



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

KENYA: Human rights defenders should be protected during electoral processes

Geneva-Paris, August 4, 2017 – Four days ahead of the Kenyan Presidential elections, as attacks against human rights defenders have increased during the pre-electoral period, the Observatory (OMCT-FIDH) and the National Coalition of Human Rights Defenders – Kenya (NCHRD-K) urge the authorities to ensure their protection, and publicly recognise their role to ensure transparent, fair, peaceful and human rights focused elections. Authorities should prevent further escalation and improve the environment for civil society in Kenya, especially ahead of, during and after the elections.

During the pre-election phase from April to June 2017, 13 cases of attacks against human rights defenders linked to the electoral context, were reported to NCHRD-K¹.

“Attacks occurred while human rights defenders were carrying out monitoring, documenting, and observing activities linked to the upcoming elections. This pattern of harassment and attacks aimed at silencing them does not bode well”, declared Kamau Ngunji, NCHRD-K Executive Director.

According to NCHRD-K, several human rights defenders involved in monitoring, documenting and observing the electoral campaign and primaries were physically attacked or harassed, threatened, and even arbitrarily arrested. Journalists and human rights defenders were also barred from documenting, entering or forced to leave campaign meetings. Furthermore, during these political rallies, intimidating statements and negative rhetoric against human rights defenders have been used by politicians, government and party officials, accusing them of influencing the outcome of the elections.

“Human rights defenders who educate voters, are working on electoral observation and monitoring and call for accountability must be protected to allow them to carry on their legitimate work. The lack of a conducive environment for civil society can potentially jeopardise the fairness and democratic character of electoral processes. The international community must keep a close eye on the electoral process and more particularly the situation of human rights defenders”, declared OMCT Secretary General Gerald Staberock.

The Observatory recalls the findings of its mission report “Kenya: 2017 elections: Broken promises put human rights defenders at risk”, published in May 2017², that denounced a widespread pattern of violence and harassment aimed at silencing dissenting voices and perpetuating impunity, including a worrying increase in cases of police brutality, extrajudicial killings³ and enforced disappearances, in an entrenched culture of impunity for these violations⁴, as well as urges the authorities to implement the recommendations formulated in this report.

¹ See NCHRD-K’s report: “Human rights defenders and journalists situation leading up to the 2017 elections. Report for the period April to June 2017”, July 2017

² See the Observatory’s report “Kenya: 2017 elections: Broken promises put human rights defenders at risk”, May 2017

³ On April 3, 2017, two unarmed boys were brutally killed by police in plain clothes. Three Commissioners of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR) condemned the extrajudicial killing and asked for a prompt investigation. See ACHPR ACHPR Joint Press-Release of April 5, 2017 on the alleged public killings of two persons in Eastleigh in Kenya.

⁴ See FIDH’s report “Kenya’s Scorecard on Security and Justice : Broken Promises and Unfinished business”, August 2017.



“Over the past four years, human rights defenders in Kenya have worked under constant pressure. Regardless of the outcome of next week's general elections, the incoming authorities will have to commit to create an environment where impunity of those responsible for human rights violations is not tolerated”, concluded FIDH Vice-President Sheila Muwanga.

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (the Observatory) was created in 1997 by the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and FIDH. The objective of this programme is to intervene to prevent or remedy situations of repression against human rights defenders. OMCT and FIDH are both members of ProtectDefenders.eu, the European Union Human Rights Defenders Mechanism implemented by international civil society.

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