Omar al-Bashir Kenya Visit not a Diplomatic Goof

International University in Kenya shares his thoughts with The African Executive on Sudan President Al Bashir's visit to Kenya to witness the promulgation of Kenya’s new constitution.

Was Bashir's coming to Kenya a diplomatic blunder?

No. It was not a blunder because it was well thought out and the likely risks taken into account. Diplomacy involves calculations, taking measured risks that can have negative impact, while bearing in mind the likely benefits. If the perceived benefits that can accrue outweigh the negatives, then the risk is worth it. The blunder would be if the officials who invited and hosted Bashir did not know of, or consider, the likely political and diplomatic repercussions of their decision. If that were the case, then those officials should not be in office because they do not know what they are doing. In this particular case, I believe the officials were fully cognizant of the possible reactions that have been witnessed so far. The reactions are a price worth paying in order to achieve a long term objective in Kenya's national interest.

What effect will it have on the implementation of the new constitution on Kenya's part and international community's part?

The invitation and Bashir's visit will have little, if any, effect on the implementation of the new constitution. It is a Kenyan document to be implemented by Kenyans and not by the international community. Kenyans will implement the document because it is in their interest. The term international community is itself restrictive in its application because it tends to refer the Euro-American countries and their institutions, to the exclusion of other countries. Some of these Euros countries had committed to assist financially in some areas and might decide to withhold "aid", and that is their right and it would not be the first time for them to do that. There therefore would be nothing new. In itself, that will not stop the country from implementing the constitution because implementing is not dependent on what "the international community" wants or does.

What challenges and opportunities does it pose for the coming referendum in Sudan as well as Kenyans living in southern Sudan?

I think the visit had the desired effect in Sudan that of working to lower temperatures between north and south as the time for referendum nears. The challenge to both the north and the south is
to refrain from engaging in provocative acts that might scuttle the referendum process or lead to a resumption of war. Both sides have opportunity to display political maturity in a time of transition, irrespective of which way the referendum vote will go. The referendum, however, is likely to be conducted in a peaceful manner and if things go as anticipated, there will be a new country in the Horn of Africa, neighboring Kenya, whose wellbeing is a Kenyan concern.

Kenyans in Southern Sudan have the opportunity of contributing to Sudanese wellbeing with their skills. If there is a new country, it will need a lot of skilled personnel in different fields such as education, various professions, agriculture, small industries, and entrepreneurship. Helping Southern Sudan to grow will be a major challenge to all who are interested in regional peace and stability.

**What does his visit reveal about the dilemma facing African countries in respect to international edicts?**

The visit, and the reaction, shows two things. First is the desire of an independent African country to make its own decisions on what is in its best interests rather than the interests of other countries or external forces. This is often difficult because African countries tend to be overly dependent on the goodwill of the Euro powers who then dictate what the African countries should do or not do, think or not think. Second is the necessity of having to balance conflicting domestic political interests. Kenya is suffering from "coalition paralysis" which makes it difficult to take tough decisions that will be subjected to internal political disputes that can undermine the tough decision. The fact that the coalition partners have taken opposite sides on the Bashir visit is simply a political game with domestic and international overtones.

Before making tough decisions, therefore, officials in African countries should know that they will have tough challenges coming from both domestic and external political quarters. They should always take such potential challenges into consideration and most important, they should be clear as to what their national interests are. National interests should dictate the course of action. The trouble is that there might be officials in positions of responsibility who may not be sure of what the national interests of their countries are.
Should the "international community" be redefined considering the fact that emerging superpowers in the East are not party to some of the so called "international" edicts?

There is no good definition of "international community" but a consensus has over the years emerged that the term refers to the Euro-powers because for a long time they seemed to dominate the rest of the world. They even expropriated the term to mean what they want, and they appeared to have got away with it. In the process, the term "international community" almost acquired a Euro racial attribute. Subsequently, it became difficult to think of African, Latin American, and Asiatic countries or peoples as being part of the "international community." It is not likely that the emergence of China and India as well as Brazil as major players would change the meaning or the concept to be more inclusive than it is. What might happen is that the term "international community" could lose potency and appeal.