



Kenya's Political Turmoil: Hitting Where It Hurts

-Hannah Getachew-

Kenya's disputed December elections have caused much turmoil within the nation. Both the alleged winner, Mwai Kibaki, and his opponent, Raila Odinga, claim that they are the legitimate winners. Since the election results were publicised violent clashes have ravaged the country. Neither side is willing to back down despite intervention from the African Union, the pleading from Kofi Annan and pressure from the international community.

Kenya's National Commission on Human Rights cast doubt on the vote, listing a catalogue of irregularities. Kenyan election officials have also publicly announced that Kibaki's re-election was announced before they had finished counting the votes. They contend that Kibaki pressured them into declaring him victorious. see Kenya on page 3

Poverty 101: EPN Brings Poverty Awareness to Canadian Classrooms

-Japneet Kaur-

Members of the End Poverty Now Special Projects Committee have been working long and hard on research about vital aspects of poverty (i.e. causes, locations, consequences and 'what you can do'). The conclusions of this research are in the process of being completed. Both quantitative and qualitative information will then be sent to a Professor of Political Science at York University, where it will be edited by Ph.D. students for clarity and academic content.

After the editing process, Jennifer Beaudoin, who works with schools in Montreal, is going to help translate this research into a functional curriculum for students in middle school and high school Civics classes. The curriculums will be tested in schools in Montreal, Kingston and Vancouver by the end of this school year and then expand to more schools in September of 2008. Thanks to our Director, End Poverty Now has organized a 3-year plan which begins with research and ends with the integration of the EPN curriculum into 100 schools in Canada. □

Japneet is a second year Psychology student at McGill University and is a member of the EPN Special Projects Committee.



Opposition protestors are scattered by police in Kibera, Nairobi

Source: <<http://www.newyorktimes.com/>>

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Bohemia: Believing in Human Resourcefulness

-Elise Do & Noah Redler-

With a setting of eclectic decorations that spark the imagination of patrons, the Montreal-based “Bohemia” store has set a new standard for progressive entrepreneurialism. Michelle, the owner and operator of Bohemia, first opened shop as a means to incorporate her desire to travel with her willingness to support artisans living in the most desperate situations.

“There are countless people with unexplored talent and skill to create beautiful pieces that would never have the opportunity to be seen and appreciated because not many people have the ability or time to visit small villages in India and Thailand,” Michelle energetically explains when asked about the motivations behind Bohemia’s interesting ambiance.

Her store was created as a portal for artists to make their crafts available to consumers around the world, so they can earn money and support their communities through personal action and development. Michelle explains, “I believe that there are people in dire need of basic resources, and they can use money as much as anything.” Bohemia was established to promote business opportunities that have long term potential. In this way, when small businesses succeed in building their own ventures and contributing to their community’s infrastructure, they will go on to help others and eventually a multitude of people will be bolstered towards working for the same goal.

Michelle’s store philosophy aspires to teach people about the places she has been and the lives that have touched her heart. Almost with tears in her eyes, she recounts the tale of a woman she passed on the road to a small village in India. She remembers the heat, the dusty road, and a woman sitting in the midst of this barren stretch of nothingness. All that was apparent was that the woman had lost both her arms and legs, and she carried nothing but a cloth sack. After hours perusing the market place, on her return trip, Michelle stopped to see this woman sitting alone, only to discover that this woman was less alone than she appeared. “The sack started to move, I remember asking the woman if I could look inside the bag, and when she peeled back the cloth. I witnessed a small child lying there crying. The sack was tiny, but it held so much. It was painful and disturbing to watch.” Such experiences have

compelled her to take action to help people in such dire situations.

When asked what she felt people could do to help alleviate poverty, she was quick to suggest personal involvement. “Volunteering on any level is amazing. It would be great if you could travel to impoverished areas and work for organizations like the UN and Peace Corps, but most people don’t really have the time; we have bills to pay and lives to live. In my store, I am happy that I have the opportunity to give something back, but I admit that this is a business.” Bohemia sells things that are created by people that need opportunities to sell their exquisite products. In this way, it plans to give back and while supporting itself as a store. Michelle uses the store as a direct link to organizations and as a venue for communication. In her eyes, “they can come and talk to people and give a face to face description of what they do. I believe people need to see the people they are giving to, and better understand where the money is going. Everyone can find some way to incorporate some volunteering in their lives, whether it is teaching a class at a community center, volunteering in a soup kitchen or even visiting ill people at the hospital; one can give back in a way that will hopefully inspire others to do the same.” It is this social-minded focus that makes Bohemia so successful in raising awareness about causes such as End Poverty Now, which runs an informational kiosk in the store.

