

# **DIGNITY THROUGH DEFIANCE**

**Speaker:** Dr. Davji Bhimji Atallah, National Secretary General

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**Venue:** Mombasa County, Kenya

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## **Mighty Comrades, National Plenary Delegates, and Branch Leaders,**

It is a profound sense of pride that we share as a union when we look at the immense structural milestones we stand on today. Just one year ago, when we gathered in our Special Delegates Conference, our collective voice shook this nation with a single, uncompromising mandate: we said that Nakhumicha must go. But today, in this grand Annual Delegates Conference, because of our unyielding execution on the front lines, we are standing in a completely redefined reality. Today, we say that Duale must come!

This transition happened through historical shifts. When the leadership changes were first executed, we had a new former minister who was a fellow doctor—someone with whom we were in constant, direct conversations regarding the profound systemic issues affecting our fraternity. So when the new, current minister came into office as a career politician, it was completely natural that we were worried. We were rightfully anxious about whether a politician would have any baseline understanding of our complex issues. In fact, I remember speaking directly at our Central Branch Annual General Meeting, where we declared openly that this is a new secular politician, and we are not ready to have the healthcare of this nation politicized anymore.

But Comrades, when we sat face-to-face with the Cabinet Secretary and forced a discussion on the structural issues that are breaking our members, something historic occurred: he seemed to have really, really read our Collective Bargaining Agreement. He seemed to have meticulously noted the trends of our past strikes, analyzed our battle lines, and understood the exact thresholds of the issues we were having. Consequently, instead of being subjected to an endless two-hour or three-hour bureaucratic stalling meeting, on the tenth of April, we had a definitive ten-minute meeting. Immediately after that, alongside the National Chairman and our Deputy National Secretary General, we were addressing the national press with explicit executive commitments.

**"We have been on the streets, and we know very well how to be on the streets. We have been at home on strikes, and we know exactly how to begin when we are at home. Therefore, when an administrator demonstrates an intention to implement our issues, we give them time to show us the actions—but let no one mistake our diplomacy for weakness."**

This tells you precisely why, for the first time in our recent history, we see the strategic necessity to employ the sophisticated aspect of high-level diplomacy. Do not misunderstand this pivot. We are on the streets by choice, and our capacity for disruption is unmatched. But when an authority demonstrates a genuine intention to implement our issues, we must act as statesmen. We have to give them the necessary window to translate those intentions into concrete actions on the ground.

I am emphasizing this because I have had deep conversations with different people across this country on one fundamental, devastating aspect: the deliberate degradation of the doctor's profession in Kenya. When state actors look you in the eye and declare that you do not want to be paid two hundred and six thousand shillings, or argue that you do not deserve to be paid any wages at all during your lines of training, let us call it what it is—that person is trying to enslave you! They do not see the professional dignity that you need to have. They actively want to strip away the economic freedom you have rightfully earned through years of sacrifice.

But here is the structural shift we have forced: we now have a Cabinet Secretary who came up in our panels and said, 'No, it is not about the low pay. In fact, we need to pay our Kenyan doctors four hundred thousand shillings, matching the baseline benchmarks of the doctors in South Africa, or paying you like the medical professionals of Botswana.' This is the global standard we are anchoring.

Therefore, the engagement we are driving forward today is clear. We must continue to move forward as one collective unit, alongside the Governor of Mombasa, whom I have explicitly tasked today to go out and impress upon the Council of Governors one non-negotiable directive: our new Collective Bargaining Agreement negotiations for the 2025 to 2029 cycle must fundamentally anchor the brutal aspect of macro-economic inflation. We will never again, after today, allow any state architecture to waste our institutional time debating the basic wages of our medical interns. That understanding is now permanently established.

Shed your anxieties, guard your professional dignity, and let us advance this struggle to its ultimate victory.

**Dr. Davji Bhimji Atallah**

National Secretary General

Kenya Medical Practitioners, Pharmacists & Dentists Union (KMPDU)

**VIVA KMPDU! VIVA!**