

As delivered

ADDRESS BY DR. KOFI ANNAN

DELIVERED DURING THE 39TH GRADUATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NAIROBI

17 OCTOBER, 2008

Your Excellency Hon. Mwai Kibaki, President of the Republic of Kenya

The Rt. Hon. Raila Odinga, Prime Minister,

Members of the diplomatic corps,

Hon. Ministers,

Dr. Joseph Wanjui, Chancellor, University of Nairobi,

Hon. Sally Kosgei, Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology,

Mr. John Simba, Chairman of Council and other Council members present,

Prof. George Magoha, Vice-Chancellor,

Members of the University of Nairobi community,

Graduands,

Parents and Guardians,

Distinguished Guests,

Ma Bibi na Ma Bwana,

I am pleased to be here with you today to participate in the graduation and convocation at the University of Nairobi.

Mr. Chancellor, thank you for your kind words. And thank you also for honouring me alongside your leaders, President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga.

Kenya is often described as an oasis of peace in a region torn by intractable conflicts. It has for many years provided sanctuary to thousands of refugees forced to flee their homes by internal and endemic strife.

Indeed, Kenya has been a critical player in the search for lasting peace in the Horn of Africa. Both the Somali and Sudan peace efforts benefited from a significant Kenyan input. Internationally, Kenya is renowned for its peacekeeping role. I worked with your troops when I was head of the peacekeeping operations at the UN - your troops have served with honour in many United Nations peacekeeping missions around the world, including snowy Yugoslavia.

Many of us have admired Kenya's proud record of political stability and economic prosperity, but we were shocked and deeply saddened by the events that followed the contested 2007 presidential elections.

The violence had also shaken confidence in the steady progress our continent is making as a whole towards good governance and democracy.

The international community has a major stake in Kenya's stability, because an unstable Kenya would have a huge destabilizing effect on the entire region.

Mr. Chancellor,

In January, when I was requested by the then Chairman of the African Union, President John Kufuor of Ghana, to lead a team of eminent African personalities to mediate between the two competing sides, I knew the task before us would be difficult and complex.

The violence that followed the announcement of the presidential election results was unprecedented in Kenya's 45 years of independence.

The need for a negotiated settlement was imperative and urgent. It was recognized that the violence was likely to escalate if the parties did not abandon their entrenched positions and reach an agreement.

From the beginning, I and the other two members of the Panel, President Benjamin Mkapa and Mrs. Graça Machel, promised to lead an open and transparent mediation process. We have stuck faithfully to that promise, making public all the agreements reached and consulting regularly with broad segments of Kenyan society.

It is true that, during the negotiations, there were times when it seemed we would get nowhere. But we never lost hope; I know I didn't. The stakes were too high. I indicated at that time that I would not be frustrated nor tire, and that I would remain in Kenya until the crisis was resolved.

It took 41 days for us to achieve our objectives; during this period, my staff nicknamed me a prisoner of peace, in that the parties appeared incapable of concluding an agreement and yet would not let me leave for fear that my departure would ignite further violence.

However, through persistence, hard work and tough negotiations, the Agreement on the Principles of Partnership of the Coalition Government was signed by President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February.

Luckily, the African Union initiative was wholeheartedly supported by the United Nations and Kenya's development partners, both here and abroad, as well as civil society, the private sector, the media, religious leaders, women's and youth groups and the population at large, who were all pleased that the power-sharing agreement was signed.

But the power-sharing agreement must not be seen as an end in itself. It is a first step in a very long journey towards a better, more tolerant and more equitable nation.

Much as Kenya was regarded as a stable democracy with well-established national institutions, the violence that followed the 2007 elections suggests the existence of underlying issues that need to be addressed.

In their wisdom, the two Principals recognized these challenges when they signed the power-sharing accord.

That is why the agreement called on the Coalition Government to address the root causes of the conflict by implementing a coherent and far-reaching reform agenda.

That reform agenda is encapsulated in Agenda Item Four of the National Dialogue, which deals with deep-seated problems that have bedevilled and divided Kenyans for decades – regional development imbalances; unemployment, particularly among the youth; stalled constitutional and institutional reforms; land grievances; ethnic discord; lack of accountability and transparency; and lack of action to counter corruption.

