

DEMOCRACY- A WESTERN CONCEPT?

Democracy and Religion in Kenya

On 19th and 20th September 2018, KAS Kenya together with the Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics (CICC) held a conference themed: "Democracy, A Western Concept?". The conference brought together different religious groups which included: Islamic, Christian, Hindu and African traditional faiths. The African Traditional Religions (ATR), the Catholic Church, the Council of Imams and Preachers of Kenya (CIPK), the Evangelical Alliance of Kenya (EAK), the Hindu Council of Kenya (HCK), the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) and the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims (SUPKEM) were among the institutions represented at the conference. Some of the issues discussed revolved around:

a) *Kenyan Democracy-History and the current situation.* It was explained that some people see democracy as God's way of accomplishing His will, others see it as an extension of the West's colonialism and as a way of getting wealth, and others see democracy as central to daily life. It was noted that Kenyans are a hugely religious nation and religion plays a huge role in everyday life. The different types of democracy include liberal and social. The former began in Europe and the latter is built on public participation and inclusiveness. Socialist democracy began in the Soviet Union and advocates for socialist market economy.

b) *Kenyan Democracy-challenges and solution-oriented approach.* Some of the challenges identified facing democracy in Kenya include: Corruption, Wide gap between the rich and the poor, Extra Judicial Killings, Ethnicity and Dishonesty. The solutions discussed included inter-political and inter- religious dialogue, respect of citizens', call for National Cohesion, Reduction of the wide gap between the rich and the poor- Fostering for Sustainable Development programs.

c) *New ways for democratic engagement in Kenya in comparison to the Western concept.* It was noted that Kenya needs to adopt what works best for it in the different situations in the country as opposed to a copy and paste model. This gives the country a chance to analyze the different challenges and consider which steps to take including the pros and consequences of the choices made.

d) *The role of religion in the democratic process.* It was noted that Kenyans are a hugely religious nation and religion plays a huge role in everyday life. Religion and Politics cannot be separated as both look at the rights and wellbeing of the people. Laws are grounded on Religion and religion has similar tenets as those of Democracy i.e. Equality, Justice. Most religions promote shared values such as peace, tolerance, integrity and respect hence the need for the different religious organizations to have a voice in the democratic sphere.

e) *Democracy, religion and extremism.* Extremism is a religious or political phenomenon that individuals or a group of people get attached to; from political or religious leaders. It was noted that Kenya does not instigate extremism from within; outside forces have been statistically proven to influence extremism and radicalization where politics and religion comes to play. There is need for religious leaders to culminate religious and national values among the citizens of Kenya.

f) *The role of religious leaders, media and politicians in forming a Kenyan democracy.* The media was noted to be vital in enhancing democracy through various actors inclusive of religious actors. However, there is a challenge in message packaging that poses a challenge to democracy by creating a rift between different faiths in reference to religious extremism hindering the achievement of democracy. Politicians too have taken to misuse of religious platforms for political mileage as opposed to the betterment of the people's needs and prey on the vulnerability of religious leaders. There is need for the media, religious groups and politicians to work in cohesion and in the achievement of a more democratic Kenya. Religious leaders too need to be more vocal in the different issues affecting the country as this is part of the democratic process.

It was concluded that Religion and politics are inseparable. There is need for the religious groups in Kenya to be more vocal in reference to achieving a more democratic Kenya. The involvement of the youth was noted to be vital in the different religious groups in the country to embrace religious values and virtues especially during this era where religious and political extremism and radicalization is not only a national but also a global problem.