

## **The Most Important Title is “Citizen”**

**By Ausrar Wambiya**

As the dust settles after the protracted political campaigns followed by the Supreme Court Presidential duel, Kenyan's are now getting back to their daily grinds. Yet while the elected and nominated political leaders take the oaths of their various offices and get down to work, those who lost in the just ended campaigns, either justifiably or not, are bound to feel helpless and lacking in stature to influence the direction of things in the days to come.

The common feeling that one has to be elected, appointed or even nominated to a particular office to influence change, provide an opinion or even confront actions that offend general norms and practices is a serious misconception that need to be corrected upfront. History has shown us that the most important office is the office of the citizen. One merely needs to belong to a particular jurisdiction either by birth or through formalization in order to count in influence. This truth escapes us yet evidence abound.

The failure to appreciate the importance of the office of the citizen could probably explain the mad rush and the near death efforts that individuals are willing to go in order to attain the available elective, appointive or even nominative offices during the political campaigns. But throughout history, individuals have led different and numerous initiatives that brought change in unprecedented ways even without having been elected, appointed or even nominated to any known office of repute. It is out of this realization that The 44<sup>th</sup> President of The United States of America Barrack Obama once remarked that, "it is citizens -- ordinary men and women, determined to forge their own future -- who throughout history have sparked all the great change and progress."

Locally, the Rt. Hon. Raila Amollo Odinga serves as a perfect example of an individual who has led some of the most progressive efforts to alter Kenya's political, cultural, economic and even social landscape even while not occupying any known office, whether appointive, elective or nominative. After making various bids to lead Kenya at the highest office and falling short, either justifiably or not, the former Prime Minister has continued to engineer efforts that have seen reforms effected in the way election processes are run in Kenya, the way Parliament works and even the way the Judiciary conducts itself, even while not occupying any office of repute.

It will be remembered that the Arab uprising that brought significant political and economic reforms in Egypt, Tunisia among other nations in the Middle East in the recent times was not started by an elected, nominated or even appointed representative of the people. The Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation which sparked a wave of revolution and unrest that would spread from the Governor's Office of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia all the way to Yemen and Bahrain was an act of a citizen. This citizen had no office, except the important office of the citizen.

A citizen is a powerful force for change in himself or herself. All one needs is just to be a human being to influence the direction of events. The elective, appointive or even nominative offices only serve as pedestals but are sometimes burdens instead of reliefs in the performance of the important work of change. This is why more and more governments are doing all they can to silence citizens – from Russia to China to Venezuela among others. This is why dictatorships go a long way to

crackdown on civil societies to undermine the idea of democracy because such actors prove too conscious and challenge such regimes. It should also not be lost on us the richest people in the world are basically citizens who are neither elected, appointed nor nominated by entrepreneurial.

What is therefore needed among the citizens is vigilance as new leaders take their positions now. The tendency to develop apathy, withdraw from public life, resign to our fate and declare that those who are now occupying elective, appointive or even nominative offices are more powerful and will load it over the rest of us is akin to being unpatriotic. Those who love their governments owe them proposals on corrective measures that need to be taken at each and every stage to improve lives of the citizenry.

Moving forward, the non-elected members of the public, being citizens, will be expected to participate in budget making forums, contribute ideas through digital platforms, attend public barazas to influence policy formulation, attend local assembly sittings at the public galleries to see how their elected representatives are contributing to debates on matters that affect them, report crimes including corrupt activities by the elected, nominated or appointed officials and ultimately participate in the next electoral process that will elect, appoint or even nominate the subsequent crop of leaders in 2027 or before. Recent calls by some citizens to be removed from the voters roll because the leaders they voted for were not declared winners by the electoral body are naïve, apathetic and akin to absconding duty.

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