

# Kenya: Kibaki must back down

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Desmond Tutu was absolutely right to fly into Kenya and throw his moral authority behind efforts to resolve the dramatic crisis that other outsiders are misjudging so badly. British foreign secretary David Miliband, US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice, secretary general of the Commonwealth Don McKinnon and President John Kufuor of Ghana, president of the African Union (AU), all missed the chance to denounce the rapid swearing-in of a man who did not win the presidential election.

This lit the touchpaper for the appalling violence of the last few days. All of these powerful people knew from the European and other observers on the ground how grotesque and open was the ballot rigging which allowed Mwai Kibaki to claim victory. The parliamentary elections in which President Kibaki's party was trounced, getting a mere one third of the seats obtained by Raila Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), and with 20 cabinet ministers losing their seats, underlined the true balance of democratic forces in the country.

Tutu knows mass anger as a response to political humiliation. Kenyans in the street will listen to him as South Africans did, and still do when he speaks fearlessly to the powerful at home as well as abroad. Perhaps Kibaki, who has rebuffed the overtures from the AU and insists that Kenya's problem is an internal one, will meet the Archbishop. If so, he will hear hard truths, but also, perhaps, a face-saving way to step back from the folly encouraged by his close advisers who dared not face his defeat and the political reckoning that would come with it.

It is a myth that Kenya has been a haven of stability in East Africa for decades, just as it was a myth that Ivory Coast was in the west - until it exploded. Kenya has been a key strategic ally for the west since independence, and the kleptocratic and repressive governments of Kenyatta, Moi and Kibaki have been supported unconditionally for that reason.

Since the launch of the "war on terror" in late 2001, the importance of Kenya to the Americans has increased even further. The west chose not to see a country where more than half the population of 31 million live on \$2 a day, where unemployment is rising, landlessness is chronic and increasing. The tourist paradise for European holidaymakers had become a bitter, lawless and cynical place for its own citizens.

Raila Odinga made a political alliance with Kibaki in 2002, calculating that together they could attack corruption, bring down an elite which had been above the law for too long, and give ordinary Kenyans the modest prosperity that had eluded too many of them since independence. (Kibaki too had been in the wilderness during the Moi years.)

But Kibaki was captured by the old elite once he came into power, and since 2005 Odinga has built a new nationalist alliance across the country, which owes as much to his own drive, as to the old magic of his father's name - Oginga Odinga. In the years after independence, when Kenyatta became a key British ally and froze Odinga out, as a socialist, and as a Luo from the poor west of Kenya, Odinga's was the name with which the Kenyan masses most identified. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the freeze won't work on the son. The election has to be rerun with a credible independent electoral commission. Odinga's offer of negotiations under international auspices must be accepted by Kibaki.

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