

Bearing the Weight of Government:

From Starehe to Kenya's Electoral Commission Chairperson

The appointment and swearing in of Erastus Etheke - the 48-year old alumnus of Starehe Boys' Centre - as the Chairperson of Kenya's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), is a moment of national significance and Starehe's deep institutional pride. It is a testament not only to individual merit but also to the enduring truth of the Starehe philosophy: that leadership is not a prize to be claimed, but a burden to be borne - with integrity, competence, and humility.

I joined Starehe in January 1994, and Erastus left at the end of 1995. I vividly remember his steadfast prefectship and focused character in purpose. For those two formative years, we shared the same Assembly Hall moments, ate in the same Dining Hall, and walked the same paths of discipline, duty, and dreams. We were constantly reminded that *'From those to whom much is given, much is expected.'*

When news broke that the President had nominated him as Chairperson of IEBC, many paused - not just because of the weight of the office - but because this process stirred something deeper in us. It was an affirmation of a Starehe promise: that a deserving child from any corner of Kenya, when given the opportunity, mentorship, and moral grounding, can rise to shape the nation's future. That a Starehean is now entrusted with safeguarding Kenya's solemn self-determination.

The test of our time

The IEBC is arguably Kenya's most watched, most litigated, and most distrusted institution. It carries the hopes and anxieties of a nation. It has weathered years of legal challenges, accusations of bias, technological failures, intimidation by the powerful, and outright violence. To chair such a body is not to sit in power, but to stand in unrelenting fire. It is in such moments that the true meaning of leadership emerges. Not in comfort or celebration, but in unending crises of complexities.

In an era when public leadership often feels transactional, cynical, or even predatory, the appointment of an alumnus of Starehe to such a vital national role, offers a rare and hopeful contrast. Erastus brings to this office not just legal credentials or international experience - though he has plenty of both - but also a deep foundation in the values Starehe instilled in us.

A quiet pledge revisited

In the wake of the announcement, I found myself remembering a verse we sang over and over during our school years; the 4th verse of the Starehe School Song:

*"We pledge ourselves, when this our generation
Must in its turn the weight of government bear,
To all mankind, through service to our nation,
Head, heart, and hand in justice, zeal and care."*

We chanted these words in the Assembly Hall with adolescent enthusiasm. They were never just poetry. They were a vow. A quiet contract with the future. Now that the future has arrived, they echo with prophetic weight.

Reflectively, this fourth verse is a radical counter-narrative in today's Kenya. In a society where tribalism, nepotism, and corruption are often normalised, the verse calls for a different kind of leader - one who will think clearly, care deeply, and act justly. That leader, we trust, is Etheke. Let us unpack the verse that he may occasionally turn to for moral guidance.

The verse begins with: *"We pledge ourselves..."*

This is not a boast. It is a quiet commitment - a promise to the future. That when our time comes, we will not shy away. We will not say, *"Let someone else do it."* We will step forward. With resolve. With readiness. With responsibility, accountability and tangibility.

"...when this our generation must in its turn the weight of government bear,"

This acknowledges that governance is a generational duty - a rotating responsibility passed on over time. Sooner or later, the current generation must lead - whether in public office, civic life, or moral influence. The word "Government" in this context symbolises not only political power, but all leadership in national life: policy, justice, education, civil service, and beyond.

"To all mankind, through service to our nation,"

Though the verse begins with national responsibility, it broadens the moral horizon to include all humanity. The service of a leader should benefit not only Kenya, but stand for universal values like unity, peace, justice, dignity, and equity.

"Head, heart, and hand"

This is not decorative alliteration. It is a universal ethical framework.

- Head - for wisdom, policy insight, and legal integrity
- Heart - for compassion, public trust, and justice
- Hand - for implementation, results, and courage under pressure

"Justice, zeal and care"

These are not abstract ideals. They are working tools for the IEBC and its Chair.

- Justice - in upholding free and fair elections
- Zeal - in confronting voter apathy, electoral sabotage, and status quo
- Care - in protecting our democratic souls, especially the most vulnerable voters

From schoolboy to Statesman

His journey - from a helpless young boy in Turkana, to Starehe, to the University of Nairobi, to the Advocate of the High Court, to global scholarships, United Nations advisory work, Africa Union's New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and to the helm of Kenya's Electoral Commission - is truly inspiring. But the appointment is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of a difficult, demanding chapter. A chapter which he was prepared for during his days at Starehe.

For the alumni of Starehe, this is not merely a news headline. It is a moment of reckoning. It calls us to remember what we promised - and what we must now deliver.

We are no longer the young ones watching from the margins of society. Some are doctors, teachers, judges, public servants, engineers, military personnel, consultants, architects, managers and politicians. We are already bearing the weight of government - quietly, widely, and sometimes unknowingly. But now Erastus must bear it deliberately, explicitly, and in constant scrutiny by all.

May his IEBC tenure remind us that Starehe was not a gift for comfort, but a mandate for impact. May his work honour Kenya and his own conscience. May it honour the quiet pledge we all once sang at Starehe: **'To bear the weight of government, in justice, zeal and care.'**

David K.

Chairman, [Starehe UK](#)

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