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JOINT STATEMENT: POLICE ROADBLOCKS, UNLAWFUL ARRESTS, AND DISRUPTION OF PEACEFUL GEN Z MEMORIAL PROTESTS VIOLATE CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

Thursday, 25 June 2026 | Nairobi, Kenya — The Police Reforms Working Group (PRWG) condemns in the strongest terms the widespread violations of constitutional rights witnessed during the Gen Z memorial protests held across Kenya on 25 June 2026.

On 24 June, Cabinet Secretary for Interior Kipchumba Murkomen assured Kenyans that peaceful and unarmed protesters would be protected by the National Police Service and that the following day would proceed as a normal working day. Instead, Kenyans woke up to extensive police barricades and roadblocks on major roads leading into Nairobi and around Parliament Buildings. Similar restrictions were reported in Embu, Nakuru, Machakos, Kajiado, Laikipia, and Kiambu counties.

These blanket restrictions denied millions of Kenyans access to work, business premises, and essential services, violating **Article 39 (freedom of movement)**, **Article 36 (freedom of association)**, and **Article 37 (right to peaceful assembly)**. The erection of barricades also disregarded a High Court order prohibiting blanket obstruction of public roads without timely notice. By undermining both constitutional guarantees and judicial authority, the police acted outside the law and eroded public trust in state institutions.

Targeting of Peaceful Protesters and Families

Despite restrictions, demonstrations were reported in at least fourteen counties, including Nairobi, Kajiado, Mombasa, Kwale, Nakuru, Kiambu, Nyeri, Nyamira, Murang'a, Bungoma, Meru, Kisumu, Machakos, and Laikipia. Particularly disturbing were reports that families of victims of the June 2025 protests, who sought to lay flowers outside Parliament in remembrance of their loved ones, were met with police opposition. Following the wreath-laying, police dispersed mourners and arrested several individuals.

The laying of flowers is a peaceful expression protected under **Article 37**, which guarantees every person the right to assemble, demonstrate, picket, and petition peacefully and unarmed. Criminalizing such acts dishonours the memory of victims and violates the dignity of grieving families.

Use of Force Against Protesters and Journalists

Reports further indicate that police deployed tear gas against peaceful protesters and journalists outside Central Police Station in Nairobi, arresting several journalists. Such actions violate **Article 34 (media freedom)** and **Article 35 (access to information)**. Journalists play a vital role in documenting public events and enabling accountability. Targeting them undermines transparency and silences truth.

Equally alarming are documented sightings of armed police officers operating masked and unidentified, in contravention of court orders requiring officers to be identifiable. Concealed identities hinder accountability, facilitate abuse, and erode public confidence in policing.

Arbitrary Arrests and Criminalization of Organizers

Arrests in Kitengela and Rongai targeted individuals accused of mobilising participation in the memorial protests. Mobilisation and organisation of peaceful assemblies are protected under **Articles 36, 37, and 38**. Arresting individuals for encouraging lawful participation is unconstitutional and chilling to democratic participation.

As of this statement, over **361 people** have reportedly been arrested, with 161 and 123 in Nairobi and Kajiado Counties, respectively. Two injuries were reported in Kajiado. Many arrests lack lawful justification, raising grave concerns under **Article 29 (freedom from arbitrary detention)** and **Article 49 (rights of arrested persons)**.

Positive Example of Rights-Respecting Policing

We commend the professionalism of police officers in Mombasa, who facilitated and accompanied peaceful demonstrators without interference. Their conduct demonstrates that rights-respecting policing is both possible and effective. The conduct of police officers in Mombasa should serve as a model nationwide.

Constitutional and International Obligations

The events of 25 June reflect a continued reliance on restrictive and punitive approaches to public assemblies, inconsistent with the **Constitution of Kenya**. Under **Article 24**, any limitation of rights must be lawful, reasonable, and justifiable in an open and democratic society. Blanket restrictions, unlawful arrests, and excessive force fall far short of this standard.

Kenya is also bound by regional and international obligations, including the **African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights** and the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**, which protect freedoms of expression, assembly, association, and participation in public affairs.

Our Demands:

1. The Executive to uphold constitutional rights, comply with court orders as directed in *Katiba Institute v Inspector General of Police & another; Law Society of Kenya (Interested Party)* (Constitutional Petition E349 of 2024), delivered on 6 February 2025, which prohibit blanket restrictions, require officer identification, and call for police facilitation of peaceful assemblies.
2. We further call for compliance with the High Court orders in Kisumu directing the National Police Service and the Ministry of Interior and National Administration to establish policing guidelines that respect Article 37 rights.
3. The National Police Service to facilitate peaceful assemblies, cease unlawful arrests, refrain from force against protesters and journalists, investigate misconduct, and ensure accountability. Consequently, we call for the immediate and unconditional release of the 163 Kenyans arrested today, whose only crime was exercising constitutionally guaranteed rights.
4. Parliament to exercise oversight over security agencies and safeguard constitutional freedoms.
5. The Judiciary to continue defending constitutional rights, prevent arbitrary detention, and ensure accountability for violations.

Conclusion

The Police Reforms Working Group remains committed to advancing policing reforms that promote professionalism, accountability, and respect for human rights. The rights to peaceful assembly, association, expression, and movement are **fundamental pillars of Kenya's constitutional democracy**. They must be protected at all times.

Signed: Police Reforms Working Group (PRWG): Independent Medico-Legal Unit (IMLU), Kariobangi Paralegal Network, Katiba Institute, Defenders Coalition, Social Justice Centres Working Group (SJCW), ICJ Kenya, IJM-K, HAKI Africa, Amnesty International Kenya, Women Empowerment Link, SOWED, KHRC, FIDA-Kenya, Haki Yetu, ICTJ Kenya, Transparency International Kenya, Inuka Ni Sisi!, Shield for Justice, Wangu Kanja Foundation, CRECO, KPTJ, and PBI Kenya.

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