

H.E Kofi Annan | 30 March 2009 | KNDR Conference, Geneva

KA's opening remarks at KNDR conference

Presidents Mkapu and Masire,

Honourable Ministers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I am glad to welcome you to Geneva and to this lessons learned meeting on the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation process. A very warm Karibu sana [big welcome] to all.

Most of you participated, one way or another, in the efforts to peacefully resolve the crisis that engulfed Kenya following the December 2007 elections.

Some of us were more directly involved in the actual negotiations than others. Some are now more involved in hands-on implementation of the agreements, while others are keen observers and advocates of the process. But all of us -- the mediators, the international community, the political parties, civil society, religious leaders, the media, and the business community -- played our part. The credit for the success of the mediation process, or any deficiencies therein, belong to all of us. We are all united in Kenya's peace-building endeavour. In our joint effort to bring lasting peace and security to Kenya, we are all bound together -- like members of an extended family, whether we like it or not!

That is why my colleagues and I at the Kofi Annan Foundation thought it would be productive, one year on, to come together, take stock of the achievements and shortcomings, and draw lessons that may be used elsewhere in similar situations. Clearly, we also hope that the lessons will help our Kenyan friends overcome the challenges confronting them in the implementation of their reform agenda.

I obviously do not want to pre-empt the findings and lessons that will emanate from our deliberations over the next two days. But I would like to offer a few personal reflections to help set the stage for the discussions.

In January 2008 when I received a call from President Kufuor of Ghana, then Chairman of the African Union, asking me, on behalf of that Organization, to help mediate the crisis in Kenya, I knew the task was not going to be easy. Kenya was a beacon of hope for Africa. It was a relatively stable country, with a modestly growing economy and expanding middle class. Kenya was important both politically and economically to the East and Central African region and any prolonged instability in

Kenya would impact negatively on the entire sub-region. It was, therefore, imperative that an early response initiative be mounted urgently. This was recognized when a stream of visitors arrived in Nairobi at the early stage, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, President Museveni, and former Heads of State who are members of the African Leaders Forum: Presidents Chissano, Kaunda, Mkapa, and Masire.

President Kufuor told me that he was also going to request President Mkapa and the former Mozambican Minister and First Lady, Graca Machel, to join me in a Panel of Eminent African Personalities to assist in the mediation.

My colleagues and I on the Panel answered the call of the African Union to assist. Africa and the international community could not stand idly by and see Kenya collapse. Urgent action was needed to resolve the crisis. The effective external assistance proves that the responsibility to protect can work.

With a great sense of urgency, as Kenya was burning and its citizens were being slaughtered, the three of us agreed without delay on a clear approach on how our mandate would be carried out. It was also clear to us that we were going to need strong and coordinated international support from the African Union, the United Nations, the European Union, the United States, and others. It was therefore important to have them on board as early as possible. We needed to act in unison and to speak with one voice. We also needed to ensure that Kenyan stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and the media, were given an effective voice in the mediation process. We sought their views and listened to their concerns, which helped us to elaborate the agenda for the negotiations. And to ensure public support and confidence in the process, we published all agreements reached by the parties and tried to be as transparent as possible.

Kenyans should be very proud for having brought the country back from the brink. If the parties had not agreed to enter into negotiations at an early stage and made concessions because they understood what was at stake, the ethnic dimension of the violence could have made things worse.

Kenya was bleeding and the people wanted peace. There was no alternative to dialogue and mediation. The leaders found the courage and the wisdom to seek a political settlement and stop the killing.

Whatever role was played by the international community, the cessation of violence was a great achievement on the part of the Kenyan political leadership and the people of Kenya. Whatever difficulties the Coalition Government may have faced since the conclusion of the National Accord, the fact of the matter is that there is now a framework in place to carry out far-reaching reforms that should fundamentally transform Kenyan society for the better. The population embraced the programme of reform, and they are demanding its implementation. They are frustrated by Cabinet disagreements and in-fighting, and by the inability to set up

the Special Tribunal to bring to justice those responsible for the post-election violence. They are equally angry at widespread corruption and the lack of action by the Government to mitigate that scourge on Kenya. The momentum witnessed in the immediate aftermath of the signing of the National Accord has slowed down considerably. But the situation is not altogether hopeless. The Government can turn things around by acting expeditiously on the constitutional, electoral, security, police, and land reforms.

