

Will New Kenyan President Work to End Christian Persecution?

Among their first formal meetings as president and deputy president-elect of Kenya, Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto met senior religious leaders on Tuesday, even ahead of meeting outgoing President Mwai Kibaki.

Kenyatta emerged the winner by garnering 6173,453 votes, meeting the threshold of the country's Constitution which required a 50 percent +1 vote of all total votes cast. This was the first election to be held under a new Constitution passed by Kenyans in 2010.

The threshold requirement was the first of its kind in the country, aimed at ensuring Kenya does not slip into a situation such as the last elections in 2007, where disputed presidential results led to post-election violence. Over 1,000 people were killed and 660,000 displaced from their homes.

Kenyatta, son of Kenya's first post-Independence President Jomo Kenyatta, and his deputy face indictment at the International Criminal Court in the Hague, charged for their alleged role in organizing that 2007-8 post-election violence.

During his meeting with religious leaders, held at the symbolically named Kenyatta International Conference Centre, Kenyatta urged politicians and all Kenyans to rise above the partisanship of the latest campaign period and join hands to build the country.

The president-elect said Kenyans should focus on nation building, adding that in his government there will be no losers or winners.

Kenyatta said that religious leaders are the custodians of conscience and commended them for playing what he called the 'noble' role of calling upon the political leadership to maintain high standards of probity and integrity, and to keep to the straight path, however narrow it may be.

"I congratulate the religious leadership for the manner in which it has continued to engage the political leadership in all matters of national interest. My government will nurture this tradition," said Kenyatta.

Among leaders who attended the meeting were the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK) Archbishop Eliud Wabukala, National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) Secretary General Peter Karanja, Africa Inland Church presiding Bishop Silas Yego, Secretary of the Episcopal Conference of Kenya, Father Vincent Wambugu, and the Chairman of the Inter-Religious Council of Kenya (who is also the Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims Secretary General) Adan Wachu.

The Inter-Religious Council of Kenya said that they are keen to work with all the leaders who were elected, including the fourth president and his deputy president, since it respected the vote of the majority of Kenyans to elect them.

"What happened ... was a statement by the people of Kenya on the leadership they support. We as the Church will continue working with Kenyans to get more commitment against corruption, and working towards cohesiveness where we are viewed as one people," said Father Vincent Wambugu.

In his acceptance speech, Kenyatta—who campaigned by touring Kenya holding **prayer meetings**, among other rallies—said, "I thank God for sustaining us and for bringing us this far. I thank all those who have remained vigilant in prayer for our nation during this time."

As celebrations by supporters of Kenyatta's jubilant coalition went on, in other parts of the country there were those who

were not happy with the win of the president and his deputy.

“As a Christian it’s a disappointment that we have these leaders despite the prayers I made. The International Criminal court case against the elect is an integrity issue that they need to have cleaned up before contesting for any seat,” says Syowea Mwikali, a Christian woman in Nairobi.

“It’s worrying because I placed my trust in God to choose the best leader as led by the Holy Spirit, but the leaders who have been chosen by the majority have caused a ripple and I wonder what is next for this country?” Syowea adds. “On the other hand I see it as an opportunity for God to turn this situation into something beautiful.”

Father Wambugu also acknowledges that the International Christian Concern charges are something that Kenyans cannot ignore.

“The leaders are no longer ordinary people, as they were when the charges were brought against them. However we have to give them the opportunity to speak, and let the courts make their ruling.”

Kenyatta touched on this issue in his acceptance speech, saying his government would respect all its international obligations.

“To the nations of the world I give you my assurances that I and my team understand that Kenya is part of the community of nations and while as leaders we are, first and foremost, servants of the Kenyan people, we recognize and accept our international obligations and we will continue to co-operate with all nations and international institutions—in line with those obligations.”

Father Wambugu also called on Kenyans not to miss the point of the new leadership in the country by focusing only on the head of state.

“We should focus on the other leaders like governors and senators who have been elected and will be in charge of the devolved system of governance the country has now embraced. The financial requirements of this new system are going to be costly to Kenyans and may drive them to further poverty. This poverty is what leads to tribal blocs. A focus on how to generate resources will help people to focus on issues.”

As the country braces itself for the inauguration of the president on March 26, there are potential bottlenecks. Hon Raila Odinga, the defeated presidential candidate, has said that he is going to contest the presidential results in court, saying that the electoral tallying process was not properly carried out by the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission. He has seven days in which to present his appeal and the court then has two weeks to decide its ruling.

The Inter-Religious Council plans to hold a thanksgiving prayer rally on March 23, to which all the presidential aspirants will be invited if the situation in the country remains calm.