

OPINION ARTICLE

THE HANDSHAKE- WHERE DOES KENYA STAND IN OPPOSITION?

By

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The March 9 handshake remains the principal highlight of Kenya's post-election period. With the recent tour of President Uhuru Kenyatta and Deputy President William Ruto accompanied by Former Prime Minister Raila Odinga to Nyanza region - an opposition stronghold on the 13th December; the significant political developments still leave questions lingering among many Kenyans. As much as the handshake seeks to address nine mutual issues namely: ethnic antagonism, lack of a national ethos, inclusivity, devolution, divisive elections, security, corruption, shared prosperity and responsibility through the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), there are still more underlying issues yet to be resolved.

Historically Kenya's opposition has been pegged on individuals rather than institutions such as political parties; an issue the country still struggles with. The Odinga lineage has been seen for years to produce individuals who strongly act as opposition and check the government on various issues. Former Prime Minister Raila Odinga and leader of opposition party - ***The Orange Democratic Movement (ODM)*** has over the years played out this role strongly. He has been at the heartbeat of opposition politics constantly and unswervingly keeping the ruling party (Jubilee administration) in check through vigilance, criticism of its policies and programmes as well as mass street action. Mr. Raila Odinga raised questions and brought to light the Eurobond saga, the National Youth Service (NYS) scandal and land grabbing indignity and has exposed mega corruption in the ruling party. Thus, the "People's President" has until the recent developments has always been considered the "People's Ombudsman".

As a party that has been in the opposition politics after two consecutive elections, the ODM's presence in government through the hand shake deal has in turn weakened the ability of the overall opposition alliance – National Super Alliance (NASA) to provide oversights and engage the government in political decisions and alternatives.

But then, the likely scenario to unfold is where there will be more compromises being made between the president and his kinsmen and Mr. Raila and top echelon. We would vouch that the recent tour of the president to Kisumu, Ahero and Bonda (part of the Nyanza region) to launch the Universal Health Care Scheme is an indication of such compromises and ability of the ODM party leader to influence the agenda of the party especially in implementation.

As we cannot completely isolate tokenism from the Kenyan politics, this aspect is what is likely to control and root for support, something that neither of the side will be willing to let go. Former Prime Minister Raila Odinga has since been appointed by the African Union (AU) to the position of High Representative for Infrastructure Development in Africa while his counterpart Mr. Kalonzo Musyoka was appointed by the President as head of the Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission (JMEC) on peace in South Sudan.

Since the handshake, many Kenyans have questioned his silence on ills of the government such as the V.A.T levy on petroleum products, maize and fertilizer scandals. The individuals that hold opposition currently such as Moses Wetangula (Ford Kenya), Kalonzo Musyoka (Wiper) and Musalia Mudavadi (Amani National Congress - ANC) do not come out as strong

as expected. Political parties too are not yet as strong and independent as would be expected to play the role of opposition.

Opposition is however, not completely lost. Parliament plays an oversight role but has the challenge of striking the balance. This is due to the fact that certain issues may not be endorsed if they are not in the interests of the ruling party and party whips can sway decisions to be made by whipping his/her members in support of or opposition of a certain matter.

It is a reality, which as per now, Kenya has a weakened opposition. Until Kenya faces her past and accepts her realities true progress will still be a struggle despite her great potential.