

Kenya Welcomes Obama but Won't Hear the Gay Rights Issue

President Uhuru Kenyatta said on Tuesday that improving security cooperation and trade links between Kenya and the United States will top the agenda when U.S. President Barack Obama visits the east African nation this weekend.

A key Western ally in the battle against the spread of militant Islam out of Somalia, Kenya's security agencies receive training and equipment from United States, Britain and Israel.

Yet over the past two years Kenya has suffered a series of major attacks by Somali Islamist group al Shabaab, including a massacre in April of 148 people at a Kenyan university near the Somali border.

The violence has hurt Kenya's tourism industry, vital to east Africa's biggest economy, and has piled pressure on Kenyatta to improve security. Obama's two-day is due to start late on Friday.

"The fight against terror will be central (to discussions). We have been working in very close cooperation with American agencies," Kenyatta said, without elaborating.

Obama's visit to his father's homeland to co-host the Global Entrepreneurship Summit with Kenyatta has been touted by Kenya as global recognition of the economic strides Kenya has made in the past decade.

Kenyatta said he wants more American companies to work with Kenyan firms in the energy and health sectors, as well as infrastructure development.

Establishing direct flights between Kenya and the United States will also be on the agenda of the visit as the lack of such a direct transport link was hurting business and tourism, Kenyatta said.

He told a news conference that he hoped Obama's visit would help Kenya obtain the U.S. regulatory status required for direct flights there.

U.S. officials have previously cited concerns about security measures at Nairobi's main airport as the reason why the U.S. regulator has not allowed direct flights to Kenya.

On possibility of discussing gay rights, an issue close to Obama's heart, Kenyatta was dismissive.

Obama hailed last month's U.S. Supreme Court decision to allow same-sex marriage but in Kenya and other African countries, where more socially and religiously conservative views prevail, few agree with him.

"It's a non-issue to the people of this country and it's definitely not on our agenda at all," Kenyatta said.

"We as a country, as a continent, are faced with much more serious issues which we would want to engage the U.S. and all our partners with."

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