

MASHUJAA DAY

Genuine heroes don't apply for the honours, let people surprise them



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Many honourees merit but just as many do not.

Our independence commemoration begins with celebrations of our heroes and heroines on October 20th of every year.

This day has been marked as Kenyatta Day in honour of those who fought for our independence from colonialists represented by Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, our founding President.

In 2010, we renamed Kenyatta Day, Mashujaa Day and engraved it in our Constitution to celebrate not only our independence heroes/heroines but other latter-day heroes/heroines.

As a country, we really haven't achieved a genuine consensus on the real meaning of heroism, who should be celebrated on Mashujaa Day, and how and when they qualify.

The common definition of a hero/heroine is a person who is admired/idealised for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities. S/he is a role model, an inspirational leader, who gives genuine meaning to life and hope to others.

Someone who by their words/deeds and courage makes you want to do extraordinary things and believe in yourself. Someone like Eliud Kipchoge.

For many of us, especially those born years after independence in 1963, the connection between our freedom fighters and our independence has been almost severed by the manner in which the surviving freedom fighters and their descendants have been neglected and ignored by successive governments.

Instead, successive governments' chosen brands of heroes/heroines

give little meaning to heroism and do not inspire.

National Honours are awarded by the President to commemorate mainly Mashujaa and Jamhuri Days. According to the National Honours Act, a person merits the conferment of a national honour by exhibiting exemplary qualities, actions, or achievements of heroism, sacrifice, bravery, patriotism, or leadership for the defence, benefit, or betterment of Kenya.

The Act establishes the National and County Governments Honours Advisory Committee, the Parliamentary Honours Advisory Committee and the Judiciary Honours Advisory Committee to process those they recommend to the President for various honours and awards.

Successive presidents have defined the character of the heroes/heroines they grant national honours and awards, some are awarded merely because they have been appointed/elected to State/Public positions even though conferment of a national honour requires that beyond the election/appointment, they must have made an exemplary contribution to better/bring honour, glory/pride to Kenya.

Philanthropists whose generosity is inspired by a genuine desire to help the less fortunate should be celebrated but not those who do it as a means for tax rebates or to build their public or political image.

What is so outstanding/extraordinary, generous or courageous or noble about a person who becomes a hero/heroine by ascending to State/Public office or by helping

others because they can afford to or for political self-aggrandizement? There are many heroes/heroines we encounter every day, extraordinary people doing extraordinary things with great love to/for others without expecting even a thank you, yet they usually go unrewarded and unrecognised but this does not deter them from doing their best each day.

The Act requires the names of the honourees to be published in at least two daily newspapers for public participation. This is critical but it is always ignored. It is gaudy or even crass to require honourees to complete their own application forms to be conferred national honours.

They should be anonymously and secretly identified and surprised during the conferment of the honours.

They should not be self-identified and canvass for national honours; this is a self-entitled self-belief that one is inherently deserving or worthy of the privilege, which is the very antithesis of heroism and honour. Therefore, the Act should be amended to give greater meaning to national honours by establishing genuine criteria and robust procedures of anonymous public identification and selection processes of honourees by the established committees.

True and meaningful heroism is not self-determined, it is determined by others through broader public consensus, genuine admiration, pride, and honour.

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Why there's no climate justice with rising debt

MOHAMED ALMAS

Climate change is no longer a distant threat; it's a crisis already affecting people's lives and livelihoods, especially in countries like Kenya.

To address the climate crisis, we must tackle its intertwined issues, such as debt and austerity measures, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.

The connection between social justice and climate justice, in Kenya's situation is crucial. The detrimental effects of debt and austerity measures on Kenyans call on lawmakers to take action, advocate for lenient austerity measures or debt cancellation. The importance of such actions in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASAL) regions cannot be gainsaid.

In Kenya and many parts of the world, climate change exacerbates existing inequalities and injustices. The poorest and most marginalised communities suffer the harshest consequences of environmental degradation, droughts, floods, and food insecurity.

The vulnerable populations often lack resources and infrastructure to adapt to climate change or recover from its impacts. Simultaneously, they face another critical challenge - debt and austerity measures.

Kenyans bear a significant burden of debt and austerity measures imposed by international financial institutions. These debts often come with harsh conditions, such as structural adjustment programmes, that undermine social services, health care, education, and employment opportunities.

