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OPINION

What Kenyans require is a movement, not fresh polls

By GABRIEL DOLAN Posted Friday, March 20 2009 at 17:27

For Christians, it is the season of Lent, a time of prayer, fasting and mercy as they reflect on the cross endured by their founder.

Kenyans can easily identify with the suffering Christ, for indeed they are a crucified people. Crucified by a coalition founded on guilt and dishonesty, tortured by unaccountable police and nailed by greedy opportunists at every street corner, we are a besieged and enraged nation.

One year after the formation of the coalition government, the nation's morale and moral fabric are in tatters. This is worrying.

What is even more disturbing is that we are looking to the same institutions and people who crucify us today to save us in 2012.

We are addicted to bad leadership, and we can't get enough of that drug. Honestly, if we continue like this, we are headed for perdition and doom.

Is this not clearly shown by the fact that it is only the Kamba, among the "Big Five" communities, that have not settled on their warlords?

YET THIS CATASTROPHE CAN BE avoided. We have got to start thinking outside the box — the box of Parliament and its 222 current members.

Politicians are holding us hostage and detaining 38 million Kenyans in one huge concentration camp called Kenya. Our minds are imprisoned by the nation's gatekeepers, and rather than choose to destroy the prison fences and liberate ourselves, we bargain for our security with our captors.

We may no longer have political prisoners at the Nyayo chambers, but we are all held captive and imprisoned by the excesses and deviousness of the legislators.

So thinking outside the box of Parliamentarians starts when we look within and discover the capacity and ability of the masses to create something that is new and better. I am not suggesting that we need a new political party.

We have far too many of them as it stands. Nor do we need to go back to the polls. We are not ready for another round of violence that would end up with the same old faces in power.

What is required is a movement that will channel the growing discontent and anger into something positive, creative, non-violent and inclusive. A social movement with a pro-poor agenda, which calls on Kenyans to be patriotic and to take part in building anew, is the most urgent agenda for the country.

This country is full of talented, capable, decent people who have left public life to politicians and warlords. A movement calls forth businesspeople, artists, farmers, musicians and writers and finds a role for all of them in rebuilding the nation.

Movements are built on passion for change and an end to injustice.

A movement is not another NGO. Movements don't give per diems or handouts, nor laze around in five-star coastal hotels.

The NGO culture has destroyed the nation's integrity, but a movement can rediscover it. Movements call on citizens to be generous with their time, talents and money and should be funded from within.

NGOs give charity to the poor, but movements go beyond that as they recognise that the poor are not just recipients of aid, but are citizens who must have an input in their own destiny.

The poor with spirit are citizens who are organised and have rediscovered their dignity and power.

Does this seem too idealistic and unrealistic to you? Well, consider the fact that Jesus of Nazareth himself started a movement that did not become an institutionalised, organised church until Constantine directed that Christianity become the official religion of the Roman Empire in 324.

JESUS CALLED PEOPLE TO SERVICE, generosity, self-sacrifice and to build communities of faith and action. He started with an ordinary bunch of people who ended up doing extraordinary things in leadership and service. All right, he was the son of God, but his message and mission were that we all have that same potential.

Faiths still inspire their faithful to that type of generosity, organisation and commitment, even if it is generally just reserved for religious activities and not public life. The food donation campaign by 13 radio stations has just had a huge response.

Kenyans clearly trust their DJs more than their politicians. I doubt if they would have given so generously if the food was entrusted to government officials.

The story of US President Barack Obama, who started as a community organiser and ended up at the White House, is an extraordinary one of a professionally organised movement funded for the most part by the poor.

We may not have an Obama, but we do have many Kenyans who are people of integrity and competence, and who can lead this movement. Movements need faces that they can recognise and identify with, and there are many such people out there.