

Speech: Remarks by ambassador at the prayer service for Kenya's 2017 elections

Dear Friends,

I'm grateful to the Provost for allowing me to address this gathering on behalf of the international community. I'd like to acknowledge the presence of my fellow Ambassadors in the congregation today.

We are here as friends of Kenya – friends of this great and beautiful country. As friends, we strive to support and strengthen Kenya; to walk alongside our Kenyan brothers and sisters in good times and in tough times.

The approaching elections are your elections, not ours; the choices are for Kenyans alone. But the elections are a time for all of us to stand together and to work together, and we will do so with you.

On 8 August, Kenyans will exercise one of their most important rights: to choose their leaders. It is a moment of great significance.

It has been a privilege, as a member of the congregation here at All Saints, to listen to and reflect on the sermons which have been preached on the theme of leadership over the past weeks.

Democracy is the best way to choose our political leaders. We know this in the United Kingdom, and we know it in Kenya.

But democracy is hard work. It involves real competition, debate, argument. Feelings are strongly held. The stakes are often high.

If democracy is to work for all of us, each of us bears a responsibility.

We must support and pray for those who are organizing these elections. It is not easy to be the referee, often under attack from both sides. It is vital that the IEBC be given the space to fulfil its role.

We stand in sorrow and in prayer with the family and friends of Chris Msando, a member of staff at the IEBC who was murdered this weekend, and with Maryanne Wairimu. As Kenya's leaders have said, his killers must be brought to justice and face the full force of the law; and his colleagues at the IEBC must be protected from harm as they go about their vital tasks.

We must all reject violence in this election, and reject words which may inspire violence. We must speak of what unites us as brothers and sisters, and hold to account those who seek to divide us or to provoke hatred.

We must support and pray for those working to keep the election safe; for those observing the polls to help make them free and fair; for the media who

inform all of us and help us reflect on the choices we can make.

And we must support and pray for the candidates aspiring for the great responsibility of political leadership.

Those who win will need to do so with generosity of spirit, working, once the democratic competition is over, to heal divisions and bring people together.

Those who lose will need to accept their loss, or where they feel moved to do so, to contest it peacefully under the rule of law.

Both winners and losers must remember that Kenya and Kenyans are far more important than any candidate or any election. They will need to accept the decisions of the people with grace and humility, and move onward. No-one must allow political competition to turn to bloodshed. No-one should die because of an election.

Friends,

We pray and work for peace, but let us not go into this election with fear in our hearts. This is a great country, in which people of many tribes and many faiths work together for the good of all. Its achievements have been and remain remarkable. Its democracy is a beacon and an inspiration for Africa. It attracts people from every part of the world to visit, live, work, and to play a part in Kenya's future.

My prayer is that Kenya goes into these elections with a commitment to peace, yes; but also with pride in what this country is, what it has achieved, and what it will continue to achieve in the future.