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## TOWARDS THE FUTURE

As Kenya looks to the future it has enormous potential in its people, its farming and its natural resources, and in its vibrant commercial and industrial economy. At the same time it is plagued by widespread poverty and contrasting extreme wealth, and by political tension and corruption. These issues undermine the ability of the country to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the skills and energy of its people, the diversity of resources, and the capacity of its commercial and industrial infrastructure.

For Kenya to be able to realize this potential it will have to address directly the issues of poverty and corruption. The continued growth of the economy depends upon an expansion in the purchasing power and productive energy of the people. While government policy continues to permit significant resources to be provided to those who already control the wealth of the country, the majority will be unable to gain the health, education, and income that would enable them to fulfill their potential contribution to the development of the nation.

Redistribution of land from the large farms to those who have little land could reduce both inequality in the distribution of resources and the political tension that this inequality produces. Land ownership has been the basis of much of the wealth of the elites, so such redistribution would only be likely to occur were an alternative source of wealth available to them.

Under pressure from countries and institutions that provide loans to Kenya, such as Germany, Sweden, and the World Bank, the government is altering its role in the country's economic development. In the past, important sectors of the economy have had significant government involvement in their activity. These include the national airline, Kenya Airways, the railway company, and the tea and coffee marketing corporations. Today the government is selling its

interests to private investors.

Were the land-owning elite willing to sell some of their land to small farmers, and invest what they gain in private industry and commerce, then the land issue would lessen in intensity, jobs would be available in industry and commerce, and addressing issues of land and jobs would contribute to a reduction in political tensions. The poor would gain access to land, job opportunities for the poor and middle class would increase, and the wealthy would gain access to different opportunities to invest their wealth. Were this combined with an end to political violence and corruption and to the siphoning off of government resources by the elites, then genuine investment to benefit the majority of Kenyans could occur. Improved security, health and education, better transportation and telephone communications, and reduced taxes on agricultural inputs such as tractors, plows and fertilizers are among the ways in which government actions could stimulate the productivity of the majority of Kenyans.

In the absence of such changes in the economic, social, and political structure of the country, the future is bleak. Poverty will increase, political tension will mount, and the nation's potential to become one of Africa's dominant countries will be wasted. This is the challenge that faces Kenya as it enters the 21st Century. It has the potential. Powerful and selfish interests and individuals currently prevent that potential from developing, but the vitality of the majority of Kenyans and the vision and bravery of new leaders, offer an alternative and much brighter future.

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