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U.S. Presses Kenyan President and Opposition Leaders to Meet

By [JEFFREY GETTLEMAN](#)

NAIROBI, [Kenya](#) — The American government on Saturday took its toughest position yet on Kenya's disputed elections, calling on Kenya's president and opposition leaders to meet immediately and saying that the election had been so flawed that it was impossible to know who had won.

“The United States cannot conduct business as usual in Kenya,” said the statement, written by Jendayi E. Frazer, assistant secretary of state for African affairs.

Ms. Frazer spent much of the past week in Kenya trying to find an end to a post-election crisis that has killed hundreds of people and damaged Kenya's image as one of the most stable countries in Africa. But she failed to persuade [Mwai Kibaki](#), Kenya's president, and [Raila Odinga](#), the top opposition leader, to even meet.

The two men have blamed each other for the violence that erupted after disputed election results were announced last month, and each claims to have won the most votes. Several election observers have said that vote rigging occurred on each side but that the government tampered with the vote tallying process to give the president an 11th-hour victory.

“It is imperative for President Kibaki and Raila Odinga to sit together directly and without preconditions,” Ms. Frazer said. “Both should acknowledge serious irregularities in the vote tallying which made it impossible to determine with certainty the final result.”

Ms. Frazer also urged the Kenyan government to lift the recent bans on political rallies and live news coverage of the turmoil.

Ngari Gituku, a spokesman for the president's party, responded, saying, "We won — clean."

Salim Lone, a spokesman for Mr. Odinga, said, "We're very pleased that the United States has so clearly recognized that it will not be possible to do business as usual in Kenya as long as the current crisis generated by the deeply fraudulent election is not resolved."

It is not clear how responsive Kenya will be to international pressure, even by the United States, which considers Kenya a close ally and provides it with hundreds of millions of dollars of foreign aid each year.

So far, the government and opposition leaders have been recalcitrant and have rebuffed calls to compromise by the [African Union](#), the [European Union](#) and several former African presidents. Mr. Kibaki has unilaterally appointed half of the cabinet, which the opposition called a "slap in the face." He has also brushed aside calls by Kenyan intellectuals, human rights groups and Western diplomats to appoint an independent commission to investigate the election.

Opposition leaders have not backed down from their insistence that negotiations be brokered by a third party, because they say they do not trust the government.

Both sides seem to be only hardening their positions, and opposition leaders have called for three days of nationwide protests next week.