All Kenyans have a stake and a responsibility to ensure that the programme of reform is fully implemented. Power-sharing arrangements may not be the universal panacea for disputed elections but the situation in Kenya was unique, given the long standing issues that were the trigger for the horrific post-election violence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I recall that, in 1998, as United Nations Secretary-General, I presented a report to the Security Council on the Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa. The conclusions of that report, which covered Africa as a whole, are strikingly similar to the findings of the Independent Review Commission (IREC) and the Commission of Inquiry into the Post-Election Violence (CIPEV) on the underlying causes of last year's crisis in Kenya: politicization of ethnicity; non-adherence to the rule of law; reliance on centralized and highly personalized forms of governance; inequitable development; corruption and abuse of power; a winner-takes-all form of political victory; and a perception that certain groups are not receiving a fair share of resources.

While Africa and the world have changed considerably since that report was produced eleven years ago, it is clear that many of the ills that have been plaguing the continent for decades continue to thrive in Kenya and elsewhere. We must tackle these challenges once and for all. I believe this is one reason why the world is paying such close attention to the way Kenya grapples with these issues -- just as ordinary Kenyans are closely watching how their leaders respond to their needs, and to their demands for real change.

While effective mediation resulted in the achievements enshrined in the Kenya National Accord, the true and enduring success of the dialogue will depend very much on the full implementation of the agreed reforms, the first real test of which will be the 2012 elections. The KNDR process was in effect a roadmap for 2012 and beyond. The achievements of 2008 were only a beginning. Some progress has been achieved – the constitutional review process is up and running, and the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission will soon be established. But most of the hard work remains to be done.

So what explains the frustrations, the cynicism, and the growing disillusionment of ordinary Kenyans? I believe one explanation revolves around the fact that everyone understands what the priorities are to move the country forward. So the average

person finds it difficult to comprehend why those changes, some of them very fundamental, are not taking place at a faster pace. A second and related explanation may be the fact that ordinary Kenyans do not feel they are part of the reform process. Greater engagement with civil society by politicians and greater efforts at sharing accurate information on the state of progress on all these issues are probably - and I would say hopefully - some of the lessons we may end up with tomorrow. These are fundamental lessons, not just for Kenya but for any other post-conflict situation.

In Kenya, the parties have already agreed on a blueprint for building a more equitable, prosperous and just society. That blueprint is found in the reform package agreed under Agenda Item Four of the National Dialogue. Many of those reforms were previously identified as crucial by the NEPAD African Peer Review Mechanism in 2006 - one year before the eruption of the crisis. And the Agenda Item Four reforms are themselves compatible with the Medium-Term Plan of Vision 2030 - the Kenyan Government's own blueprint for developing Kenya into a middle-income country.

There is no disagreement on what needs to be done. All that is lacking is effective action. So ordinary Kenyans interpret that, rightly or wrongly, as lack of political will on the part of their leaders. They see it, rightly or wrongly, as proof that the political elite are putting their own partisan interests above the interest of the nation as a whole.

Kenya is at a crossroads. The time to act is now. And many of the people who need to undertake the required actions are right here in this room.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In some ways, negotiating and signing a peace agreement is the easy part. Implementation is much more complex and much more difficult. An agreement, no matter how beautiful its text, is merely a piece of paper unless it is actually implemented faithfully, in both letter and spirit.

Having said that, let me make the purpose of this meeting crystal clear. We are not here to renegotiate the Agreement, neither are we here to replicate the Kenyan political battle field in Geneva. We are here as I said at the beginning - to look back at the process we went through together, take stock of the implementation of the Accord and learn lessons that can be used in other places in the world that may be in a similar situation as Kenya was a year ago.

In closing, I'd like to express my appreciation to all the donor countries and institutions that have supported the mediation process and continue to do so, and particularly to the Norwegian government which has also generously supported this meeting.

Thank you.

