

Bio sketch

Maina Kiai

Maina Kiai, an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, is the former, and founding, Chairman of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), an independent government body established to protect and promote human rights in Kenya. He left at the expiry of his 5 year term, deciding not to renew the term, and as Chairman, led the KNCHR to recognition as a credible, well-functioning and independent body that was unafraid to challenge the highest authorities in Kenya in pursuit of its objectives. He was instrumental in KNCHR's work in the public recognition that corruption is a violation of human rights, and especially economic rights; the work on police excesses, including extra-judicial executions; the work on use of state resources and hate speech in political campaigns, and in the work on using cultural institutions to validate women's property inheritance rights in Luo Nyanza.

Currently Maina is making documentary films on issues of social justice as an empowerment tool where ordinary-and traditionally voiceless--people get opportunities to speak out and think through issues of concern to them. So far, and working as a Director of Voxcom Ltd, and InformAction, a non-profit multi-media organization, Maina has produced 3 films on Organizing and Campaigning for Change focusing on the Barack Obama campaign in the USA in 2008; "Change we Can" on what leadership means in Kenya and what needs to be done to get good leadership in Kenya; and "Getting Justice: Kenya's deadly game of wait and see," on issues around justice for the election crisis in Kenya from 2008. All have been aired on national TV in Kenya, except Getting Justice which will be aired at the end of September 2009.

Maina is a member of the Steering Committee of the World Movement for Democracy, a loose coalition of pro-democracy groups and individuals started in 1999. He is also a member of the Steering Committee of the African Democracy Forum, the regional African grouping of the World Movement for Democracy.

Prior to taking up his position with the National Commission, Maina Kiai was the Director, Africa Programs at the International Human Rights Law Group (now Global Rights) based in Washington DC from July 2001. The International Human Rights Law Group is a capacity building and strengthening organization that works with civil society organizations across the world on the basis that defending human rights is best done on the ground and in the respective countries.

Before that, Mr. Kiai was the Africa Director at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London, UK from 1999 to 2001, where he has the record of being the longest serving Africa Director in the organization. He played a key role in the decentralization of the International Secretariat to locations outside London, and was a leader in change management, including increasing the scope of AI's work to include economic and social rights.

Mr. Kiai is the founding Executive Director of the non-governmental Kenya Human Rights Commission (one of Kenya's leading NGOs), where he served from September 1992 to September 1998. At its inception, the KHRC had no funding and only one staff (Mr. Kiai himself) and at the time he left, it was one of the leading human rights NGOs in Kenya with a key role in advocacy work in the protection of human rights. The staff, volunteers and interns by 1998 numbered more than 20 spread across Kenya, and the organization had funding of about US \$800,000.

Among his major achievements in KHRC was the revitalization of the constitutional reform process, which Mr. Kiai spearheaded by organizing and writing the Proposal for a Model Constitution in 1995 in conjunction with the Law Society of Kenya and the International Commission of Jurists (Kenya Chapter). This Proposal for a Model Constitution was used as a mobilization tool, leading to the formation of the Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs), which in turn led to the formation of the National Convention Assembly and its Executive wing, the National Convention Executive Committee (NCEC). Mr. Kiai was an active member in all these forums.

Mr. Kiai taught law at the University of Nairobi, and was the Archibald McDougall Professor of Law at the University Of West Virginia School Of Law in the US in 1998. He has published widely in various journals and newspapers in Africa, Europe and the USA, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Times* and *Christian Science Monitor*. From 1995 to 1997, and again from 2001 to 2003 was a columnist for the *Sunday Nation* newspapers. He has also been a correspondent of the London based *African Topics* from 1996-1998. He has also appeared as speaker at many national and international conferences and seminars, as well as on Television in Africa, Europe and USA. He was educated at the University of Nairobi and attained a Master of Laws degree from the Harvard Law School in the USA.

In 2003, he was honored by being installed as a Chief of the Mende community in Sierra Leone for services in human rights to the community including capacity building on human rights and democracy and support for human rights in Sierra Leone. And in 2005 he was named the "Jurist of the Year" by the International Commission of Jurists, Kenya Section. In 2008, Maina was the Open Society Initiative Africa Public Policy Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, where he focused on political leadership issues in Africa, vis-à-vis the Obama campaign.

As Chairman of the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, Mr. Kiai focused on creating a strong independent institution focusing on the entire spectrum of rights, including establishing the recognition that corruption is a human rights issue, and that the way to create a better society in Kenya must start with establishing mechanisms—from the bottom up—for accountability of political leaders.