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George Gachara: “I’m Positive. We’re Going To Fight”

George Gachara is the co-founder of the Picha Mtaani Initiative.

What role has the media played in Kenyan politics?

[Misinforming] people, and largely so. If you look deep down behind their agendas, it’s just sensationalism and populism. If you look at the media in other [countries], they’re very critical and they have a very clear agenda and they hold to account the politicians.

Our media plays the ball of the politicians – who said this, who insulted the other, who is crying wolf. I think our media should take more responsibility and set the agenda; put the benchmark for reform.

They tried that some time ago, I remember – at the height of the post-election violence – they said “Let’s save our country”, and it was uniform for all of them. They had that agenda for a while until the violence stopped and I thought “Whoa – so the media can really get its act right”.

But then after that they went to business as usual. I think they have a critical role in informing people, which they’re not serious about. You see, this normalcy that we’re enjoying right now, all the peace – the vehicles can [move] in the traffic jam,

and Nakumatt is open – is very fragile.

We must really concentrate on [bringing] this country back to sanity and stop enjoying this temporary normalcy, then the media and the people of this country would take peace and reconciliation seriously. I think it’s the same amnesia across the country – now that we don’t have militia running in the streets and blocked roads – then we think there’s peace, but there’s really not enough peace.

Today we have a new generation of IDPs who have been battered, who are out there, still hurting, they don’t have food, they’re marginalized, their money is being stolen!

Such people are potential recruits to a militia group, or a threat in themselves. These are the human stories that the media should be covering, and strongly.

A time will come when we’ll all be pushed to some wall – no more water, no more electricity, no more food, roads are congested, we just can’t move – then we’ll decide it’s about time.

Otherwise, the militia may decide to catalyze [it], and we’ll have a new

system. Probably that will be worse.

What do you think will happen in 2012?

If we don't do anything by 2012, whatever we did in 2008 will be a Christmas party, just like Kriegler said.

Unfortunately – this is the sad reality – Kenyans are arming themselves, young people have learnt how to kill people, they're still unemployed, they're dispossessed, and the politicians are still dividing us, and even the Christians and the Muslims are dividing us. We have more [reasons] to lead us to violence than those leading us to otherwise.

I'm positive we're going to fight, and worse. Realistically, what we can do as young people and as a country is look at how we can reduce the magnitude of the violence.

Picha Mtaani aims at providing a platform for national reflection and building local reconstruction consensus through photo exhibitions and debate. Find out more about them on their website - www.pichamtaani.com

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