

Lift protest ban, protect judiciary and preserve civil society role, UN rights experts urge Kenya

16 October 2017 – Voicing concern over restrictions on protests as well as attacks on judiciary and civil society in the run-up to presidential elections in Kenya, a group of United Nations independent human rights experts called on the Government to honour its obligations and protect the rights of Kenyans.

“It is precisely when political tensions are high that governments should do their utmost to let people express their grievances and to protect their rights,” said the experts in a news release issued by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)).

[Kenya is facing a choice](#). We urge it to choose to uphold its constitution and pursue strengthening of its democracy, to avoid deepening political divisions and exacerbating tensions.”

According to the human rights experts, a pattern of police brutality, excessive use of force, consistent harassment of judges and threats to civil society has been witnessed even before the ban was imposed.

Under the restrictions, protests are forbidden in parts of the nation’s three largest cities – Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu – until further notice, protests in other parts of the country require prior police permission and organizers can be held criminally liable for any offence by any participant.

In the news release, experts noted that while some previous protests had been marred by violent incidents, they stressed that response to any violence must be proportional to the level of threat and that security forces must prioritize dialogue and non-violent means.

The presidential elections are to be held on 26 October.

An ‘alleged climate of impunity’

Impunity fosters a culture of violence and mistrust, the opposite of what Kenya needs as it prepares for a repeat of the presidential elections
Experts

The rights experts also said that there was currently an alleged climate of impunity for law enforcement officers despite the launching of several investigations, including one into the violence that followed the 8 August general election, when dozens of people were killed and many injured as a result of police action.

In particular, they highlighted an incident on 28 September, when 27 students and staff at the University of Nairobi were reportedly injured when police used tear gas, beat them with wooden clubs, robbed them and threatened them with sexual violence.

A few days later, on 2 October, police reportedly used tear gas in a nursery in Nyalenda (a suburb of Kisumu) injuring at least three children.

“We call for a prompt, independent and thorough investigation into all allegations of police brutality,” the experts said, adding: “impunity fosters a culture of violence and mistrust, the opposite of what Kenya needs as it prepares for a repeat of the presidential elections.”

‘Robust checks and balances are the prerogative of every democracy’

Further in the [release](#), the experts expressed serious concern over reports of repeated attacks against individual judges and the judiciary in general and attempts to limit the courts’ role in hearing election-related petitions.

“Robust checks and balances are the prerogative of every democracy,” they said, stressing that the independence of the judiciary must be protected.

Over the years, we have repeatedly raised concerns with the Government of Kenya about shrinking civil society space and attacks on individual human rights defenders

They also underscored that the role of the civil society must also be preserved and denounced fake information being circulated online on social media, seeking to denigrate human rights organizations, including members of the Kura Yangu Sauti Yangu initiative which works for free and fair elections.

“This is unacceptable and must immediately stop,” the experts said. “Over the years, we have repeatedly raised concerns with the Government of Kenya about shrinking civil society space and attacks on individual human rights defenders.”

The UN human rights experts noted above include Michel Forst, the [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#); Agnes Callamard, [the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#); Diego García-Sayán, the [Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#); Nils Melzer, the [Special Rapporteur on torture](#); and David Kaye, the [Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#).

Special Rapporteurs and independent experts are appointed by the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council – the highest intergovernmental forum in the UN system on rights issues – to examine and report back on a specific human rights theme or a country situation. The positions are honorary and the experts are not UN staff, nor are they paid for their work.

Secretary-General condemns Saturday's attacks in Mogadishu; commends responders

15 October 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres today commended the first responders and residents of the Somali capital, Mogadishu, for mobilizing to aid in what is being called Somalia's worst-ever bomb attack.

In a [statement](#) from his spokesperson, the Secretary-General urged all Somalis "to unite in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism and work together in building a functional and inclusive federal state."

Strongly condemning the attacks, he conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families, as well as his wishes for a speedy recovery to those injured.

According to media reports, at least 200 people were killed and an even greater number of people were injured.

The Secretary-General's Special Representative in Somalia, Michael Keating today said that the UN and the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) were working closely to support the response by the Federal Government of Somalia and local government authorities, including the provision of logistical support, medical supplies and expertise in the aftermath of the bombings.

"It is a revolting attack both in terms of its intent and impact," the Special Representative [said](#).

The Special Representative said that the immediate priority is to support efforts led by the authorities to recover from the attack and help all those affected, especially the injured and newly homeless.

