

Kibaki militias on rampage in post election spree to crush opposition

Words by Charles Digges and Photographs by Stephen Digges

NAIROBI – Shortly following the swearing in of Mwai Kibaki as Kenyan president in the most tension ridden and hotly contested election in decades, Kibaki's opponent Raila Odinga and his official supporters were immediately arrested.

Kibaki's election was announced at around 8:00pm local time by by Kenyan Central Election Commission (ECK) chairman Samuel Kivuiti – who had been heckled and almost attacked during the vote count - and the announcement immediately sparked off violence across the capital and the country as a whole. Some 13 people have been officially reported dead in the unrest.

The announcement of Kibaki's victory hit Nairobi's slums like an explosion and thousands of young men streamed out of Kibera, a shantytown of one million people in Nairobi's outskirts, brandishing sticks, destroying make-shift shacks, burning tires and hurling stones. Soldiers on the payroll of the Kibaki government were at the ready.



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Other interviews across the country revealed that people were being dragged into the streets as mobs went from dwelling to dwelling, hunting down people on the basis of their tribal affiliations, dragging them into the streets and beating and hacking them to death with crude weaponry.

The dubious conclusion of one of the most fiercely - fought elections in Kenya's history has pitched the country into chaos. Western observers said that Kenya's election commission ignored clear evidence of vote rigging to keep the Kibaki regime - which has fought tooth and nail to do so - in power.

Now, the second most developed and stable nation in Africa, which has a powerhouse economy and some of the most spectacular game parks and nature preserves in the world - and which has been left untouched for years by the internecine struggles that have characterized the lives of its immediate neighbours - is the scene of a tribal bloodletting.

In Mathare, a slum in Nairobi, Luo gangs burned more than 100 Kikuyu homes. In Kibera, Kikuyu families loaded up their things in taxis and fled. Oily black clouds of smoke rose from the slums on Sunday evening and splotching out the sun. Almost all the businesses in the country are shut.



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Capital cut off from rest of country as militias crush resistance

WIR reporters, who travelled on foot patrol with government soldiers inside the Kibera slum witnessed what were possibly five more deaths to add to the official toll as the soldiers fired on loyalists to Odinga with rubber bullets and then beat the five immobilised protestors with rifle butts, leaving them for dead.

Outside Nairobi, near the Western District, Francis Ibimahala Lugonzo, reported in a telephone interview with WIR that his settlement was "engulfed in flames" set by

rioters loyal to Odinga. The telephone transmission was then cut short as basic communications have begun to fail across the nation.

Nairobi is currently cut off from the rest of the country. Airports have been closed and roads are cut by military checkpoints at 10 kilometre intervals. It is not expected that authorities will be allowing anyone back into the city until at least January, 3rd – though even that date remains unclear.

Food supplies for the city's nearly 3 million residents are in danger of dwindling to nothing. Food queues as witnessed by WIR in markets across Nairobi on Sunday were nearly two and a half to three hours long, spilling out onto the street, and only staple products in this once luxurious city remain.

Most estimate that those will be gone within two days unless the blockade and curfew are lifted.

As a whole, the business sector has ground to a standstill. If they were open at all, workers clocked off at 3:00pm to begin the arduous journeys to their homes, made all the more difficult by the total shut-down of Nairobi's public transport system.

On television, the federal government pleaded with Kenya's working population to return to their jobs tomorrow in order to allow Nairobi citizens – caught in a struggle to find basic goods – to stock up for what many consider will get far worse before it gets better.

Other television programmes were interrupted by other government appeals to the citizenry of Kenya, asking them to "pray to Jesus" to avoid a civil war. These entreaties began during the proliferation of Kenya's Sunday morning religious broadcasts, and were begun by Kenyan parliamentarian Margaret Wanjiru, who lead a prayer in hopes of bring peace to the nation.

Nairobi streets were punctuated after curfew on Sunday night and early Monday morning by gunshots and government sweeps against opposition members. Fires set by Odinga supporters, who were seen celebrating defiantly next to the businesses and kiosks they ransacked – and where thieves were often still fleeing the scene – claimed responsibility for their acts of vandalism and violence.



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Allegations of Fraud

As soon as the election results were announced at 4 pm local time, cries of fraud went up from the Odinga camp. Prior to his alleged arrest at 8:00pm, when Kibaki was sworn in for his second term, Odinga accused Kibaki of stacking the ECK in his favour.

"Kibaki has flooded this (electoral) commission with his cronies." Odinga told reporters in Nairobi.

Indeed, the election was close if the official account is to be believed. Kibaki secured 4,584,271 votes, beating Odinga by more than 230,000 votes, the ECK told WIR. Yet Odinga has accused the Kibaki camp of padding the election results in Kibaki's favor by more than 300,000 votes. The vote count itself was also dramatically delayed.



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Tribal tensions lead to violence

As little as two weeks ago, Kenyans polled expressed the opinion that neither a Kibaki victory nor an Odinga victory would change any crucial element of their life style, and most who were interviewed said they were still undecided.

Those who had formed a solid opinion of who they would cast their ballot for said they would be going to the polls with tribal considerations in mind. There was some tension to be observed, but nothing to suggest the melee that has erupted in this international centre today.

As one young Kenyan student of Kikuyu descent, who declined to give her name, said, "We are Kenyans – it is a matter of pride to us that we not become like our neighbours, like Somalia, Uganda, Tanzania, Sudan, where people kill each other (...) every day."

Kenya, she said, "would never dissolve into that kind of unrest – hundreds of tribes and nationalities reside here, we get along. What is important to us is peace and development."

Her words were sadly contradicted by this day's events.

Much if the violence is being blamed by experts and Kenyans alike on the recent rise of tribalism and coarse frictions between Kikuyus, who see themselves as Kenya's ruling class and Lua's who align themselves more with Kenya's working classes.

The election has been characterised by what one western aid worker, who asked that her name not be used due to the politically neutral nature of her work, as "the worst tribal violence in Kenya since the election of (Jomo) Kenyatta," in 1963.

The ensuing uprising after that election is known to Kenyans as the Mau Mau uprising, or "emergency" in the Kikuyu tribal language, and Kenyatta himself was an ardent Kikuyu tribesman. He served until 1978.

Odinga in this election – though he served in a high position in the Kenyatta regime, ran on his Lua tribal affiliations against the Kikuyu Kibaki.

International surprise and outcry

A team of observers from the European Union said the ECK had failed to ensure the credibility of the poll.

"We believe that... the ECK... has not succeeded in establishing the credibility of the tallying process to the satisfaction of all parties and candidates," chief EU observer Alexander Lambsdorff said in a statement.

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband commented in an email interview that London had "real concerns at the irregularities reported by the EU observers and others."

In Washington, US State Department spokesman Tom Casey condemned the violence.

"Regardless of the eventual winners of this election, we call on Kenyans across the political spectrum to work together to advance democracy and national development," he said.

"It's a sad day for Kenya," commented Michael Ranneberger, the American ambassador to Kenya.

"My biggest worry now is violence, which, let's be honest, will be along tribal lines."