Michelle is passionate about helping people around the world, but makes sure to remember the people “living in our own backyard” that could potentially benefit from a charitable attitude and cooperation from their neighbors. She advises that one should never forget those among us that could use some support. “People have the best of intentions, but sometimes they just are not sufficiently informed, and more often than that, lack the time in their own busy lives.” To counter this common apathy, constant and consistent efforts at maintaining an open mind and a helping hand can grow to make a real difference. Though short term answers do little to truly alleviate poverty, socially vigilant solutions such as Bohemia give a refreshing perspective on economic inequality. □

Elise is the Sponsorship Officer and Noah is the Public Relations Officer for EPN.

Disputed Elections in Kenya Cause Escalating Unrest

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Prior to the election, Kibaki had been in power since 2002, during which time he delivered on his promise to achieve economic prosperity. Indeed, Kenya has seen a 5.5% growth rate from 2002 to 2006. Though his platform was based on anti-corruption policies, Kenya is now one of the 20 most corrupt nations in the world.

As the two opposing parties largely cross-cut Kikuyu and Luo ethnic lines (that is, Kibaki's Party of National Unity and Odinga's Orange Democratic Movement, respectively), the election results have sparked conflict in a relationship that has historically—though not necessarily traditionally—been characterized by tension. Together with the Luhya, these groups account for approximately 65% of the population. Post-independence Kenya's governmental structure has been set up to enforce Kikuyu dominance over the Luo's and the Luhya.

Though the current situation in Kenya is above all else a political issue, it has become intrinsically linked to ethnic violence. An attack from one group begets retaliation from the other and vice versa, spiralling violent tensions to unforeseen levels. To date, an estimated 750 people have died since the December 27th elections, and approximately a quarter of a million have been displaced from their homes.

The United States and the European Union (two of Kenya's biggest three donors) have both threatened to suspend aid if the situation does not improve. By placing immediate material incentives for cooperation they are hoping the two parties will be forced to communicate. The UK has given USD 2 million in aid to help with the humanitarian aid relief. Whether this method of persuasion is effective remains to be seen; in the past, threats to suspend aid usually remain only threats.

In the long term, such disputes have severe adverse effects on Kenya's economy. If these two donors remain steadfast in their warnings, a failure to stabilize the current state of affairs may quickly make a major humanitarian crisis of the what began as a political quandary. Moreover, as the political volatility

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A woman douses the charred remains of where her home, and business, once stood.

Source: <<http://www.newyorktimes.com/>>

Kenya's Economy, One of the Largest in Africa, Grinds to a Halt

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continues foreign investors will see Kenya as an increasingly unattractive location to set up businesses.

Tourism is by far one of the biggest sectors of Kenya's economy and, unsurprisingly, it is suffering. It brings in over a million tourists a year and earns Kenya approximately USD 900million in revenue each year. The UK has advised its citizens not to travel to Kenya unless required. Even once the violence subsides, Kenya will have to work hard to regain the confidence of foreign tourists. Any negative effect on tourism will have a multiplier effect that will leave few untouched. These effects could very well spill over throughout the region. Since approximately 40% of Kenya's exports go to other countries within the region, they may pay indirectly a similar price.

Raila Odinga has also urged his followers to boycott all Kikuyu owned businesses, including a list of businesses in the tourism, dairy, banking and transport sector, to name a few of the targets. While this move is a guarantee for him that the issue will remain in the forefront of international news, it also exacerbates the already decidedly tense circumstances. In several of Kenya's largest cities, the tem-

porary closing of shops and businesses has cut off access to food and basic necessities that citizens rely upon daily. Gangs of unemployed young people have fueled the violence of the opposition movement, creating unrest and police-civilian clashes in the slums.

While a re-election mediated by the UN would be ideal, this outcome seems highly unlikely. Perhaps more realistic is the creation of a power-sharing agreement of sorts in which both Kibaki and Odinga will share some sort of collective authority. Regardless of the final outcome, both sides need to immediately denounce the ethnic violence, as Kenya is currently on a very slippery slope. If purposeful measures are not taken immediately, current ethnic tensions may lead to cyclical violence and civil war. Settling this dispute between Kibaki and Odinga is but the first step towards reconciling an entire nation of disenfranchised citizens. □

Works cited: Zeleza Post, BBC, CNN, Reuters (Africa), Open Democracy, The Nation

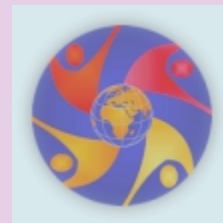
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