

Ufungamano – Joint Forum of Religious Organisations

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NB. Forwarded to Office of the President, Deputy President, Senate, Parliament, Judiciary, EACC & SRC

PRESS STATEMENT: STATE OF THE NATION AND REFERENDUM

Introduction

Ufungamano Joint forum of Religious Organisations (U-JFRO) originally known as Ufungamano Initiative comprises the main religious organizations. As a forum of religious organizations U-JFRO has been a key player in the democratization process in Kenya and in the Constitution of Kenya review process since 1999.

U-JFRO wishes to highlight the following concerns in the country which are very important, *trusting that the Government and other agencies involved in the governance of our country will take action in securing the future of the Country.*

Unfulfilled Promises

Fifty seven years since independence Kenyans have been striving for a better quality of life. After so many years of hard work they still have not been able to satisfy their basic need for food, shelter, clothing, education, healthcare, etc. Successive governments have completed their 5 year terms with many unfulfilled promises or with very little achievement and the dream of Kenyans for a better country has remained a mirage.

Today the cost of living for ordinary Kenyans has risen to the extreme because the Government and Parliament have failed to implement policies conducive to reasonable prices of food, housing, clothing, and other basic commodities and to create policies which would promote job and business opportunities for Kenyans.

The Government and Parliament have concentrated in politics rather than in improving the welfare of the people. There is too much politics in Kenya from one election to another which is dangerous to the life of the nation.

Size of Government & Government Expenditure

The Preamble of the Constitution gives Kenyans an inalienable right to determine the form of governance of our country for the well-being of the present and future generations. The Constitution envisages governments based on essential values of social and economic justice.

Unfortunately, the Constitution has created top heavy structures of governance the country can no longer afford. Having carried the burden for 10 years, it has proved beyond reasonable doubt that this structure of governance is absolutely unsustainable.

Despite warnings from Kenyans and international organizations, the government has not made enough effort to reduce the extravagant spending by the Executive and the Legislature.

Kenyans can no longer sustain nor tolerate the exorbitant, selfish and unnecessary benefits being dished out to a small number of leaders while majority of Kenyans are languishing in abject poverty.

Most of the tax payer's money goes to salaries leaving very little for public services and development resulting to poor health and educational facilities in the country. It is worth noting that our political leaders and top public servants take the biggest share of the tax money.

It is imperative to cut down the size of the National and County Governments to contain the ballooning public wage bill and the National and County governments ought to manage the resources of our country equitably and prudently.

Public Debt & the Wage Bill:

In the Financial Year ending June 2019, for every Shillings 100 which the country earned, Shillings 57 went into servicing the National debt. This compares to Shillings 25 Treasury paid six years ago. The country's debt has risen to Shs. 5.8 trillion or 61% of the GDP yet the Treasury proposes the debt ceiling to be increased to 9 trillion! The recent report by the World Bank that Kenya's external debt is at the highest level it has ever been, is worrying.

The National Government needs to obey the provisions of 'Article 201 on Principles of Public Finance and Article 211 on Borrowing by the National Government', in the Constitution of Kenya. Over-borrowing endangers the present and the future generations of our Country.

The MPs are also not obeying the mandate of the Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC), a Commission established by the Constitution. The behavior of our MPs is against the spirit of the Constitution which they are under oath to protect. They have continued demanding more and more money from the poor tax payer.

Recently, the media reported that MCAs pocket upto Kshs. 25,000 per day in allowances amounting to about Kshs. 700,000 per month per person. This is unacceptable and Kenyans must protest in the strongest terms possible, against the insatiable greed of the leaders they elected. SRC should take action to tame the greed of the MPs and MCAs.

U-JFRO supports the President's recent view that public jobs are not about making money but about service and sacrifice. We urge the President to exercise his executive authority to check the greed of the political elite and the excessive spending in government. The unnecessary security personnel and other benefits given to the political leaders and top public servants should be withdrawn to save public money. It is common knowledge that the country is going through a very hard economic time.

Corruption:

Corruption and misuse of public funds in the National Government, Counties and Parliament are rampant. U-JFRO urges the Government and all Kenyans to engage in the fight against corruption more aggressively. **The fight against corruption is about a disease capable of consuming the whole country if it is ignored for too long.**

EACC should carry out life style audit on all Governors, MPs, Senators, MCAs and senior public officers, retired or serving, without fear or favour and should return any ill-gotten wealth to the Treasury. Those involved in corrupt practices should be prosecuted without delay and those found guilty should be barred from holding public offices forever. As stated before, U-JFRO believes that EACC should be given prosecutorial powers in this fight.

The recent remarks by the speaker of the National Assembly, reported in the media that a number of MPs have been claiming allowances for meetings they did not attend, is alarming. This is corruption as much as it is criminal.

We commend the President's effort in the fight against corruption but a more drastic effort is required from him in disciplining those appointed in the high offices of his Government when implicated in corruption. As mandated by the Constitution the President should exercise his authority on behalf of Kenyans.

U-JFRO also commends the DPP for his work in the fight against corruption.

We urge the Judiciary to deal with corruption cases promptly as matters of priority. Quite often Judiciary is seen as the missing link in the fight against corruption in Kenya.

Referendum:

U-JFRO strongly opposes any attempt by the politicians to increase the size of Government for their personal gains through a referendum before the next general elections. Any amendments to the Constitution **must aim** at cutting down the size of Government, the number of MPs and MCAs and Commissions, to reduce the public wage bill and the public debt.

In an earlier Press Statement U-JFRO highlighted the necessary amendments to the constitution.

