

In Memory of Chris Msando: Murder Most Foul

Dear Chris,

It has been two years since we last spoke. A lot has happened, while you have been away. Eva, Allan, Alvin and Allison miss you a lot. The agony of your mother continues to haunt us. The sorrow of your sisters, brothers and friends weighs heavily on many. But the hope of a better tomorrow still beckons. Hope that your death and that of many others was not in vain.

Let me tell you what happened after your brutal torture and murder. Your assassination was roundly condemned. Announcements made on investigations went nowhere. The 8 August 2017 elections proceeded. You remember the concerns you always raised about the electronic transmission of results? It played out in exactly the way you and others feared it would. The system froze at 8:30 pm on Election Day and what happened thereafter, remains a mystery.

The Chairman of the IEBC (Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission) could not confirm or deny if the system had been manipulated. He gave the Glomar response. The one that brings chills down the spine, reminding one on why you paid the ultimate sacrifice. Why they permanently got rid of you. They knew you would have detected and made known the manipulation of the transmission of the presidential result. The games you had alerted the Commission to. The "tunnel" created to the servers. Those servers, which like your murderers, continue to be kept in secrecy.

I will spare you, my brother, the details of what happened thereafter. Baby Samantha Pendo is too young, to tell you of her ordeal under the security forces. Unfortunately, there are more than 100 young men and women lying closer to you with

more credible testimonies than I could ever deliver. The lives lost in the pursuit of political interests. In the struggle for electoral justice. The collateral damage in the quest for political and economic control by a tiny elite – the sons of Kenya's first President and Vice President, respectively. The reign of the dynasties and the clamor of the so-called *Hustlers* to find a place in the ruling class.

My brother, I know how much you cared about your work at the IEBC. So, indulge me in a bit of gossip that I know you disliked. Do you know that your position is still vacant at the IEBC? Your shoes are seemingly too big to fit. Oh, and the rest of the Commission is in shambles. I am sure you remember the Commissioner with long dreadlocks. The one you often appeared on television with to explain how the KIEMS (Kenya Integrated Election Management System) gadgets worked. Naively thinking that your honesty was enough to change a path the powers had destined years before you started your jobs. Thinking that you could out-manoeuvre 'the system.' The real owners of the country. She resigned before the October election.

And that young man who was hired to manage the Secretariat? That one with previous zero management experience. The one who pleaded for your director to be brought back to the Commission after he had been suspended. The one who feared that with you in charge, their plot would be foiled. The one who was among the last people you had a meeting within the office shortly before you disappeared. The one who asked you to return to the office after your television presentation. Yes, the one who was always close to the powers that be. The political class abandoned him. And do you know what happened next? Three Commissioners resigned in solidarity with the young man. I know it will come as a surprise to you that the fluent Swahili-speaking Commissioner was among those three. But your Chairman is still hanging in there, with two unlikely allies. Those two Commissioners who disrespected him the most. The

ones who openly defied him all the time.

My brother, I digressed. I know you are curious to know what happened in 2018. Dr. Miguna Miguna swore in the People's President Raila Odinga on 30 January 2018. It was one of the shortest terms in *office*. It lasted one month, for he voluntarily gave it up on 9 March 2018. The country was perplexed to see him shaking hands with "his brother" President Uhuru Kenyatta at Harambee House. In the Kenyan style of avoidance disorder, we resorted to humor and labelled it a *Handcheque*. The country was told that the journey to Canaan was still on. The crocodiles had disrupted it but that their team of experts would build bridges to deliver Kenyans to Canaan. Only if they knew how black people are currently ill-treated in Canaan, they would not dare promise us that! Millions of shillings have been spent on "collecting views" from *wananchi*. And yet, the report of the experts was probably finalized before they even started their rendezvous. It is the usual elite bargain. The dynasty ganging up to change the constitution to perpetuate their hold on power and the economy.

Speaking of the economy, Chris, it is in peril. According to data from the Central Bank of Kenya, as of January our total debt stood at 5.2 trillion, one of the highest in Africa giving us a debt ratio to GDP of 56%.

If it were not for the remittances from the Diaspora averaging Ksh 24 billion per month, the recently floated *kachumbari* bond, the bailout by the World Bank among other fiscal policies, the situation would have been worse. Corruption is at its highest peak. According to the [Corruption Tracker](#) website, the total amount of money stolen from public coffers stands at a staggering KES 8,061,872,800,000 since 2014. The intra-Jubilee Party fights have one silver lining as the different factions are competing to expose each other. Each day they wash their dirty linen in public, allowing us to have a glimpse of the extent of their theft.

Chris, I know you do not have much time to read all this. You have better company. I can imagine what it must be to listen to the Kenyan heroines and heroes of the democratic struggle who rest in peace with you. The numerous men and women murdered by the Kenyatta I and Moi regimes. Those who lost their lives in the various post-election violence episodes. Those who paid the ultimate price in the liberation struggle. But spare me a few more minutes to tell you about the latest in our political machinations.

I will invoke the name of the love of your life to get your attention. Do you remember Eva's speech at your funeral service? It was moving and powerful. Her words, "may you not have peace", continue to haunt us each day. Collectively as a country, we have found peace elusive. Those high-ranking politicians who tried to malign you, to cover up your assassination, many of them are now claiming that their lives are in danger. It is as if the hunter has become the hunted. Remember those who refused the services of foreign intelligence services to unravel your murder? They are now busy visiting those foreign countries in the name of capacity building to undertake investigations. Oh, my friend, Chris, I can hear your quintessential booming laughter.

You must be saddened to see the hopelessness among the youth. The unemployment rate is unsustainably high. There is a sustained gutting down of our education sector with a Cabinet Secretary who de-emphasizes university education. The running down of the health services with no respect for the nurses and doctors. The pain of farmers who have no competitive prices for their maize and yet the cartels are bringing in imports. The extra-judicial killings of young men in marginalised neighbourhoods. The depression of a nation, the devastating mental illness with the associated spike in suicides, femicides and homicides. The plunder of our environment in the race for resource extraction.

Knowing you, I must stop enumerating the problems. You were

always the ultimate optimist, pragmatist and problem solver. There is no challenge that was insurmountable to you. You always defined the challenge and provided options, even on what appeared to be impossible tasks like protecting the servers!

Chris, I will finish on a rather positive note. That despite the gloom, there is hope. Young men and women are organizing on social media in ways unimaginable to those of our age. They have initiated social justice centres throughout the country to push back on extra-judicial killings. The *#SwitchOffKPLC* and *The DeColonize* movements are leading on fighting off the energy cartels and for environmental justice. The fledging *Kenya Tuitakayo Movement*, continues to unify Kenyans around common objectives. The Limuru III meeting on 7 July re-energized the calls for a grass-root based leadership to secure the leadership of the State and defend the 2010 Constitution. New political parties such as the United Green Movement, Ukweli Party, among others promise alternative leadership to the country. There is hope that the struggle for social, political and economic liberation is not in vain.

Let me stop here for now, for I know that on this second anniversary of your murder, there are many others waiting in line for your attention.

Rest in peace my brother.

My very best regards,

Miriam