With great pleasure, I stand before you this evening to grace this annual event and to speak on a topical issue that is close to the hearts of all taxpayers and that forms the basis of resident associations, that is, service delivery.

Given my background, the organizers aptly and rightly so, narrowed the topic to “The Role of Parliament in Enhancing Service Delivery”. I am further delighted to talk to people who have contributed their time and resources to make their neighbourhoods the residential area of choice, for this is indeed the bottom-line and aspiration of every resident association.

It should not escape our attention that the underpinning motive for creation of resident associations is to add value to the quality of service that the community gets. I must hasten to applaud you for realizing that service provision is not just about access, but encompasses quality.

As citizens, we do have a contemporary view of the state in service delivery, but then, this has not always been practical and any semblance of normalcy has necessitated a little prompting from concerned citizens. Resident associations therefore have emerged to provide the much needed caucus to collectively press for service delivery that is accessible, efficient and effective, besides being a platform to foster unity among residents.

Distinguished guests,

Residents are the cornerstone of any neighbourhood and have the potential to transform it into a model and preferred area to reside, in terms of security, environment, infrastructure, sanitation among other fundamental necessities. Resident associations the world over have proved a dependable entry point into realizing this dream. Accordingly, an empowered resident association is
an integral part of a successful community and greatly contributes to the overall success of both the residents and the community.

I am certainly aware that the resident associations can only achieve much in an environment build on trust. Social trust, which refers to citizen’s confidence in each other as members of a community, is imperative in this kind of arrangement. It facilitates collective and collaborative action and contributes to the raising of overall social cohesion in a given society. All these requires an enabling policy and legal environment to empower citizens to demand for accountability in terms of public service delivery.

Indeed, many parliamentary activities, today viewed in the light of political pursuits are important in the management of public affairs and service delivery in many positive ways. They range in scope from activities of parliament as an institution and members as politicians. They are all a flexible means of accomplishing a wide variety of responsibilities bestowed upon the parliamentary institution.

Parliament in that generality has conventionally assumed the role of the representative of the governed. In this way, parliament claims and enjoys unfettered right to, not only, represent, but speak for, stand for and safeguard public good.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Perhaps more than any other institution today, Parliament attracts unprecedented public attention in terms of expectations. This is not without substance as indeed the legislature is constituted of elected representatives of the people and, as such, the legitimate entity to champion the needs and interests of the electorate who are governed and suffer most from democratic malpractices and injustice. It must see itself as the custodian and promoter of the democratic values by virtue of its legitimate role and functions in society.

As a representative entity therefore, parliament legitimately represents the society and its diversity and is accountable to it. Through the elected representatives in parliament, people have a voice in politics.

Parliamentarians in turn, express the will and preferences of the people and transform them into policy. This way, a parliament both shapes and reflects public opinion, and determines the manner in which public affairs are conducted, including the quality of services.

As a consequence, parliament and parliamentarians have a pre-eminent role in ensuring that public resources trickle down to the community and that they receive service equitably. As the first and foremost representative body, parliament has the greatest stake in the way service delivery to citizens is
performing, and through its lawmaking, representative and oversight roles ensure that public service delivery is conducted with utmost efficiency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The forgoing notwithstanding, parliamentary activities have undeniably become a milestone on all spheres of state affairs including the economy, socio-cultural progress and development. They have become indispensable in their oversight roles in guaranteeing peoples rights and liberties.

In clear departure from the past, parliament is increasingly embracing stakeholder participation in the legislative process and in matters of national interest. At the centre of this engagement process are the parliamentary committees, which afford the public an avenue for participation in the legislative process. The all-inclusive engagement is critical in ensuring that public perception and sentiments are taken on board when coming up with proposed laws.

Within the realm of the expanded democratic space, the legislature has come to be regarded as the epitome of good governance. It is a facet embedded in all theories and the best practice of government, whether one refers to division of labor, separation of powers or checks and balances.

The work of parliament is transacted pursuant to the established procedure which remains flexible to emerging contemporaneous issues. It is within such leeway that parliamentary roles to the tax-paying citizens in form of service delivery find accommodation.