1. National Assembly

The number of constituencies and elected members of the national assembly be reduced to 150 down from the current 290. In many countries the MPs not only represent a much larger constituency but give a very high level of service. On the other hand, according to the recent survey and hansard reports, some MPs attend Parliament but contribute very little in the debates. Kenyans are over-represented. There are 347 MPs and 67 Senators with a **GDP of \$70.53 billion**. USA has a population of over 325 million, with 535 congressmen and 100 Senators and a GDP of **\$18.75 trillion**.

2. County Assemblies

Similarly, elected MCA's should be reduced to 750 down from the current 1450. To comply with the 1/3 gender rule we propose that up to 300 women be appointed from among those who have contested but are the best losers. On this basis the total number of MCA's would be a maximum of 1050 from 2250.

3. The Cabinet

Section 152 of the Constitution provides for a cabinet of between 14 and 22 Cabinet Secretaries. U-JFRO believes that Kenya does not need more than 16 Ministries (16CSs) at the moment and in the near future. Compare the current number of Cabinet Secretaries and their assistants, with the number of Ministers in more developed countries.

4. Independent Commissions

There are too many commissions which duplicate the roles of Government Ministries. These should be rationalized to reduce the public wage bill and to avoid unnecessary cost to the tax payer. For example the Commission for Revenue Allocation is unnecessary because its work belongs to Ministry of Finance. Lands Commission is also unnecessary.

5. County Governments

At the current number of 47, the counties are too many and some are not viable. They are also too costly to Kenyans. The Counties should be clustered into viable economic blocks. U-JFRO proposes that counties be reduced to 16 and the current counties become sub-counties. This could easily be achieved if the previous provinces were split into two counties each, the Rift valley split into three counties because of its larger size and Nairobi retained as one county.

6. Senate

U-JFRO proposes that in the 2022 General Elections, senators should be elected in the new reduced number of counties and each county should elect one man and one woman senator similar to the US model. This will reduce the senate to 32 senators down from the current 67 and will provide a good solution for the gender balance. In order to control parliamentarians, it should become an upper house to be of use to the country.

7. Nominations

U-JFRO proposes that all other nominations in the national assembly, senate and county assemblies be scrapped because the system has been abused with only relatives and political cronies being nominated. Every elected leader is supposed to represent all types of interest including vulnerable groups.

Building Bridges Initiative (BBI)

BBI does not address the national concerns above which would benefit the country now and in the future. In essence it is about sharing and increasing political positions adding the burden to the tax payer.

BBI is not about uniting the country since it has divided the country even more as it is being driven by one political party ODM and a section of Jubilee party. Preparation to amend the constitution in a referendum requires a national conference, all inclusive, first and foremost. A national forum, people driven, would build consensus on the necessary amendments.

The proposal to create the Prime Minister's position and two deputies is not only politically dangerous and unviable as it creates two centres of power, but it also increases the cost of running government. These are consequences which Kenyans would wish to guard against and which they cannot afford.

Increasing the number of MPs is the opposite of what Kenyans want. And appointing Cabinet Ministers, as in the current Constitution is what Kenyans wanted, to separate Parliament from the Executive. Cabinet Ministers should not be members of Parliament.

While it is a good thing to increase funds allocation to counties, the most important question is whether counties have been spending the 15% allocation efficiently and effectively. Parliament must legislate mechanisms of safeguarding funds allocated to counties first.

Majority of the BBI proposals are not referendum material. They are administrative. The amount of public money and energy used in popularizing its content is unjustifiable in the public eyes.

Worst of all popularization of the BBI is taking place when the Covid-19 pandemic is spreading rapidly in the country, threatening lives and livelihoods of Kenyans. This is callous! The National Government and County Governments should be spending available public money in fighting the pandemic, capable of destroying lives and the economy, in a short while. BBI rallies for or against are uncalled for and a danger to the lives of Kenyans. UJFRO urges the President to ban political rallies indefinitely to save lives. U-JFRO sends deep condolences to all bereaved families. May God give them the necessary strength to face the future.

As it has been observed in one of the media columns, "President Kenyatta and Mr. Odinga are foisting an expensive campaign on Kenyans only a few months before another campaign for a general election". BBI seems to be a succession plan for 2022.

Why should the country waste money for a referendum aimed at meeting the interests of politicians instead of satisfying the needs of Kenyans in general.

Kenya needs peace and unity among all communities and these are products of a happy people able to provide food, clothes and shelter for their families. These are basic in the hierarchy of human needs. Divisive politics does not promote peace nor unity.

Conclusion

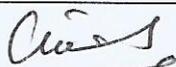
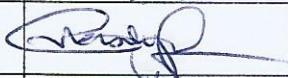
The resources God has provided generously for Kenya must be shared equitably among Kenyans and used wisely for the benefit of the people. **The resources are not for the political leaders to grab and share among themselves as and when they want.**

We the religious leaders have committed to play our divine role of saving this country from misgovernance and misuse of national resources. We shall speak out against all injustices and all forms of oppression in our country either from the two levels of government or from non-governmental organisations or any other bodies in Kenya. We shall conduct civic education in our respective organisations to create awareness in good or poor governance.

Our God of justice in Heaven is watching every step we make on earth and whether we are mindful of the welfare of His people in our actions.

May God bless Kenya.

Signed:

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1	RASHMIN CHITNIS	CO-CHAIR/TRUSTEE	
2	CHARLES K. WAMBURU	VICED SECRETARY	
3	SILAS MAG SARO	SOA	
4	Rev. PETER LAUNGU THOMAS	FEICCK	
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7	PST. EVANS LUANGA	FRIENDS QUAKERS	
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