

WATCH VIDEO: President Kenyatta leads hugs and apologies between political rivals



President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga hug during the National Prayer Breakfast meeting at Safari Park hotel, Nairobi on Thursday May 31.

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Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, opposition leader Raila Odinga and their deputies last Thursday exchanged hugs and apologies, cementing their pledge to promote unity after a fractious and bloody election.

The unusual scene unfolded at the country's annual national prayer breakfast.

It came eight months after Kenyatta's re-election in a drawn-out poll that divided the nation and left at least 92 dead, according to rights groups.

Longtime rivals Kenyatta and Odinga in March shook hands and pledged reconciliation in a move that stunned the nation, as well as members of Odinga's opposition alliance who said they had not been consulted.

What is now known as "The handshake" had spurred endless speculation but little concrete action.

But last Thursday, at the instigation of the president, the two men shook off any skepticism by repeatedly hugging each other and calling each other "my brother" at the prayer breakfast.

Vice President William Ruto and Odinga's running mate Kalonzo Musyoka also apologised to each other for any election rancor, and hugged.

"We have campaigned against each other, we have said nasty things against each other, and today, I ask forgiveness and I would like to apologise," said Kenyatta.

'No more election deaths'

"Never again shall a Kenyan die because of an election. On my own behalf and that of all those behind me, I tender my apology," said Odinga, who had claimed the election was stolen from him, and whose supporters were the vast majority of those killed by police during protests.

Also present at the event was Supreme Court Chief Justice David Maraga, who rose to international fame as the man who annulled Kenyatta's victory in a first August election and ordered the poll held a second time.

The rapprochement between Kenyatta and Odinga has left the opposition in disarray, and headlines have swung straight onto

the 2022 election race and its potential alliances.

Despite the display of unity, numerous questions remain about the concrete implementation of the reconciliation deal.

So far a joint committee has been established to work on a “national dialogue” in a country where politics and ethnic rivalry go hand in hand.

At the breakfast Kenyatta reiterated his commitment to fight the scourge of corruption in the nation and opposition leaders and the chief justice assured him of their support in this battle.