"The international community will do everything possible to help the people and government of Somalia to overcome this tragedy," he said.

According to media reports, a massive car bomb detonated outside the entrance to a hotel in the city's K5 junction, which is home to government offices, hotels and restaurants.

Later in the day, a second bombing was reported in the city's Madina district.

On International Day, UN highlights rural women's participation in sustainable, climate-resilient agricultural

15 October 2017 – Women and girls are central to the sustainability of rural households and communities, improving rural livelihoods and overall wellbeing, but their role and significance is often overlooked, the head of the United Nations entity for women's empowerment today said.

In her statement for International Day of Rural Women – marked annually on 15 October – Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka noted that women farmers are just as productive and enterprising as male counterparts, but often lack equal access to land, credit, agricultural inputs, markets and high-value agrifood chains.

Rural women are highly capable and knowledgeable custodians of their land, and can move further ahead to more fully and effectively participate in green value chains, including by profitably and sustainably linking rural and urban markets, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said. Executive Director of UN Women Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka in her statement for the Day.

Globally, women comprise 43 per cent of the agricultural workforce, according to UN figures, with smallholder agriculture farmers producing nearly 80 per cent of food in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and support the livelihoods of some 2.5 billion people.

According to some estimates, closing the gender gap in access to land and other productive assets could increase agricultural outputs by up to 20 per cent in Africa.

Noting this year's theme for the Day, which focuses on opportunities and challenges in climate-resistant agriculture, the head of UN Women called for more training and skills development for rural women and girls so that they can play a greater role in the development of green food and agricultural value chains.

In addition, she highlighted the role that women farmers can play in protecting biodiversity through the use of indigenous crops and agro-ecological farming methods that are environmentally friendly and free of toxic chemicals.

All this relies on the Governments, however, – providing the social and physical infrastructure that enables rural women's participation in sustainable, climate-resilient agricultural production, processing, transport and marketing.

But she stressed that life in a rural setting should not automatically lead to agriculture.

Rural girls have an equal right to their urban peers to a good education, careers in STEM and a thriving role in the digital revolution, Ms. Mlambo-Ngcuka said referring to the acronym for vocations related to science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

She added that girls should also not automatically end up in unpaid positions caring for family members.

Only once these inequalities are purposefully levelled, will both women and girls, whether rural or urban, be able to take their place at the heart of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the growth of a better future for us all, the senior UN official said.

International Day of Rural Women is marked one day before World Food Day, which will focus this year on investing in food security and rural development in the context of migration, and on 17 October, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Parliamentary forum opens in Russia; discussions to include UN cooperation

14 October 2017 – A committee to strengthen cooperation between the United Nations and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) will discuss its work at the annual IPU forum, which began today in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Ahead of today's opening, IPU said that its 2,000 delegates will focus discussions this week on overcoming intolerance, xenophobia and extremism.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, new technologies and migration are breaking down old barriers and bringing people together in different ways, IPU said in the opening press conference in Russia, which featured Martin Chungong, the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

During the Assembly, the parliamentarians are expected to sign a petition promoting democratic societies. They will also discuss a number of global issues, including prohibition of nuclear weapons, cyber-security, as well as the Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) and promotion of renewable energy.

"We can no longer address global solutions without global reflection and consensus," Mr. Chungong said.

Among other issues, the IPU's Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

will discuss its work and look at ways to bring a more robust parliamentary contribution to the major global processes, according to IPU.

I hope in the future all UN Member States will become IPU members, as well, Valentina Matvienko, the Chairwoman of the Federation Council, said on the opening day, which included a forum for women parliamentarians.

The IPU is not a member of the United Nations, but following an agreement in July 2016, the two organizations agreed to strengthen collaboration on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change.

UN in Somalia condemns ‘barbaric’ bombings in Mogadishu

14 October 2017 – The United Nations in Somalia strongly condemned today’s blasts in the capital, Mogadishu, which reportedly killed or injured dozens of people.

In a tweet, the UN Assistance Mission in Somalia ([UNSOM](#)) denounced the barbaric bombings in Mogadishu targeting civilians.

The head of UNSOM and UN Special Representative of Secretary-General in the country Michael Keating tweeted that he was horrified by the attacks.

He extended his deepest condolences to the families and friends of the dead and injured.

According to media reports, a massive car bomb detonated outside the entrance to a hotel in the city’s K5 junction, which is home to government offices, hotels and restaurants.

Later in the day, a second bombing was reported in the city’s Madina district.