Parliament further finds engagement in the ability to enhance public service delivery in the constitution itself. The constitution grants parliament the power to receive petitions, to debate and even summon government agencies to explain any complaints relating to provision of services.

I must contend that parliament has a valuable ally in the resident associations to raise such petitions and to call to account government agencies to deliver services to the community. Parliament can no longer ignore the role resident associations are playing in transforming service delivery in residential areas. They continue to be instrumental in influencing and ensuring that by-laws are adhered to and not side-stepped, in an effort to safeguard communal property and residents against unscrupulous developers.

One profound role of parliament is to ensure accountability, to ensure that laid down procedures are followed in service delivery by officials and that the breaches are monitored. It cannot be gainsaid that recent developments have only enhanced this parliamentary role of holding other arms of government to account. Crucial development associated with the 10th Parliament is a
project for live broadcast of parliamentary proceedings – this will enhance openness, more participation and reduce incidences of lack of quorum.

Given the potential for KARA and its affiliates to influence governance and other reforms, it behoves Parliament as the prime public institution to always empower the associations through policy, legal and regulatory framework to associations represents an attempt by the taxpayer to get value for money in the quality of service he/she gets from government and its agencies. This must translate into a better living environment and is further a means of self-empowerment by the community.

I am greatly concerned that there is still no comprehensive policy framework to guide the formation and operation of a residents association. Even though, there are legal provisions for those registered as societies or associations, those registered as self-help groups seem to operate under no clear sets of rules and regulations. Ideally, we should not have varied regulatory and operational mechanisms for entities that purport to deliver the same service in the same country. Such scenario is a recipe for compromised vigilance on public service delivery. I urge the relevant stakeholders to push for enactment of comprehensive law to address such anomalies.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Commitment to the pursuits of a resident association may face many challenges some that border on home ownership. Participation and success of a resident association activities draws heavily on home-owners as opposed to rented housing, which occupants consider transient. Owning a home in the major urban areas is a pipedream for most Kenyans even the gainfully employed. The mortgage cost is beyond reach and disenfranchises hard working Kenyans from full participation in resident associations making them weak in demanding quality service delivery

The citizens are becoming unforgiving and extremely knowledgeable about the manner in which governments affect their daily lives. On account of this realization, parliament needs to make home ownership a realizable dream for most Kenyans. Not only will this empower many citizens to demand services, but the sense of ownership will embolden them to demand value for money commensurate with taxes and other levies paid.

Additionally, access to information is a fundamental human right and a critical component in public service delivery, more so where intervention by resident associations is deserved. Parliament has the obligation to create an infrastructure and procedures to make information available to citizens.

As we seek to be more proactive and engage parliament to enhance public service delivery, we need to find the scope for our capabilities and to create mutually rewarding relation ships between all stakeholders in public service
delivery, including the private sector in its corporate social responsibility. A strong focus by parliament should be a pass laws that would streamline and eliminate the overly complex web of policies and bureaucracy that often mystify rather than promote good service delivery and management.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I move to conclude, let me at this point profoundly and unreservedly thank the many countless volunteers represented here today who have gone that extra mile to make the resident associations in Kenya a reality. Individually, we should strive to make our respective residential areas the best to live in all those towns we live and work in.

Without doubt, service delivery has been so ably shaped by the great public goodwill that you ably represent. For although governments can build roads, schools, police stations and the associated infrastructure that is necessary to service a residential area, it is the people give life to the neighbourhood.

Overall, it is sometimes demanding, sometimes frustrating and sometimes exhilarating, to push for service delivery as taxpayers. The capacity for resident associations and KARA to contribute to service delivery and governance should not be underestimated.

Indeed, KARA has done commendably well to create such a forum to coalesce collective values for the various resident organizations to network and share experiences. More importantly, the ability to replicate best practices through such networking is the thrust by which well managed should be premised.

With these few remarks, I am optimistic that the role you play will be rewarding and each of us will be able to look back and take great pride in our contribution to the respective resident association in the years to come. God bless you.

THANK YOU.

Hon. Kenneth Marende, MP
Speaker of the Kenya National Assembly