News



Sr. Virginia Njeri of the Religious of the Assumption talks to residents of Kawangware, a low-income residential area in Nairobi, July 22. The sisters conduct peace campaigns to urge residents to maintain peace and avert violence during elections. (GSR photo/Doreen Ajiambo)



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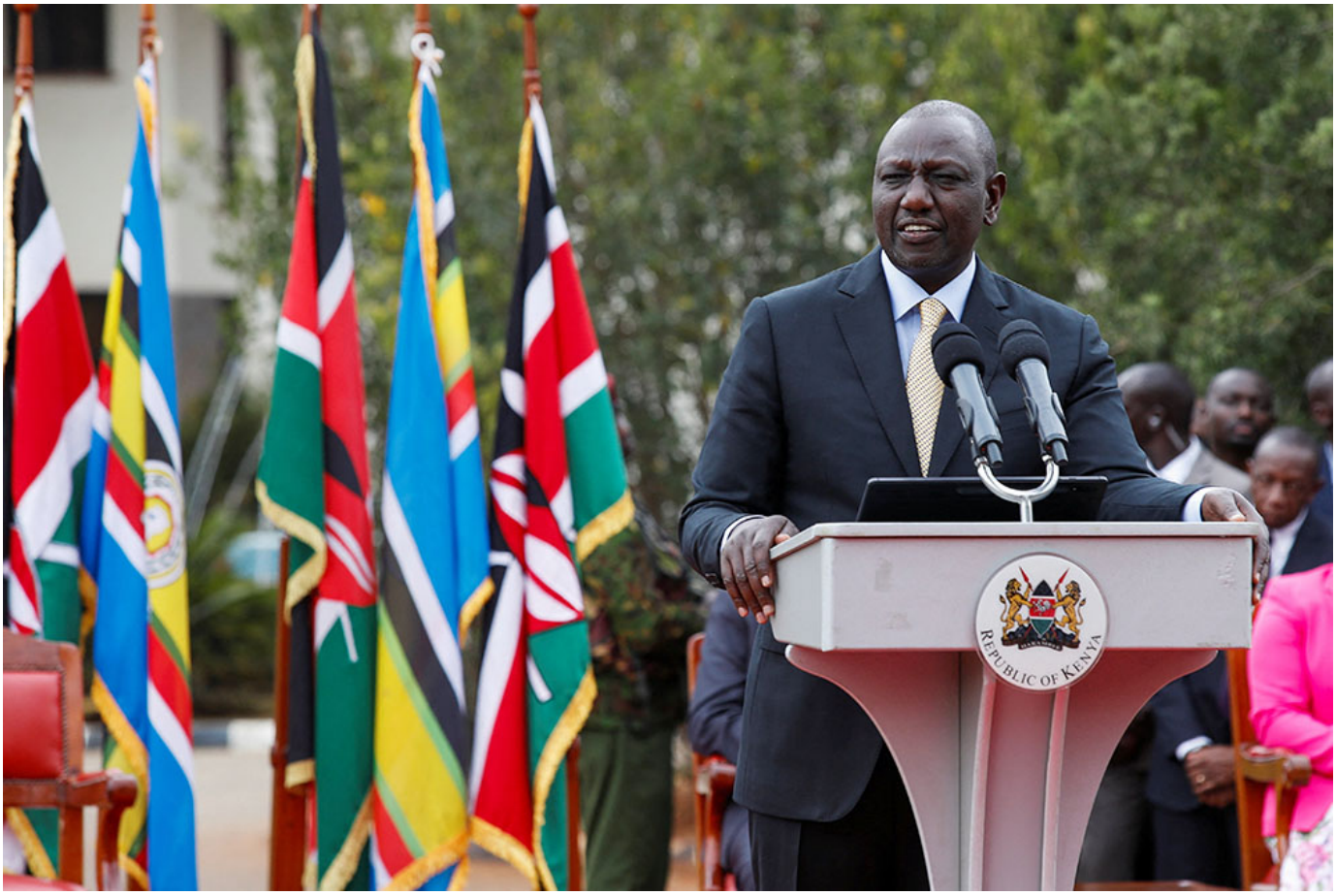
NAIROBI, Kenya — September 9, 2022

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Religious leaders, including sisters, have praised Kenyans for maintaining peace and calm after the country's Supreme Court on Sept. 5 upheld William Ruto's presidential victory over Raila Odinga.

The unanimous verdict was delivered by Martha Koome, chair of the seven-member court, ending weeks of political uncertainty and delivering a blow to Odinga, who had alleged fraud in the Aug. 9 presidential election results. The electoral body had declared Ruto the winner with 50.5% of the vote (more than 7.1 million votes), while Odinga received 48.85% (roughly 6.9 million).

