

**IRCK CHAIRMAN’S REMARKS
ON THE OCCASION OF A SYMPOSIUM WITH THE NATIONAL
COHESION AND INTEGRATION COMMISSION
ON THE PLACE OF FAITH-BASED LEADERS AND INSTITUTIONS
IN PROMOTING PEACE**

27th October, 2021

The chairman of the National Cohesion and Integration Commission Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia, distinguished commissioners of NCIC, my fellow Religious Leaders, all invited guests, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

First and foremost, we are deeply grateful to God almighty for the opportunity to converge here today for this symposium appropriately themed ‘*The Place of Faith Organizations in Promoting Peaceful Co-existence during the 2022 General Elections*’. Second, I thank the NCIC leadership for this noble and timely intervention. I take this opportunity to recognize, appreciate and welcome representatives from member Religious Coordinating Bodies namely the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims, Evangelical Alliance of Kenya, National Council of Churches of Kenya, Seventh Day Adventist Church, Organisation of African Instituted Churches, National Muslim Leaders Forum, Hindu Council of Kenya, Shia Athan Asheri Jamaat and Council of Imam and Preachers of Kenya. I acknowledge all Religious Leaders and organizations working towards a better Kenya not forgetting members of Kenya Interfaith Youth Network and Kenya Women of Faith Network represented here by leaders from various parts of the Country.

Ladies and gentlemen, Kenya plans to hold national elections in August, 2022 as outlined in Article 136 of the Constitution of Kenya. The most recent presidential election in 2017 yielded contested results. The situation in Kenya less than a year to the August 2022 general election is one of concern and hope for many. Kenya is already experiencing heightened political temperatures manifested through acts

of verbal and physical violence between people of opposing political orientations. Several by-elections in March and May 2021 suffered electoral violence, including attacks against IEBC officials at polling centers. Misinformation and hate speech, particularly on social media also remain an issue of concern.

The important question before us today is how we the Religious Leaders can join hands more effectively with partners from the government such as the NCIC and other government agencies with a direct role in electoral management as well as not state actors to secure the 2022 General Election. As critical moral, social and political agents of development we have an important role in shaping and influencing the development of all aspects of life. As the voice of reason, and the society's conscience, faith-based organizations working in partnership with state and not state actors can make significantly contribution to the "*Uchaguzi bila noma*" scenario which we all aspire.

The first step toward towards securing the 2022 elections is to deepen partnerships with all relevant players and such partnerships cascaded to the grassroots. One of such platforms is the *Uwiano* platform which both NCIC and IRCK are part together with other critical peace and security stakeholders. We have drawn important lessons from the 2013 and 2017 one of which being the importance of strategic collaboration. Through enhanced partnerships, platforms such as *Uwiano* and others can potentially play an active role in conflict prevention and promoting reconciliation and cohesion at all levels of governance.

Hate speech is a common phenomenon in our politics. It is a worrying trend considering the fragility of our social fabric stemming from decades of ethnic balkanisation. Religious bodies and movements however provide a neutral and secure space for talks and active mediation. Religious organisations' extensive networks reach large numbers of people and have formidable capacity to effect change. Religious organisations and leaders have access to all levels of power: community, national and international, giving us the ability to address conflicts at multiple levels.

Up to this point I know we are anxiously asking ourselves what can be done to better prepare ourselves for the coming election cycle. I wish to reiterate that no single organisation can enhance peace and cohesion while working in isolation

and that is the reason why we are gathered here to ventilate on this issue and identify tenable solutions moving forward. I will enumerate potential areas of convergence for introspection and perusal.

Civic and voter education. Religious organisations have previously conducted civic and voter education from a values perspective. We are convinced it is not adequate to cast a vote correctly without thoroughly vetting the track record of leaders offering themselves for elective positions. Using a criteria for electing leaders with values, the faith groups can partner with NCIC to carry out mass civic and voter education through the congregation model. This is a reliable and cost effective approach of reaching out to the masses with reliable and relevant information to give guidance on attributes to be considered before choosing a leaders at all levels of governance. We shall launch a campaign themed “*choose good leaders*” on 27th October, 2021 with prayers in eight regions of Kenya culminating into a national day of prayer on 28th October, 2021.

Early Warning and Early Response. Through our extensive networks, we have capacity to detect and initiate response in the event of potential violence. In collaboration with relevant security structures, faith groups have capacity to facilitate grassroots dialogue and mediation. This can be in the form of interfaith dialogue, community dialogue, inter-community dialogue and inter-generational dialogue. This can provide valuable information to EWERN systems established by NCIC and other government agencies.

Create spaces for dialogue between the political leaders and members of the public. The Dialogue Reference Group (DRG) has successfully experimented this concept. The DRG led mediation efforts in 2016 that culminated into minimal electoral reforms by a Joint Select Committee of Parliament. These reforms persuaded the opposition coalition NASA and the incumbent Jubilee Coalition to participate in the 2017 General Election.

Conduct sensitisation of politicians, media, bloggers, analysts and commentators on conflict sensitive communication and reporting. Religious leaders can be engaged and capacity built as cohesion monitors and facilitated to monitor public spaces and social media for hate speech messages.

Election observation and monitoring. Accredited leaders may be deployed in all the gazetted polling stations across the country. A parallel tally can be carried out and results announced to minimise chances of contestants disputing the election results.

This meeting therefore fills me with immense hope that there is adequate goodwill to secure the upcoming General Election. It is my hope and prayer that the outcome of this meeting will not only strengthen partnership between NCIC and Religious Leaders but also empower them to play an active role in promoting peace and national cohesion using all platforms available.

Thank you and God bless you all.

Rev. Fr. Joseph Mutie
Chairman Inter-Religious Council of Kenya