

OP-ED

By H.E. Mr. Kofi Annan

(Final edition)

Groundbreaking democratic elections were held in Kenya on 27 December 2007 when 10 million out of 14 million registered voters cast their ballots peacefully. Seventy-two hours later, following the announcement of the Presidential results, Kenya, long considered one of the most stable and economically developed states in Africa, descended into chaos and was on the verge of tearing itself apart.

What gripped the country was the stuff of nightmares: rapes, mutilations and communal violence. Children lost their parents. Families lost their homes. Communities lost trust in each other.

A robust and thriving economy was dealt a severe body blow. Tourism, the top earner in the economy with profits of USD 1 billion in 2006, was brought to an abrupt halt. Truck drivers, fearing for their lives, were unable to deliver Kenyan trademark export products such as horticulture, tea and coffee to the port of Mombasa from the interior. The Kenya Association of Manufacturers estimated that the crisis would eventually cost the country nearly USD 4 billion in the first half of 2008 and a minimum of 400,000 jobs.

The ripple effects of this crisis were felt throughout the region. More than 100 million lives throughout the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions were affected. The disruption of the 1,400 kilometer Northern Corridor, from Mombasa through Uganda and into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), was hampering commercial and humanitarian operations in Rwanda, eastern DRC, Southern Sudan, and Uganda.

Kenya, long the launching pad from where humanitarian assistance was injected into neighbouring states, had to grapple with its own emergency.

On 22 January, I said that “my message to the parties is this: there can be no solution without genuine dialogue, no lasting peace and stability without cooperation, and determined and sustained respect for the rule of law and human rights”.

I am very pleased that both President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga did not stray from these important principles.

We are now at the cusp of a new Kenya, where power is being shared by former protagonists -- now partners in a grand coalition government.

But this is just a beginning. The coalition partners must not forget their commitment to address the long-standing and deep-seated problems that have bedeviled and divided Kenyans for decades.

When you are riding in a train, and the train gets derailed, you are well advised to look backwards at the twisted rails to find out how you got to where you are, and then look ahead to find out how you now get to where you want to go. For Kenyans today, it is a question of doing just that: looking to the past to determine when and where the country got derailed. Once that is determined, you must fix and adjust the rails towards the direction of peace, justice and prosperity.

That is the core idea of what we call Agenda Item Four of the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation process.

When I sat with the parties on 1 February, they agreed to a list of issues under Agenda Item Four that must be addressed within one year from the beginning of the Dialogue process. There is just a little more than nine months left to do that, and even if the tasks ahead seem daunting, the new Government must seize the day and take advantage of this unique opportunity to get it right for Kenya.

Agenda Item Four includes constitutional, institutional and legal reforms. This means looking at reforming the way Parliament operates, how the Police can better serve society, how to improve public services and the management of public finances.

It also includes land reform. Everyone agrees that land has been a source of economic, social, political and environmental problems in Kenya for decades. In spite of past attempts to address this challenge,

the problem persists, as Kenyans were so brutally reminded during the post-election period.

To ensure sustainable peace, it is equally important to address poverty, inequity, equitable access to opportunity and regional imbalances. Most Kenyans will agree that faced with insurmountable poverty, people develop a sense of hopelessness which in turn can lead to acts of violence.

Your leaders also agreed to tackle unemployment, particularly among the youth. Few things are as discouraging as unemployment. The creation of job opportunities for Kenyans, especially young people, is a matter that should be addressed with a sense of urgency.

There are other important issues under Agenda Item 4: Consolidating national cohesion and unity, promoting transparency and accountability in the affairs of government and fighting corruption.

Getting to work to implement the agreed reform agenda should be the priority for all Ministers, Parliamentarians, civil society organizations, private sector and community and religious leaders in your beautiful country. Indeed, it is a task for all men and women, from any generation and from all walks of life, who rightfully pride themselves on being Kenyan.

I am confident that the international community will stand by Kenya during this period. I will stay engaged, and so will my colleagues in the Panel of Eminent African Personalities.

We are committed to seeing this process to its end.

(852 words)

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