

Meet the Candidate – Sen. Johnson Sakaja

Event in partnership with the **European Business Council**

Event Start at **8:25 AM**

This event continues the Meet the Candidate series hosted by EBC, where members are given the opportunity to meet the major candidates of upcoming elections. On the 30th of June, those present sat down for a breakfast meeting at the Capital Club, and listened to Sen. Johnson Sakaja, a front runner in the race for *Governor of Nairobi*. Also in attendance was Sen. Sakaja's running mate, former COO of Absa Bank Kenya Ltd James Njoroge Muchiri, who briefly addressed those present. We would like to warmly thank Sen. Sakaja, Mr. Muchiri and their team for such a successful event.

Introduction

The event, kicked off by EBC Chairman Darren J Gillen, focused on the major challenges of doing business in Nairobi, especially the license issue(s) that the private sector has long complained about, and later pivoted on the several opportunities for infrastructural and general urban development.

Sen. Sakaja's remarks revolved around three pillars, his involvement and history with his city, his response as governor to the licensing harassment some companies undergo, and the infrastructural opportunities for foreign investors to help reposition Nairobi as the financial hub in Africa.

Nairobi and Sakaja, Sakaja and Nairobi

Sen. Sakaja, born in Nairobi, has felt his city lose the economic and cultural momentum it once had. He has had a long history of activism and political contribution, for Nairobi and the larger Kenya. Most notably, he was an influential part of the new Constitution of 2010. Super Senator, a moniker given to him during his dynamic senatorial mandates, was very vocal about the emancipation of Nairobi from the national government. In his eyes, there are two fundamental changes that need to be addressed in Nairobi:

1. "Nairobi does not need a one-man government; it needs collaborative leadership".
2. "Nairobi's identity must be branded", and the identity of Kenya's capital city must return.

Bureaucracy in Nairobi: the issue of licenses

One of Sen. Sakaja's first priorities if he is elected Governor of Nairobi will be to create and facilitate access to information about the city. In his opinion, it is the lack of knowledge citizens of Nairobi suffer from that props up systems of corruption who often abuse people's uncertainty of legal processes, required documents, and the more general ambiguity surrounding several business aspects of Nairobi life. Nairobi in business, he says, can be compared to traffic lights trying to regulate traffic when a policeman beckons it forward. The lack of transparency regarding what the system really is, seems to be one of Sen. Sakaja's top priorities.

Specific on the issue of business licenses in Nairobi, a long-lasting struggle for the private sector, Sen. Sakaja explained how he will dismantle the failing status quo, by simply requiring one e-license per company, whose costs will be fixed proportional to the company's size and sector of activity.

Nairobi, a city of opportunities

Without getting into too many details, Sen. Sakaja sees major reforms that would allow his city to grow. The ones that he discussed at this event were:

1. The traffic and mobility issue in Nairobi is too great. However, to every problem, a solution, made possible by companies interested in developing public transport systems. After all, why should the city's natural growth be halted by a minority of people who use the alleged 20,000 Matatus on the street. Citizens of Nairobi deserve a system of transport more efficient and dating this century.
2. The cartelized industry of Water in Nairobi is also largely problematic, as an oligopoly of businesses hold power over the distribution of water in the capital. Sen. Sakaja wants to find a way to optimize and equalize water for people in areas abandoned by these "cartels". Sen. Sakaja seeks only to add a drop of fairness to an already heavy glass.
3. "Nairobi's most precious resource is its people". To avoid the threat that millions of unemployed and disillusioned youth pose, the Senator is looking for national and foreign businesses to help refine and grow the Waste Management service in Nairobi. He labeled this sector as one ready for growth.

Q & A Session

Succeeding to the senator's speech was a Q&A session, that allows present members to ask more specific questions about some of the changes he would enforce if he were to become Governor.

Of the many issues raised during the session, questions were asked about the city's planning and the change of land use. On the subject of urban life in Nairobi, questions were asked about the lack of regulation bars in residential areas, a symptom of a deeper corruption in law enforcement. Sakaja's plan to address these issues comes down to public participation, with participatory budgeting installed as the new transparent way of seizing Nairobi's developmental projects.

EBC guest Andre Franklin, attacked the nature of city hall's politics, wondering if the corruption is remediable at all. The Senator affirmed that by reducing human interaction with cash by operationalizing electronic payments, increasing access to county information, and redesigning Nairobi into 5 New York style boroughs, he will extract those selfishly pettifogging the larger problems of Nairobi.