Austerity measures limit public spending, leading to reduced access to essential services and a lower quality of life. Climate debt highlights the responsibility of wealthier nations, primarily in the Global North, for their historical and ongoing contributions to climate change.

These nations have emitted the lion's share of greenhouse gases and benefited from industrialisation, while countries in the Global South, like Kenya, have suffered disproportionately. The Global North owes a debt to the Global South for the loss and damage. To address the intertwined challenges of debt, austerity and climate change, Kenyan leaders must take decisive action. Here are two paths they can consider:

1. They can advocate for more humane austerity measures that protect social services and the well-being of their citizens. This will not only ease the burden on vulnerable communities but also enable them better adapt to climate change's impacts.

2. They can also join the global call for debt cancellation, especially in exchange for climate action commitments from wealthier nations. Cancelling debt payments would free up substantial resources that can be redirected toward climate action and supporting ASAL communities.

President William Ruto's initiatives to raise revenue offer a promising opportunity. By channelling the funds previously allocated to debt payments into climate action, Kenya can significantly enhance its climate resilience. The Green Energy Strategy and Innovation programme, for instance, can receive much-needed funding to accelerate the transition to sustainable energy sources. Finally, connecting social justice with climate justice is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic approach to tackling the climate crisis.

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Marrakech meet didn't address Africa's debt



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The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank annual meetings concluded in Marrakech, Morocco.

The last such meeting was in Kenya in 1973, coincidentally the year of the military coup against the elected government of Allende in Chile that ushered in the dictatorship of Pinochet, laying foundations for neoliberalism.

In the decades that followed, the IMF and the World Bank have championed this neoliberal model, rooted in colonial, patriarchal and extractive systems across Africa.

Such systems have enforced variations of structural adjustment and fiscal consolidation programmes that have profoundly undermined development and capacity of African states to chart their own independent course. The result is a rise in regular debt and economic crises.

These crises have then been used to justify imposition of harsh loan conditions and coercive policy advice on African governments, perpetuating dependency and stripping away the capacity of states through cuts to public spending.

Although some of the rhetoric has changed in recent years, in practice the Fund and the Bank are still attached to this cult of austerity, undermining progress on health, education and other public services and blocking Africa's ability to respond and adapt to the climate crisis. After four lost decades to Africa development, it is time the IMF learns from its failures.

ActionAid's research has shown that IMF enforced cuts and freezes to public sector wage bills have consistently blocked the recruitment of urgently needed teachers, nurses, midwives and other public sector workers.

We have documented the gendered impact of these cuts, with women being the first to lose access to services, the first to lose opportunities for decent work and the first to absorb the rising tide of unpaid care and domestic work.

Yet the IMF policy advice remains little changed despite many hoping last week's meetings in Morocco would begin signalling a new season of change. Countries are still forced to negotiate solutions one-by-one - denying the systemic causes of the debt crisis that clearly require a collective response.

It is time for a systemic solution to the debt crisis that goes beyond the common framework and that reforms the outdated international financial architecture, including through ensuring a fair representation of African countries.

Our African governments should work together to demand a coordinated regional action across Africa to resolve the debt crisis - rather than allowing the blame to be placed onto individual countries. Our finance ministers should follow up their call in 2022 for a UN tax convention by making an even bolder call for collective action on debt.

The IMF continues to support regressive taxes such as VAT, passing the burden onto those least able to pay. There are many progressive and gender-responsive tax alternatives that can focus on raising reve-

nue for public services from the wealthiest individuals and firms.

Earlier this year ActionAid produced a policy brief on the Vicious Cycle linking the debt crisis and climate crisis. Indebted countries are forced to earn foreign currency rapidly and do so by investing in fossil fuel extraction and industrial agriculture - thereby accelerating the climate crisis.

At present, the IMF and World Bank make matters worse by continuing to subsidise fossil fuels and by failing to recognise how debt is undermining progress on climate adaptation. Our governments should recognise these connections and make debt cancellation and debt renegotiation a priority in climate finance negotiations at COP28 and other international spaces.

Climate finance, including for loss and damage, must be based on grants and global taxes, not loans.

Finally, African governments should recognise these institutions are fundamentally colonial in nature, formed before most African countries achieved independence.

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