

## News feature

# Country at the crossroads

In her second article on troubled Kenya, News Letter reporter **KATE CHAMBRE** talks to a retired brigadier who divides his time between Northern Ireland and the African state



**OUTCRY:** Police move in to disperse women supporters of the Orange Democratic Movement who blocked a road leading to the heart of Nairobi after they were stopped from entering the city centre



**B**RIGADIER Adrian Naughten and his family spent Christmas and New Year on the Kenyan coast before driving 580kms through the heart of the country back to Nairobi this time last week.

They experienced no violence and "nothing unusual" as they travelled home to the capital city.

The father-of-two said the problems have mainly been confined to Kenya's "poorer areas and slums" and that the news media has helped fuel a certain amount of anxiety by creating the impression that the whole country is in turmoil.

But he said he has been particularly impressed that the Press had "in no way sided with one party or the other".

He said: "We drove 375 miles from Malindi on Friday and saw nothing but peace and harmony."

"Throughout our nine days at the coast we saw nothing. There have been very nasty incidents and I do not wish to deny that certain areas have been very badly affected, but in general everywhere is quiet and people are trying to get back to normal."

He said the poor had suffered the most in the post election fall-out.

"As is always the case it is the poor who suffer. They are the ones in the first instance who are given so many promises in pre-Election campaigning and then when the promises fail to materialise the losers whip cer-

tain elements into a frenzy in order to create the tension."

Brigadier Naughten, who is chairman of Kenya's Irish Society, believes there is clearly a desire for peace in the country.

The violence erupted last month after it was declared that the ruling party had won the general election despite early indications that the Opposition had triumphed, leading to claims of vote rigging.

He said there is a "realisation" that the image of Kenya has been tarnished and that its "economic life blood - tourism" would be affected in the short term.

It was "imperative" that a successful outcome was reached quickly, he added.

"The problems here bring into sharp focus the whole issue of the definition of democracy on the African Continent."

"Kenya has been a shining beacon of peace and tranquillity for Africa over 43 years of independence and yet, when tribalism raises its head, there is instant trouble," he said.

"In the past the main tribe has had no opposition so each election has been a foregone conclusion."

"When another tribe raises the ante and provides a genuine opposition the trouble starts - exactly what has happened here over the past two weeks."

Brigadier Naughten, originally from Tipperary, said there is evidence of rigging results on both sides.

"In my view the Electoral Commission made a big mistake

on day two by announcing that the Opposition were almost a million votes ahead without making it very clear that there were several constituencies, most of whom were known government strongholds, still to be counted," he said.

"Naturally, when the sitting president is then declared the winner 36 hours later it looks less than transparent to the man in the street - and to most bystanders!"


Asked what he thinks the future holds for Kenya, Brigadier Naughten said: "Well, my view is that a deal of sorts will be brokered and the Opposition leader will be offered a place in the government either as prime minister or deputy president."

There is too much at stake for both sides and for Kenya in general, he said.

"If they cannot broker a coalition of sorts then the country will face economic hardship which is already being faced by many who have been displaced from their homes due to looting, gang warfare and tribal differences."

He added: "This would be a disaster and remember that Kenya is much more used to harbouring refugees from neighbouring war-torn countries than having to deal with an internal similar problem of their own making."

"So it is in everyone's interest to settle disputes now - not tomorrow."


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