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Match taxes with service delivery, Albright tells State

By Elizabeth Mwai

Former US Secretary of State Mrs Madeleine Albright has told the Government to justify tax collection by providing essential services.

Albright, who came face to face with abject poverty in Kibera slums, said democracy dictated that the Government has to deliver.

"Citizens are more than willing to pay taxes but the money must be used to provide the essential services. Democracy is not an event, it is a process. It does not come in one day," Albright said.

Speaking at Kibera's Toi market, Albright said people were victims of poverty because the Government had failed to empower them.

She has chosen the market as a case study to be showcased in other parts of the world as an informal market with a humane face.

The decision was reached after her tour, during which she was exposed to a savings scheme by the traders to assist each other secure loans to expand their businesses.

Maximising on available resources

Through the scheme, traders at Toi market have accumulated Sh15 million, which enables them to acquire loans of up to Sh80,000. At least 800 out of the 3,000 traders at the market have joined the scheme and make a daily contribution of Sh10.

Albright, who is currently a co-chair of the Commission on Legal Empowerment, termed the scheme as brilliant. She said there was hidden capital in society, which the poor could use to contribute to the economy if they had title deeds.

"I was moved by Toi traders. Here is a group of people living in extremely poor conditions but they do not want to be victims, so they are maximising on the available resources and making important decisions," she said.

She was accompanied by the Acting Lands Minister Mr Kivutha Kibwana, Education Assistant Minister Mrs Beth Mugo and the UN Habitat Director of the Global Division, Mr Lars Reutersward.

Led by their chairman, Mr Ezekiel Rema, the traders complained of lack of land security and failure of the City Council to provide garbage collection services.

Dagoreti MP Beth Mugo called for speedy resolution of the land issue to facilitate development of the market. The Government, she said, should keep its promise of modernising informal markets.

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