

Fifty years on, Kenyatta Junior faces challenge of fulfilling his father's promise of true freedom #Kenya@50

We continue our commemoration of 50 years of Kenyan independence with Gabriel Oguda lamenting that the ideals of the country's independence leader Jomo Kenyatta remain unrealised.

December 12 2013 will mark Kenya's 50th anniversary of independence from colonial rule. There were many reasons why Kenya sought to take control of her affairs. One conspicuous factor was the feeling that the British had brought untold suffering and that we could not be subservient to outsiders determined to overstay their welcome. There were protests and bloodshed, and when the guns could not silence the undying will of the oppressed for freedom, the colonisers left.



Passing on the baton, a young Uhuru Kenyatta meets the President of West Germany Heinrich Lubke in the company of his father Jomo

Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta was under no illusion about the task ahead. As the Union Jack was lowered and the Kenyan flag hoisted on high, he reminded Kenyans that we were now on our own and that true freedom could only be achieved with hard work (*uhuru na kazi*) and by pulling together (*harambee*). A graduate of LSE, Kenyatta fulfilled his mission and knew that for Kenya to move forward, it was necessary to act on education, poverty and disease – three key enemies of development. The newfound freedom was a cause for national unity. Everything was going our way.

When Kenyatta asked Kenyans to embrace hard work in nation building, he did not recognise – or ignore – that Kenyans expected him to be the shepherd and them the flock. Strong leadership was needed to refocus the mindset of the masses. It was important that a shift be made from the “*we are being oppressed*” cliché characteristic of the colonial regime to “*we are now solely in charge of our destiny*”. This change of attitude happened when the ownership of the White Highlands reverted back to the locals with Kenyans occupying positions formerly reserved for the colonial elite. However, Kenyatta's administration fell short when it came to a fair distribution the country's wealth. Those close to the reins of power gained the most benefit. This marked the beginning of the neglect of the Kenyan people.

There have been three Presidents in Kenya since Jomo Kenyatta and all indelibly linked to him. These include Daniel arap Moi and Mwai Kibaki (Vice-President and Finance Minister under

Kenyatta). The third, and current, President is Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Kenya's founding father and plucked from political oblivion by Daniel arap Moi and polished by Mwai Kibaki.

The crisis of leadership Kenyatta left behind when he died in 1978 is now fully manifest in his son's presidency. The 1963 national building blocks of *uhuru na kazi* and *harambee* have been dismantled in that we lack a unity of purpose. This can be seen in the mutation of the national attitude from "*we are being oppressed*" to "*we are now a sovereign country*" to the current cry of "*tunaomba serikali*" (we appeal to the government) – a monotonous cry signaling a desperate attempt to remind the government of its commitment to the people.

Uhuru Kenyatta's election in March 2013 was the result of a bitterly-contested poll, one that ended at the Supreme Court. The elections were characterised by a new catchphrase "*choices have consequences*", coined by Uhuru Kenyatta's opponents warning Kenyans against electing an International Criminal Court (ICC) indictee facing a charge of crimes against humanity. The prophecy has come to pass. Although our Golden Jubilee celebrations should be a happy time, Kenyans will not be happy. Recently, a bill was passed increasing the prices of basic commodities beyond the reach of a majority of the people while another bill seeking to curtail media freedom is awaiting presidential approval. The latest attempt at clamping down on dissent has come in the form of another controversial bill which would cap foreign funding for NGOs at 15% of their budget.

It is a challenging task to build a nation with the leadership blunders of three successive governments weighing heavily on your shoulders. It is even more painful when a select few well-to-do government officials become insensitive to the plight of the overwhelming majority of Kenyans struggling to make a living. If this is the punishment Kenyans have to bear for governing themselves, then it is better to return to 12 December 1963 and begin again, this time on the right footing. *Tunaomba serikali*.

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December 11th, 2013 | [International Affairs](#) | [0 Comments](#)
