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IS IT FINALLY RAILA ODINGA'S TIME

February is D-month for the election of the next African Union's next chairman of the commission that will take over from the former Chadian prime minister, Moussa Faki, whose eight-year tenure ends with the vote. Faki took over from Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma in 2017. Is it finally the former Kenyan PM Raila Odinga's time?

As the African Union prepares for the pivotal election of its next chairman this February, the continental body certainly stands at a crossroads marked by significant leadership transitions. The upcoming vote will not only usher in a new leader to succeed Moussa Faki, who has steered the organisation since 2017 following Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma's tenure, but it is also a moment to, reflect on the achievements and challenges of Faki's eight years in office. This transition could also set the stage for fresh new perspectives and renewed strategies to deal with the challenges Africa faces and that could shape the continent's future. As Member States cast their votes, they will be determining not just

successor, but also the direction for the African Union Commission (AUC) in addressing Africa's pressing issues.

“THE UPCOMING AU COMMISSION ELECTION COULD MARK A HISTORIC MOMENT FOR RAILA ODINGA AS HE VIES FOR LEADERSHIP, BACKED BY KEY AFRICAN NATIONS.



The AUC is the secretariat of the African Union and manages the day-to-day activities of the pan-African bloc. The position carries significant power, and as the AU now participates in the G20, the AUC will not only attend these meetings but also manage the continent during a period of geopolitical uncertainty due to the Trump presidency and its potential impact on Africa. An ISS paper from 2020 argued that 'the AUC chair needs to be both technically sound in the management of the commission and a seasoned diplomat to deal with the various stakeholders in the diplomatic space'; it appears that Faki was able to achieve this. However, the ongoing conflicts in Sudan and Eastern Congo continue to plague his tenure.

The winner must get support either by consensus or at least two-thirds of the 55 African Heads of State. The anticipation is certainly building for the upcoming vote on February 25 at the AU heads of state meeting. Veteran leader Raila Odinga, a prominent figure in this race, some analyst say embodies both experience and vision, making him a formidable contender. The outcome of this election will undoubtedly shape regional dynamics and set the tone for collaboration and progress within Africa.

Who are the candidates?

But although Odinga is the frontrunner, he does face stiff competition from **Djibouti's Mahamoud Ali Youssouf and Madagascar's Radrian Mandrato**.

During the **Mjadala Afrika debate in December, Djibouti's Mahamoud Ali Youssouf said** : 'Africa is moving forward and it's doing its level best to be on an international level. We want an integrated and peaceful Africa. If I'm elected, in terms of peace and security-early warning system, we are going to strengthen the peace and security council'.

Odinga, who introduced himself as a "son of Africa," also greeted the audience in Arabic, Kiswahili, and English, saying he was an Afro-optimist and, having served his country for decades, had gained experience in managing public affairs.

Madagascar's Radrian Mandrato, a former Finance and Foreign Affairs Minister, said Africa is dynamic and while Africa is moving forward and then there is the AU that doesn't have the capacity to move it forward'.

#RailaforAUC #UnitedAfrica

This is just some of the social media hashtags that Odinga, the former Kenyan Prime Minister, has been using as part of his campaign to win the hearts and minds of African leaders for the African Union chairmanship. Odinga has been lobbying African leaders, from South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa to Nigeria's Bola Tinubu to Tanzania's Samia Hassan to Egypt's Abdel Fatah el-Sissi.

The leader of the Kenya Opposition coalition, Azimio, has been crisscrossing the African continent. During the last week of January alone, Odinga was a guest at the African Heads of States Energy Summit in Tanzania. There, Odinga met the presidents of Mauritania, Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Djibouti, and Burundi.

After that he jetted off to Cairo. Odinga also accompanied President William Ruto's state visit to Egypt with Egypt's el-Sissi. Odinga's recent tour across Africa underscores the significance of diplomatic engagement and Odinga's diplomatic efforts have illustrated a proactive approach to building alliances that can enhance economic and social development across borders. Furthermore, his presence in Cairo during President William Ruto's state visit to Egypt emphasised the importance of solidarity among African nations in tackling shared issues.

Raila's Vision

Last year, the 79-year-old Raila unveiled his eight point-agenda. The agenda primarily focuses on Africa's economic transformation; intra-African trade; financial independence; agricultural transformation; gender equity and equality; climate action; continental integration; and peace and security.

In Raila's vision he plans to boost Africa's financial independence from external players such as Western and Asian powers. Odinga stated that he "will advocate for the reform of the global financial architecture to ensure Africa's equitable participation in global economic decisions." Raila's vision for Africa's financial independence seems to not merely call for reform, but a transformative blueprint that seeks to reshape the continent's economic landscape. 'I will prioritise opportunity, dignity, and security for women and girls across the continent and fully address marginalisation, exclusion, and discrimination against women and girls' is Odinga's agenda on gender equity.

East Africa's Time

It's East Africa's time to lead the organisation and Odinga has the full support of Ruto and the region. So far the East African Community (EAC) countries that have come out in support of Raila include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Raila has visited several heads of state in January and met the heads of state in SADC - South Africa, Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, and Mozambique, who, according to reports, have pledged their support.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

According to Raila's team, they have also secured support from the eight ECOWAS countries, which include Nigeria, Ivory Coast, The Gambia, Senegal, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, and Liberia.

Who is Raila Odinga?

The former engineer, academic, parliamentarian, and later Prime Minister is also the leader of the opposition Azimio coalition. He has also contested the Kenyan presidential election five times. Odinga and his family are part of the political establishment in Kenya. His father, Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, led independence struggles in the 1950s and later served as the country's first vice president. In 1969, Jomo

CANDIDATE FOR THE AU COMMISSION CHAIRPERSON

Kenyatta's government detained him, making him a prominent left-wing opposition politician. He has been relentless in the pursuit of political change in the East African powerhouse.

Despite facing setbacks, including the five unsuccessful presidential bids, Odinga's enduring influence as a prominent left-wing politician shaped the discourse around governance and social justice in Kenya.

Odinga's last rodeo

Despite his advanced age of 79, Odinga appears to possess the energy necessary to guide the continental body through challenging geopolitical times. Odinga's political journey underscores a remarkable blend of resilience and strategic insight.

His courage to spearhead protest marches during the tenures of Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto reflects not only his commitment to social justice but also his ability to galvanize support in turbulent times. As the youth demographic grows rapidly across the continent, Odinga's capacity to engage this vibrant population will be crucial. Given the high proportion of youth on the continent, the question arises: will Odinga possess the stamina and energy necessary for a 4-year term to lead the continental body and effectively address the challenges and conflicts?

Way forward....

Human Rights Watch, in a strongly worded open letter to the new AU chairperson, said the 'continental body should go beyond the usual cursory statements of condemnation and take measures to efficiently deter atrocities, protect civilians caught amid conflicts, and ensure redress for international crimes.'

They added that the AU should also unequivocally press national authorities to hold abusers to account in free and fair trials and support regional or international judicial mechanisms when those at the national level have proven unable to deliver justice.

If Odinga assumes the role in the upcoming weeks, he will face significant challenges in addressing these pressing issues.

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