shows that only 8.4% of women are registered as professional engineers. Algeria is leading the world and Africa with 48.5% being women engineering graduates. My hope is that some of the discussions in this room will seek to impact and inspire the next generation. Let's increase the number of women pursuing engineering courses and graduating into the job market. I challenge the team here to aspire to surpass Algeria.
8. I know that women face a myriad of obstacles as they seek professional skills. These includes sexual harassment, being excluded from boardrooms and the burden of carework. The good news is that the government has put in place different laws to protect and support women in the workplace. My office is keen to engage the private sector to ensure that women feel safe in the workplace. We still need to see more women in leadership positions; more funding for female led innovators and more acknowledgement of what women bring to the table.
9. I am looking forward to the discussions that will guide my office to see the gaps that women in engineering face across sectors. Please note that the Office of the Women's Rights Advisor was created at such a time like this to identify gaps and provide the Presidency with the solutions to mitigate the same.



10. In this remarkable journey 'Beyond Excellence', we must remember that excellence knows no gender. For women to be a cut above the rest of engineers, we cannot afford to cut corners. Excellence, professionalism and integrity should be our driving force as women. In my office we say history was made and changed by difficult women. Women willing to do the hard work for the sake of future generations. On that note, do I have 'difficult' women in this room?
11. I am reminded of the first black female engineer, Mary W. Jackson (1921- 2005). She successfully overcame barriers of segregation and gender bias to become NASA's first black female engineer in 1958. She became a leader who ensured equal opportunities for future generations.
12. Honouring the legacy of trailblazers like Mary Jackson, let's lay the foundation for a brighter, more inclusive, and innovative future. Let's go beyond breaking through glass ceilings. Let us redefine the very structure of the engineering profession and make space for every talented female engineer.
13. As we embark on this journey today, let us commit ourselves to working together. Let us create an environment where



mentorship and support flourish, where policy and advocacy drive change. Notwithstanding where young girls are inspired to explore the endless possibilities within the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

14. The future we envision is one where the talents and expertise of women engineers are recognized and celebrated, where their voices are heard, and their leadership is embraced. Let's embark on a journey of exploration, empowerment, and inspiration.
15. It is my hope that this Summit will be a transformative experience for us all. It is through our collective efforts and the exchange of ideas that we can pave the way for a more inclusive and diverse engineering landscape. This should propel us into a future where the potential of women in engineering knows no bounds.
16. I end with this quote from a famous scientist Robert A . Heinlein, “ Everything is theoretically impossible, until it's done”. Let's do it ladies! Surpass Algeria!

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