Koome threw out all of Odinga's accusations. The court rejected his argument that the electoral technology failed or was tempered by Ruto's party agents. It dismissed allegations of voter suppression and ballot-stuffing by the electoral body. Koome also noted that the eleventh-hour boardroom rupture among electoral commissioners was not grounds to nullify the poll's outcome.



Kenyan President-elect William Ruto speaks after the Supreme Court upheld his win in Nairobi Sept. 5. Catholic bishops in Kenya are urging citizens to accept the verdict of the Supreme Court on the Aug. 9 elections. (CNS/Reuters/Monicah Mwangi)

"This is a unanimous decision," she said. "The petitions are hereby dismissed. As a consequence, we declare the first respondent as president-elect," setting the stage for Ruto to be sworn into office on Sept. 13, the first Tuesday after the court delivers its verdict following a presidential petition.

Church leaders thought that the court's declaration to uphold Ruto's win would plunge the country into violence as in previous presidential elections. In 2007, for example, election violence claimed 1,300 lives and displaced 600,000 people. In the 2017 elections, police killed more than 100 people who were protesting the rigging of the election.

"It's interesting to see the country is peaceful even after the elections," said Sr. Mary Wandabusi of the Franciscan Sisters of St. Anna. "We now have a new president, and life is slowly returning to normal. People have resumed their daily businesses. I want to thank all the Kenyans for maintaining peace."



Judges of the Kenyan Supreme Court enter the courtroom Aug. 31, before a hearing over a petition seeking to invalidate the outcome of the Aug. 9 presidential election in Nairobi. (CNS/Reuters/Baz Ratner)

Wandabusi is among hundreds of sisters countrywide who participated in peace campaigns and civic education to prevent violence before, during and after the election. She said their effort to talk to people about the importance of maintaining peace and participating in the exercise of voting prevented the country from plunging into violence.

"I am grateful that our efforts paid off," said Wandabusi, who was among those in charge of peace campaigns in western Kenya. "We shared love with everyone, and we can now witness the peace in the country. As a peace champion, I thank all the stakeholders who helped us do our peace campaigns peacefully."

Sr. Virginia Njeri of the Religious of the Assumption, who led peace campaigns in the country's capital of Nairobi, thanked Kenyans for embracing each other and resisting being used by politicians to cause violence or hate each other. She said their peace campaign message in slums and on radio programs helped to avert violence that has overcome the city in previous elections.

"We, as peace champions, are very grateful for the peace that has been experienced in the country. We really thank the Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya for the civic education given to us that enabled us to transmit peace to all the areas in Nairobi, especially the hotspots," she told Global Sisters Report.

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"We also thank our dear Kenyans for adhering to peace since the election time up to date. We continue praying for our leaders and the entire Kenya government as we wait for the peaceful inauguration."

Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde, of Kenya's Mombasa Archdiocese, told GSR that the church had played a key role in ensuring peace, love and harmony prevail in the country after a closely contested election.

"We tried to go to the grassroots to preach peace," said Kivuva Musonde, who is also the chair of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops. "I am grateful people listened to us. We have now to accept the verdict of the court and move forward. Let's unite as a country and show love to each other."

Kivuva Musonde noted as an observer of the just-concluded election that there was so much fraud in the process. He urged the electoral body and political parties to do a better job in future elections.



Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde of Mombasa, Kenya, reads a statement of religious leaders following a dispute over the presidential election results, during a news conference in Nairobi Aug. 17. (CNS/Fredrick Nzwili)

"We wanted transparency during the whole process, but it's hard to say it was achieved when you look at how things are," he said. "There were many discrepancies and election malpractices. I can confidently say so many things didn't go the right way. There was voter bribery and poor networks that affected the process."

He pleaded with Kenyans, who are divided and have always voted along tribe lines since independence in 1963, to embrace the new president as a God-chosen leader and work to move the country forward. He also urged Ruto to reach out to all Kenyans, including Odinga and outgoing President Uhuru Kenyatta (who campaigned against Ruto's candidacy), and unite everyone for the betterment of the country.

"As religious leaders, we have visited the president [Kenyatta], the president-elect [Ruto], and even Odinga. From their body language, you can see [Kenyatta and Odinga] are in pain," said Kivuva Musonde, noting that the president-elect still donned his usual smile.

"We have advised the president-elect to focus on uniting Kenyans. He is the president for all of us despite different political views. We will continue to pray for peace."

Related: Sisters, church leaders call for peace amid Kenya's election protests
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