



INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL AND BOUNDARIES COMMISSION

CHAIRPERSON KEYNOTE REMARKS AT THE KARA BI-MONTHLY TALK SERIES FORUM AT THE SAROVA PANAFRIC HOTEL NAIROBI

EMAIL: ahmedissack786@yahoo.com

WEBSITE: <http://ahmedissackhassan.co.ke>

Observe Protocol

Ladies and Gentlemen Anuj Somany is quoted to have said once said that:

“If the road is not patchy, rough and on a hilly terrain, then the journey is not often worth undertaking as all destinations are already enough crowded”

The long journey to the Elections has drawn its curtains with the Supreme Court ruling. As stipulated the six ballot Election was quit ambitious, tasking and challenging to say the least. This would not have been achieved were it not for the trust, patience, faith and profound goodwill exhibited by the Kenyans towards the Commission.

Putting it plainly **ladies and gentlemen** on the 4th March we had a rendezvous with history tasked to conduct and manage a rather

complex election under a new constitution that no electoral management body within and beyond the region had the courage and resolve to do what we did.

We knew we were venturing into a huge logistics High Costs and high expectations if not unforgiving, expectations. We put our best foot forward and we resolve to get it right but this was however not without challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen one of the biggest challenges was how to both satisfy and meet the huge public expectation borne of the incredible level of confidence and trust it had placed in the IEBC against the background of the conduct and consequences of the previous Commission. The Commission had to justify that confidence and prove to the country and world that it was not misplaced. Hence investment in all the equipment, personnel, facilities, etc. that helped manage the electoral process.

Admittedly, not everything worked as well as had been planned, nevertheless it did not deter and weaken IBEC's resolve to deliver a fair, transparent and credible election.

Again from the public's perspective, the expectation that the Commission would hold the country together and not allow it to degenerate into chaos was a point of concern. Hence our constant and regular exhortations for peaceful elections and for the electorate to maintain their confidence in the country's institutions in the event of a dispute. That became a chorus, and it sometimes

sounded monotonous, but it was necessary no matter how much it jarred on our ears. At the heart of this was, of course the manner in which the election was conducted.

Managing the mounting pressure from the various stakeholders, of those who believed in us, those who demonized us, and those who thought they could manipulate it was yet another challenge. The diverse interests that come to play at such sensitive times can overwhelm even the hardest and most stoical professional. However we would insist and encourage our staff that there was need to focus the attention with the singular resolve to do what was right for the Kenyan electorate and national interests.

The rumor mills, misplaced gossip and speculation that seemed intended to distract us and hope that we would make a fatal mistake was yet another broth that we were willing to ignore at that pain stricken moment.

Ladies and Gentlemen as you all are aware we were faced by some serious technology failure which not only led to the delays in the overall transmission and tallying of the results, but also cast doubts about the integrity of the process. However that being the case, the Commission always had a backup plan which was in the event to resolve to manual counting of votes. In fact you will all recall the procurement process of this equipment that was yet another milestone marred with confusion and political interests.

In the end the team managed to remain composed and level-headed in the face of extreme pressure and provocation from the various stakeholders. It called upon its reserves of energy to keep focused and stoical through many night without more than an hour's sleep.

Ladies and Gentlemen you will all agree with me that managing six elections in a single day was always going to be a big challenge. Unfortunately, the public, particularly the political class, didn't seem to appreciate that and became increasingly unforgiving when the clockwork procedures we'd designed buckled under pressure. We probably need to rethink our strategy for the next and subsequent elections.

Key lessons learnt:

- **Voter education:** there was a sense during the entire election period that the IEBC had not devoted sufficient time and resources to voter education. The simulation exercise ahead of the election would actually seem to confirm this seeing as to how it didn't go as well as had been hoped. In some of the extreme cases some people thought it was the real election; others simply didn't quite understand the methodology of the voting. The incredibly high number of rejected and spoilt votes may be traced to voter ignorance. What this tells us is the IEBC needs to invest greater effort, time and resources in voter education.
- **Early procurement** and testing of electoral material to avoid a recurrence of the hiccups we experienced.

- **Thorough scrutiny and quality assurance of ballot papers** to eliminate mix-ups like the one that delayed ward elections in Kuria, Migori County.
- Voter education: As per the Constitution, make it a continuous rather than an event-based process.
- The Kenyan public has developed an insatiable appetite for information. Therefore, need to ensure sufficient **flow of information** on the electoral process. This will also help enhance public confidence and trust in the Commission and its image as a transparent body.
- No matter how jarring to the ear it might sound, there is no substitute to the **chorus of Peace** that we maintained throughout the election period. The events of 2007/08 are not that far behind us and they will continue to haunt as well as prick our collective conscience at every election period. As IEBC, the vital lesson here is that we're not just an election management body; rather, we're an essential part of the nation's peace-building and peace-making machinery.

Finally ***ladies and gentlemen*** I wish to confirm to you that the Commission has learned very valuable and humbling lessons from this challenges and is now taking measures to audit its entire general operations to help identify and address there and any other problems that may crop up. We call upon all stakeholders you included to continually assist us were necessary.

Thank you and God Bless you