

TRANSCRIPT . FEBRUARY 2010

## John Githongo: “My sense Is That Nairobianians Crave Normality.”

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

What have you found different since you came back?

I was away for about 3 years, I came back and I was a bit surprised to find that groups of friends from different tribes who used to sit down and have a beer together no longer do that. People who used to drive out to each others' homes, it doesn't happen as much.

That's a problem, and I think that fixing the problems that we face starts at that level, with us as individuals reaching out to each other in ways that help to break down some of the stereotypes that have become very strong in the way people talk and think these days.

It starts with the individual. *Ni sisi*, it's us – it starts with us. If you're waiting for Mr. Annan, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, if you're waiting for some taskforce or some commission to solve this problem, then I think that we're in big trouble.

Has the violence damaged our 'Kenyan-ness'?

One of the things that violence does is that it changes peoples' identities. A person can be a music producer, a golfer, a Rotarian, and then violence happens and – especially if that violence has an ethnic angle to it – all those other identities disappear

overnight, and you're left just hanging on with your singular identity of tribe.

I would push the question back to you; what are you doing, what am I doing to break down these barriers that have come up. The national psyche will only be sorted out by us.

You know, and I know, that if we created a National Psyche Taskforce – which is the way we Kenyans do – or, we can create the National Psyche Ministry, we can create a National Psyche Committee; all of us know it's a joke.

It starts with us and what we can do, what you can do, what I can do. If enough of us reach out, then that creates a wave that can then become something solid.

What we call it doesn't really matter, but starting the other way, expecting that some instrument that is the creation of Government or some other agency is going to do it won't work.

It starts with the actions that you and I take.

What is the role of the Kenyan middle class in all this?

My sense is that Nairobianians crave

normality; everyone wants things to be normal. Everyone would like to think that 2007/2008 didn't happen. Kenyans are good at that. In the 1990s, you'd have a riot in Nairobi, teargas, people screaming, running, shouting, people are hurt etc.

A day later, people are going to work, people are paying their mortgages, paying their car loans, on Friday evening the pubs are full again. We crave normality.

What has been exposed is that, we're very few of us who can afford that normality. The vast majority of Kenyans are living a much more complicated and difficult life, and they're beginning to get in our faces in different ways.

We see it with the type of crime that one sees, with the rise of vigilante youth and vigilante groups around the country. There's a whole host of trends that begin to interfere with this bubble that is comfortable for us in the middle class.

So, the bubble is going to be burst. There's a friend who told me the other day, "I have my head firmly in the sand." When an ostrich has its head firmly in the sand, the majority of its body is in the sun and [it] can be interfered with in ways that are very uncomfortable.

**Your thoughts on those who feel disconnected from all this?**

You're going to be burnt out of your Range Rover. Anybody sitting back thinking that you're going to watch problems on TV like in 2007.

We had the comfort [last time], we watched it on TV, it ended, Kofi Annan flew in, people shook hands and then we have this coalition. I'm not that certain that we'll have the comfort of being able to watch it on TV next time.

The TV might be the first thing to be taken away from us.

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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.**