

TRANSCRIPT . FEBRUARY 2010

John Githongo: “It’s Possible For People To Talk Themselves Into A War.”

John Githongo; anti-corruption campaigner and founder of Inuka Kenya.

Is all this a natural part of growth for a country?

Every country develops in its own way, and I think what’s happening to Kenya is unique. I think Kenya has now reached a stage where, we’ve had it good for about 40 years. There are many issues that we should have dealt with.

We’re very lucky people, as Kenyans; we have a beautiful country, beautiful weather – the best weather in the world – and very good people. We’re not inclined to take up arms against each other *kighafla*, as people say.

This part of Africa is a rough neighborhood; difficulties in Somalia, there were difficulties in Ethiopia, Rwanda...there were difficulties for a long time in Uganda, as we know. We took that for granted, as Kenyans, and perhaps we took it for granted for too long.

The events of the last elections, and not only the last elections; the trend that we’ve seen with regard to youth and criminalization, and violence around elections that has been bubbling since the early 1990s that came to a head in 2007.

This has caused some of us – especially the youth – to snap out of it, into a new reality. We’re blinking in the sunlight. We’re like people who’ve been wearing shades for 40 years, and somebody’s taken off the shades.

Were you surprised by the 2007/8 violence?

I wasn’t surprised by the violence, because ever since the introduction of multiparty politics, we’ve had violence of one kind or the other. Usually – in my opinion, and from the reports that I have read – violence that is directed by people around the President.

What was unique in 2007 is that the violence reached a point where – in certain parts of the country – it became very spontaneous. Even those members of the elite who would have benefited from the violence lost control over it, and a lot of the simmering resentments and issues that we have left un-addressed for all those years came bursting into the sunlight.

That was the shocking element; the violence in itself was not shocking, what was surprising was the extent to which it was spontaneous

and self-driven in certain parts of the country. Usually, violence in Kenya radiates outwards from State House. That is our history.

Your thoughts on 2012?

It's possible for people to talk themselves into a war, where you make it a self-fulfilling kind of thing where everybody says, "In 2012, it's going to be worse than 2007 because we haven't done this, we haven't done that.", but the only people who can stop it is us, as Kenyans.

So, what happens in 2012 is up to us.

I tell people that we have a gloom industry in Kenya now. It has become a fully fledged industry, it's well funded, it has some very articulate people who spend a lot of time saying how bad things are, and how we're going to have a war, and how maybe a war may even be a good thing.

Some people say that we [should] finish what we started so that we can start from a clean slate. These are demented kind of views that people are putting out.

What really is going to happen in 2012 is very much dependent on us, not only at this national level of the Government and its taskforces, its commissions and all those projects that we hear about and read about, but what we as Kenyans do between each other.

John Githongo has been an anti-corruption campaigner for many years and recently founded Inuka Kenya - a trust that aims to recapture the powerful moment of hope felt by all Kenyans in 2003 and convert it into lasting change created by and for Kenyans.

KuweniSerious. 2010.