

FREE AND FAIR ELECTION – YOUR VOTE YOUR CHOICE

RIGHTS AND DUTIES OF YOUTH DURING ELECTIONS

On the 13th and 14th of August 2015 the Civic Education Teachers Association (CETA) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) jointly organized a two-day symposium on free and fair elections for secondary, college and university students as well as secondary school teachers. The symposium dwelt on two topics in particular: the principles of free and fair election; and the role of youth in enhancing free and fair elections. The event took place at the National Museum in Dar es Salaam and was attended by more than 400 participants each day.

The first day of the symposium was assigned to secondary school students while the second day was assigned to students of high learning institutions and secondary school teachers. Most of the participants were members from to secondary schools and higher learning institutions in Dar es Salaam with representatives from Mbeya, Mwanza, Moshi and Dodoma colleges and universities. The same resource persons facilitated the event on both days.

Opening remarks were given by Safari Minja, Executive General Secretary of CETA. Subsequently Stefan Reith, Resident Representative of KAS in Tanzania, distributed greetings from KAS.

Principles of Free and Fair Election

The first presentation was given by Father Dr. Charles Kitima, former Vice Chancellor of St. Augustine University (SAUT), focusing on principles of free and fair election.



Father Dr. Charles Kitima outlines principles of free and fair election

He provided a detailed historical and legal basis of democratic elections. He pointed out that elections became necessary with the sophistication of social organizations and emergency of states. He indicated that it was important to note, that election is a universally recognized basic human right delineated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the UN General Assembly of 12th December 1948. Dr. Kitima explained that this Declaration is supplemented by legal instruments that include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 among others. The Covenant comprises basic political and civil rights of the individual which e.g. include the freedom of opinion, the right to assembly, the right to participate in one's government either directly or through freely elected representatives, and the right to nationality and equality before the law. The Accession of the United Republic of Tanzania pertaining to the Covenant was accomplished in 1976. Additionally, the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977 provides polit-

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ical rights under Article 21 and addresses principles of democracy and social justice under Article 8.

Elections are a fundamental element of any democratic system. Dr. Kitima outlined international recognized principles that are useful to gauge whether an election is free and fair. He noted that such principles apply throughout the election cycle. Among others, they include the freedom to register as a voter and the freedom of assembly in the pre-election stage; the access to voting without any discrimination and unreasonable restrictions, and secret ballot during the election stage; and a defined procedure of announcing results, and clear rules for challenging the election outcome in the post-election stage.

Dr. Kitima's presentation was followed by a lively discussion which was facilitated by the moderator of the symposium, Jimmy Luhende.



A secondary school student giving a statement

The Role of Youth in Enhancing Free and Fair Election

Subsequently, Humphrey Polepole, former Commissioner of the Constitutional Review Commission (CRC), elaborated on the role of the youth in enhancing free and fair election. He pointed out, that it is important for youths to concentrate on understanding the root cause of a problem and how to address it. He advised the youths to avoid being driven by pure emotion in their decision making processes and drew attention to the importance of standing up and living principles, also saying that there is a need to look for caring leaders and to shun away from a

selfish and self-serving type of leadership in the forthcoming election.



Humphrey Polepole giving his presentation

In his presentation Mr. Polepole mentioned that change and transformation have to be understood as two different concepts and that it is also important to comprehend that election is a process containing an election cycle that involves a chronology of activities. Humphrey Polepole pointed out, that there is every reason for the youths to take an active part in the electoral process knowing that all the three candidates – President, Parliamentarian and Councilor – are servants of the people and so they must be chosen carefully. Youths shall take advantage of their age to attend campaign rallies. Students across the board must play their part in mobilizing themselves and the larger population of voters in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the respective position of candidates and parties, and later on to cast their votes accordingly.

After his presentation, the participants had the chance to raise questions and discuss the topic. On both days the audience was taking part very actively, showing a lot of interest in the issues raised.

Conclusions

The symposium provided a central platform to address the subject of free and fair elections in Tanzania and to discuss issues with regard to the general elections 2015 constructively. Uncertainties among students pertaining to the electoral process are clear indicators that civic education has a long way to go. The symposium aimed at widening the understanding of principles of free and fair elections; specifically on the electoral process, voter's political and legal

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rights and on the rights and duties of the youths during the 2015 elections. Similarly, the symposium was geared at mobilizing students, teachers and the general public to exercise their fundamental rights and duties of participating actively in voting.

In conclusion, the participants of the symposium agreed to vote come October 25th, 2015. The participants were also in agreement to voice their concern on issues regarding the free and fair elections and to shy away from fomenting chaos during the run up to the general elections. The participants advocated reaching out to other social groups and other students and agreed on the need to attend election campaigns and vote on the voting day upon them.



Group photo with secondary school students