

Tom Mboya

## The next generation of political party in Kenya

Since independence in 1963, major political alignments, realignments, and alliances have taken place on the basis of 'community interests': the misplaced notion that if 'one of our own' is in power, we will be better off as a community. To correct this, a small group of patriotic Kenyans, myself included, began to meet in 2013 and deliberate what role we could play in beginning to craft a new, progressive political discourse. The Democratic Congress (DC), is a values-based political party, established in recognition that much that ails Kenya, especially corruption, impunity, and ethnicity, boil down to the lack of a national values framework.

Schlagwörter:

Ethnicity - Politics - Next Generation - Political Party - Democratic Congress - Leadership - Integrity - Values - Constitution

# THE NEXT GENERATION OF POLITICAL PARTY IN KENYA

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## Background

Politics in Kenya has always revolved around ethnicity. Since independence in 1963, major political alignments, realignments, and alliances have taken place on the basis of 'community interests': the misplaced notion that if 'one of our own' is in power, we will be better off as a community (ethnic group). In a country that is deeply ethnically oriented, the effect of this orientation on national politics has been significant. Necessarily, it means that larger ethnic groups have a numerical advantage over smaller ethnic groups; and larger ethnic groups, by virtue of their size, are in a position to abrogate power and resources to themselves, to the exclusion of others. The discourse on inclusivity has been prevalent for many years, with some communities feeling marginalized by virtue of their numerical inferiority, and thus, fewer opportunities and representation in government or public office. This argument is often illustrated by the fact that of four presidents since independence, three have come from the same ethnic community, indeed, the largest.

The challenge this creates for national politics, and the culture it creates is one where the politics of ethnicity trumps ideology, or even the needs and aspirations of the average Kenyan. Unfortunately, the politics of ethnicity can be volatile: we in Kenya have first hand experience of that. Following the 2007 general election, a disputed result in the presidential race triggered an orgy of ethnic violence that left more than 1200

people dead and 600,000 displaced. Kenya is yet to fully recover from this episode!

## Rationale

Fast forward to 2013, and in the run up to another general election, political mobilization still took on a predominantly ethnic dimension, much as it has since independence. It is in this context that a small group of patriotic Kenyans, myself included, began to meet and deliberate on why it is that our politics has refused to evolve, and what role we could play in beginning to craft a new political discourse. It was impossible to fathom that in the year 2013, in a rapidly developing Kenya which serves as a regional hub; was a global leader in innovation, especially in the mobile money industry; and boasting the largest economy in the region; still our politics remained backward, largely ethnic, and a polarizing, destabilizing force in the country. It was impossible to comprehend that despite a host of positive indicators, as a country we were failing to realize the true potential that was plain for all to see; and the reason for that failure was an obsolete, exclusionary brand of politics.

While a politics conducted primarily along ethnic lines does not necessarily serve the interests of a particular ethnic group, it does serve a number of sectarian interests. Those who stand to benefit from this brand of politics are elites and the political class, who use their respective ethnic groups as voting blocks. Rarely, however, do they provide any meaningful public goods or 'returns' to the electorate. With the politics of

‘mtu wetu’ (our man/person) deeply entrenched in Kenyan society, it becomes easy to manipulate the electorate in the pursuit of public office.



Tom Mboya studied Social Science, Law, and Democratic Governance at tertiary levels in the US, UK, & South Africa. Tom is a governance and anti-corruption practitioner, and parliamentary development expert. He has extensive experience in political affairs and consulting for Parliaments. Currently, Tom works as a freelance governance consultant, and is Chairman of the Democratic Congress.

### The Next Generation of Political Party in Kenya

It is against this backdrop that the quest for the next generation of political party began: a party that would welcome and serve the interests of ALL Kenyans. It was clear to us that in a modern age, and with the immense human and intellectual capacity available, Kenya deserved better, and could make even greater strides if only we applied ourselves to the ‘elephant in the room’, the politics of ethnicity, and hence exclusivity. We took the view that it defeated conventional wisdom that so many sectors in Kenya were demonstrating signs of prosperity, EXCEPT for the political sector. Ironically, the political sector has such a profound influence on all others, such that if the political sector is dysfunctional, that dysfunction necessarily filters down to all other sectors, at least to some extent.

In establishing the Democratic Congress (DC), there was a realization early on that it was not necessary for us to reinvent the wheel. Of more importance was to begin to build a political party in its true sense: a membership based institution. Not a purpose-built vehicle targeting a single elec-

toral event, nor an outfit built around a single individual or ethnic group. Rather, a political organization that set its sights on the long-term emancipation of the minds of the Kenyan people, preparing to build a more just and more inclusive society.

### Approach to Elective Office

I am extremely proud to be among the founding members of DC, and one of those aspiring to elective office in the upcoming 2017 election. Guided by our values-based ethos, and at this early stage in our development, our focus at this stage lies in County-level seats and parliamentary seats. As a party keen to revitalize public service, we feel that of the 6 elective seats in Kenya, these two positions place us closest to the people themselves, and offer us the best opportunity to begin to address some of the most important issues facing Kenyans, including ethnicity, corruption, and service delivery. This is also very much in keeping with our long-term vision: building our party from the ground up, rather than the failed top-down approach that has been so prevalent in Kenya.

As per the Constitution of Kenya 2010, “The legislative authority of the Republic is derived from the people and, at the national level, is vested in and exercised by Parliament<sup>1</sup>”. On the part of the County Assemblies, “The legislative authority of a County is vested in, and exercised by, its County Assembly<sup>2</sup>”. DC, therefore, seeks to compete for these seats, among others, so as to be able to exercise this legislative authority responsibly, and for the benefit of all Kenyans, as opposed to benefitting political elites. With a progressive Constitution, we feel we are uniquely placed, and dedicated to restoring dignity, sanity and decorum to legislative bodies in Kenya.

A central tenet of our values based ethos is integrity. Uniquely featured in our Constitution is the fact that an entire chapter is dedicated to Leadership and Integrity. This

is in clear recognition of the challenges Kenya has faced in this regard over the years. Chapter 6 on Leadership and Integrity sets a high standard for the qualities those in leadership ought to espouse. Unfortunately, these provisions of the Constitution have been largely ignored since promulgation in 2010. Within DC, the standard set by Chapter 6 is the minimum standard we have set for those wishing to vie for elective office. We are very much alive to the fact that Kenyans have been repeatedly disappointed by a corrupt and self-serving leadership, and yearn for the kind of leadership the Constitution envisaged. The next generation of political party is here to provide that leadership!

**|| Tom Mboya**

Chairman of the Democratic Congress (DC)

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#### ANMERKUNGEN

- 1 Cf. Constitution of Kenya (2010): Article 94.
- 2 Ibid.: Article 185(1).