

# Kenya, Then and Now

by **Rob Martin** (July 2014)

On 12 December 2013, Kenya celebrated a half century of independence. Progress has been made, and although Kenya remains imperfect, it obviously did not deserve the bloody and barbaric 21 September 2013 attack islamist militants made on the Westgate Shopping Centre in Nairobi, the capital.

Kenya had an unpleasant colonial experience. It, and Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, were the UK's settler colonies in Africa. Thousands of English men and women flooded into Kenya. Few can have had a better life than the settlers in Kenya. They stole some of the most attractive land on this planet, they had vast amounts of money, armies of servants and life was a non-stop sexual free-for-all. An English joke asked, "Are you married, or do you live in Nairobi?" A Canadian, Edouard Girouard, was Governor of British East Africa from 1909 to 1912.

Africans would not accept subordination in their own country. In the 1950s, armed struggle against colonialism and settler domination broke out, led by an organization called the Land and Freedom Army. The Governor declared an Emergency in 1952. The colonial authorities, backed by British soldiers, sought to defeat what they mistakenly called Mau Mau. Both sides committed atrocities. The authorities arrested prominent nationalists and staged an Alice-in-wonderland trial at the end of which all the accused, including Jomo Kenyatta, were acquitted of leading and organizing Mau Mau. The Emergency ended in 1960, fighting was transmuted into negotiating and on 12 December 1963, Kenya gained independence under Prime Minister Jomo Kenyatta, who morphed into President one year later. President Kenyatta headed a government defined by corruption and oppression. Political opponents, even ones who had been close associates, Tom Mboya, Pio Pinto and JM Kariuki, were murdered. Kenyatta turned the country into a one party state. Only his party, the Kenya African National Union, was permitted to operate. Kenya did not follow its neighbour Tanzania, and turn itself legally into a one-party state. Kenya's constitution contemplated multi-party politics. Extra-legal measures were used to prevent parties other than KANU contesting elections. Kenya was a republic, but the style of government was monarchical. Whenever Kenyatta drove through the main street of Nairobi, called, oddly enough, Kenyatta Avenue, police cleared the sidewalks of pedestrians and the roadway of cars, to allow him to sweep by in his enormous stretch black Mercedes.

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