In addition, the report of the Independent Review Commission, published last month, revealed a number of serious deficiencies in the country's electoral system, which requires urgent attention. And only two days ago, the Commission of Inquiry on Post-Election Violence also released its report.

I wish to emphasize the need for the Coalition Government to move expeditiously to deal with the recommendations of these two commissions.

Unless the entire reform agenda is effectively pursued, Kenya will remain vulnerable and liable to repeat the horrific violence witnessed earlier this year. It is the nation's long-standing problems and deep-seated grievances that allowed the electoral dispute to take on such catastrophic proportions.

I am pleased that the National Dialogue Team signed a Statement of Principles on long-term issues and solutions. And in July, the Dialogue Team adopted an implementation framework for pursuing the reforms under Agenda Item Four, marking the successful conclusion of the mediation phase of the National Dialogue.

The country's political leaders now have the crucial responsibility of ensuring that all the National Dialogue agreements, as well as the recommendations of IREC and CIPEV --

that is the commissions that looked into the elections and the violence -- are implemented.

There is considerable goodwill in the international community for Kenya, and it will do all it can to assist. But ultimately, it is Kenyans themselves who must take responsibility for translating these agreements and the recommendations into action.

Signing an agreement is the easy part. Implementing that agreement is much more difficult, particularly when the trauma experienced earlier this year is still fresh in people's minds. Every effort will be made to heal the wounds left by the violence. Thousands of internally displaced persons still need assistance as they return to their homes and start life afresh. And greater efforts are required to reconcile local communities and promote peaceful co-existence.

Mr. Chancellor,

As I indicated earlier, signed agreements mean little if the parties involved are not committed. I am confident that President Kibaki and Prime Minister Odinga are mindful of their grave responsibilities and are firmly committed to the implementation of the agreements and passage of necessary reforms.

By agreeing to a negotiated settlement, as we have heard earlier, they demonstrated leadership, true patriotism and love for their nation. They must be commended for putting the national interest first.

Kenyans need to support them as they spearhead efforts to heal the nation and lay a firm foundation for building a democratic, peaceful and prosperous country, underpinned by the rule of law.

The University of Nairobi and indeed all universities in Kenya have an important role to play in the reconciliation and the healing process now underway. You can offer concrete proposals on how Kenya's institutions should be reformed and its inherent conflicts resolved. You must prepare the students for their future role in a democratic and prosperous Kenya. For no one is born a democrat. No one is born a good citizen. It takes hard work and training.

And we must insist that society be built on three essential pillars: security, development and the rule of law. For there can be no long-term development without security and there can be no long-term security without development. At the same time, no society can long remain prosperous without respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Mr. Chancellor, let me once again express my appreciation to the University of Nairobi for honouring me with this honorary degree. It is a special privilege. Credit must also go to the leaders and the people of Kenya – from civil society, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, the media, religious groups and others.

They supported the process throughout the period. They were extremely helpful to me -- I met and listened to them. They choose peace over violence. No one could fail to be impressed by what has been achieved and accomplished in such a short time.

It is a testimony to the inherent tolerance, restraint and wisdom of the Kenyan people.

And I am certain that these qualities will serve you well as you tackle the more difficult, longer-term issues, whose resolution is essential for the healing and prosperity of this nation.

You have a lot of essential work to do between now and 2012, barely four years away. The voters will reward the parties and leaders who take the reform agenda seriously and work effectively for its implementation.

Surprisingly, some politicians are behaving as if 2012 is tomorrow and elections are around the corner. It's a bit more complicated than that. I sense there is a new Kenya emerging, and the people demand effective leadership, transparency and performance.

I urge the politicians to focus on the right priorities between now and 2012 – the passage of long-term reforms; and then hope to reap the rewards in 2012.

The Kenyan people own these agreements and will insist on their effective implementation. And they will provide a useful yardstick when the time of judgment comes in 2012.

Thank you, your Excellency and the people of Kenya, for welcoming me once again to your beautiful country.

Na Shukuru Sana.

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