

It is quite easy for one to fall in love with the East African nation of Kenya. God has blessed it with great beauty. Snow top mountains, great savannahs filled with millions of wildlife creatures in their natural habitat, bustling cities like Nairobi and Mombasa and a people who are so proud of their heritage. We first started going to Kenya in 2006 and were making much progress through the Kenya Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the embassies of both our nation and Kenya. We took three trade missions that included stays at the Amboseli National Park (with a full view of Mt. Kilimanjaro) and twice at the great Massa Mara where the Great Annual Migration takes place. We were coming to terms with a Memorandum of Understanding and a Strategic Plan. Business was about to take place in an historical fashion.

Then something unexpected occurred from a United States perspective. There was a national election in December, 2007. The slate of candidates worked the nation up into an emotional and violent frenzy. What we viewed on television and through the Internet was something beautiful turning into something very ugly. Political parties turned into tribal coalitions – there are 39 distinct tribes in Kenya. The aftermath of Election Day was chaos, mayhem and violence including multiple murders. This post-election violence left over 1,200 dead and 600,000 people internally displaced. Even members of our Kenya Chamber of Commerce went into hiding and said “We will get back to you when things are safe.” It just broke our hearts.

Kenya was no longer suitable for business. At the time of the aforementioned elections it had an economic growth rate of 7%. That went to an annual rate of 1.7% which was an all-time low for this nation, that is now 50 years old, since its independence from the English Empire. Today, that rate of growth is 4.5% but it could greatly increase depending on one thing – a smooth election this Spring. Kenya needs to show the business world that it has corrected its ways and is ready for positive business growth. The above led the international business community to reduce investment and impose sanctions on the nation.

Hopefully, the leadership of Kenya has learned from the above mistake. As a result of a thorough investigation four prominent Kenyans have been charged by the International Criminal Court (AKA The Hague) for crimes against humanity for organizing the above violence. They will go on trial this April. Structurally, a lot has changed with Kenya's political system which hopefully will change the outcomes of future elections.

In response to the disorganization after the last elections, Kenya has written and accepted a new constitution. According to the Africa Business Initiative of the International Division of the US Chamber of Commerce some of the measures include: “1. Establishment of country

governments (and corresponding positions of County Governor, Civic Ward Representative, and Women County Representative). Now Kenya will be composed of 47 counties (as opposed to 8 provinces.) 2. Formation of a Senate, thus creating a bicameral legislative body (known collectively as the Parliament, which is now made up of the National Assembly and the Senate). 3. Increased women's representation; 47 seats were added to the National Assembly for women representatives (elected from each of the counties). There are also new "gender rules" (that every governing body can be composed of no more than two-thirds of the same gender), which will be implemented progressively, starting with the 2013 election." This appears to be a very pro-democracy change for the nation.

The upcoming primary election will take place in March 2013. The second and run off round will take place in early April. The two leading coalitions running for President and Vice President are the Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD). Their candidates are Raila Odinga, President, and Kalonzo Musyoka, Vice President. The other leading party is The Jubilee Coalition which has Uhuru Kenyatta running for President and William Ruto running for Vice President. Odinga is the current Prime Minister and Musyoka is the current Vice President. I have met with Prime Minister Odinga while visiting Mombasa.

It is my prayer that this election and the aftermath go smoothly. But there is one conundrum. Of the four suspects indicted by the International Criminal Court two are running in the current race. Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto are accused of organizing the mayhem following the past elections and will go to trial immediately (coincidentally) after the upcoming runoff election. "Dear Lord please bless Kenya with peace".

Kenya is a nation full of "promise". God has blessed it with just about every mineral and resource known to earth. Its land is fertile and its people educated and brilliant. Let them reach their potential. The "ball" is now in their court and the business world is watching and hoping for the best.

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