

TANZANIA

STEFAN REITH

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Round Table Discussion on BVR, Free and Fair Elections

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

On the 03rd of July 2015 Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) carried out a round table discussion on Biometric Voter Registration (BVR), free and fair elections. Tanzania is holding general elections in October 2015 and for the moment is conducting the respective registration process. Therefore, this topic is highly important to the population and respective leaders and gains much attention. The discussion addressed the particular role of religious leaders within the matter. The event, which was held at Karimjee Hall in Dar es Salaam, was attended by the Prime Minister Hon. Mizengo Kayanza Peter Pinda as the Chief Guest.

After arrival and registration of the guests, the Secretary to the Dar es Salaam Region Peace Committee, Rev. John Solomon, made welcome remarks. He advised the participants that the event was graced by the Chief Guest, Chairperson of the Dar es Salaam Region Peace Committee, Dar es Salaam Regional Commissioner, District Commissioners from Kinondoni, Ilala, Temeke and Mwanza as well as twenty Religious Leaders from Mwanza Region Peace Committee, Chairperson of the Muslim Women [JUKITA], Representative of KAS, Commander of Police Special Zone and Members of the Dar es Salaam Region Peace Committee.

Opening prayers were followed by a word from KAS, which is a long-time partner of the Interfaith Dialogue in Tanzania. The Programme Coordinator for KAS, Richard Shaba, gave a brief history of KAS in Tanzania dating back to a few months before Tanganyika (now Tanzania) gained her political independence. He cited some high-

lights which included the publication of books on "The Rights of a Muslim Woman according to the Holy Quran and Sunna" and "Aspects of the Islamic Economic System – the Tanzanian perspective". He also pointed out how KAS strives to provide platforms for religious leaders to meet and address issues uniting them and those which tend to drive them apart. He made a mention of the Interfaith Football Match of 2014 to which the Prime Minister was invited and accepted to be the Chief Guest.



A word from KAS

On the question of Biometric Voter Registration [BVR] he informed the participants that since 2014 KAS and their Partner CETA [Civic Education Teachers' Association] have been collaborating with the National Electoral Commission [NEC] and the PMO-RALG [Prime Minister's Office - Regional Administration and Local Governments] under the theme "Your Voice, Your Choice! Rights and Duties of Youths during the Upcoming Elections" to sensitize young adults at the various institutions of higher learning in the Mainland Tanzania to view registration as a very vital step towards exercising their democratic rights. He concluded by appealing to the Religious Leaders to continue agitating for free and fair elections [FaFE] not forgetting to remind the communities to en-

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sure they register when NEC BVR Officers are in their respective localities.

Subsequently, the Chairman for the Dar es Salaam Region Peace Committee, Sheikh Alhad Musa Salum, gave a brief historical background of the regional Peace Committee and the positive involvement of KAS in the Interfaith Agenda. He acknowledged with pleasure the presence of twenty Religious Leaders from Mwanza Region [ten Sheikhs and ten Bishops]. The Sheikh urged fellow Religious Leaders to remind their followers to register under BVR once the NEC Teams are in their respective locations. Furthermore, he insisted the Religious Leaders have a big role to play to ensure free and fair elections. He implored them never to take sides, neither pro/contra Government nor one-or-the-other political party. Their approach should be objective, fair, non-partisan and proactive. He reminded the audience, that the aim of the round table discussion was to bring together the Religious Leaders and reflect on the current political situation and trends, and that the objective was to agree on a joint way-forward which shall bind all Religious Leaders.

Hereinafter the Prime Minister Hon. Mizengo Kayanza Peter Pinda delivered his keynote speech and officially opened the event. The Chief Guest was grateful to have the honour to officiate at such a noble gathering. He reiterated the position of the government to strive for peaceful, free and fair elections.



The Chief Guest delivering his key note address

He made it clear that for their objective to be achieved they must work closely with Religious Leaders. The security organs alone cannot ensure that peaceful, free and fair elections are held. Traditionally Tanzania has been a haven of peace for all her neigh-

bours who faced challenging political situations in their respective countries since 1960. This peace and tranquility did not come on its own. The zero-hour politicians put a lot of effort to ensure that distractors such as ethnicity and/or religious differences do not show their ugly face. We are duty-bound to maintain the status quo! Closing he congratulated the Religious Leaders on their efforts to maintain contact among themselves and always coming out in strength and numbers to defend peace, love and tranquility. He wished the participants successful deliberations.

Rev. John Solomon then invited the guests to break the Fast while the round table discussion was facilitated. The discussion was very interactive with pleas for all 'to be on the same book, chapter and verse'. It was resolved to agitate for regular formal and informal meetings as Tanzania edges towards the elections. Finally, it was agreed that the message of love, peace and tranquillity should be echoed by all, all-the-time.