



PRESS RELEASE

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“We are afraid of election violence” women cry

They urge for the urgent implementation of the UNSCR1325 to cater for the special needs, representation & participation of women and girls in the informal sectors

Nairobi, 27th July - Women peace builders from over ten informal settlements in Nairobi are collectively raising the alert for impending violence during the polling day from August 8th.

Contrary to persistent government assurance for peace and security during the electioneering period, the women converging from different areas of Nairobi's informal settlements and low income areas are rather skeptical that their areas will be peaceful and now want the government and security apparatus to heed their plea.

“People have been moving out of the estates, those who have homes in the village are parking and leaving; some have been threatened directly or have been intimidated to leave. If there was peace and security, would people vacate their homes?” they paused.

The women represent the low-income areas of Kibera, Mathare, Korogocho, Huruma, Kiyambiyu, Shauri Moyo, Kaloleni, Mukuru, Kangemi and some parts of Ngong & Ruaraka.

Identity protection

In a bid to protect their identity for fear of being victimized, the women, masked across their faces and holding placards with relevant messages to their plea urge the government to take their concerns seriously before things get out of hand.

“Our areas are marked as “hot-spots” but that alone puts us under pressure; there are talks of people arming themselves; there has been a lot of violence some of which hardly ever get reported. Even though we are afraid, we have come forward in solidarity so that these issues are not overlooked” they stated.

Women in low-income areas and informal sectors persistently bear the brunt of election violence. Sexual violence is rife, women campaigners as well as aspirants are easy targets of attacks while their voices are muffled and often ignored in escalating political tempos.

In some of the areas, women peace builders claim that young women especially are easy targets by gangs and political pressure groups in the slums who attack anyone with dissenting support from theirs.

In almost all the areas represented, criminal gangs have seemingly increased and/or regrouped ahead of the polling date and are continuously causing violence and mayhem.

Criminal gangs & pressure groups

Other areas continue to experience a surge in youth drunken and disorderly behavior as a result of free and cheap liquor courtesy of political aspirants poised on causing chaos. To women and girls in the slums, this translates into volatile environments where women are victimized.

Even more concerning to some is the trend of threatening and intimidating messages on phones, threatening leaflets and even inflammatory Whatsapp messages which continue to instill fear and apprehension from communities.

“It is a difficult situation. You ignore all these at your own peril because they somehow come to pass” said a concerned woman from Mathare. “Just the other day there was serious clashes here over the position of an MCA and

people were violently attacked and property looted and destroyed. There were even cases of attacks on women and girls. If it is like this now, how then will it be when final election results are announced?"

The government and security authorities have reiterated there will be heightened security during the voting period and after. With specific areas, mostly slums, marked as "hot spots" the governments has continuously rolled out elaborate security plans with the aim of assuring Kenyans of their safety.

Give us policewomen too!

In these areas however, the women peace builders are not convinced that police presence alone will make things safer. They are calling for strategic and gender sensitive policing that will not victimize them more in an already precarious situation.

"Whenever there is violence and mayhem, the police come in forcefully. As a woman you are in a double risk of even getting sexually molested and violated in the process. How then can we be at peace when we also fear police intervention? It is a tricky situation for us" some of the women lamented.

"When the police deploy security to our areas, they should also include female police officers to protect women and girls so we can at least feel safe to be rescued and shielded" they pleaded.

On the other hand, numerous peace committees existing in various areas, mostly under the directive of the local county administration have been accused of malpractice and fanning the same violence they are meant to surpass.

"You will be surprised to know that within these very same peace committees, there are inciters and spies who may expose you as a member to even more danger. Further still, the voices and presence of women representation to these committees is so weak that you cannot advance women's' security issues as required" some of them complained.

To make it worse some of the women confirmed that sometimes armed police are deployed to "guard" the same peace meetings which clearly beats the

purpose of the agenda at hand. “It is a discussion about strengthening peace building and sustaining peace, why then do we need armed police around? It only creates more tension” they lamented.

Implement the Kenya Action Plan on UNSCR1325

While invoking Kenya’s commitment to the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 on women peace and security, the women now want the government to fully implement the process required to incorporate the voices and participation of women in peace and security.

They therefore recommend the following to be urgently considered by the government and security apparatus when rolling out operations in slum areas during the voting period;-

- Guaranteed security assurance – provision of ultimate security especially for women and children
- Deployment of gender-sensitive policing to manage women’s vulnerability and insecurity
- Creation of safe spaces for women and children when violence breaks out.
- Mapping out of easy access for emergency and health care services by medical and security personnel during heightened violence
- Persistent community discussions and engagements on peace & cohesion
- Engage the youth as peace-builders and conflict mitigators
- Roll out the national action plan on 1325 with a specific focus to vulnerable areas like the informal sectors.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 was unanimously adopted in October 2000. It recognizes the centrality of gender in approaches to international peace and addresses the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women.

The Kenya National Action Plan (KNAP) on UNSCR 1325 was rolled out in March 2016 under the theme; *kuhusisha wanawake ni kudumisha amani* (to involve women is to sustain Peace).

Amongst the core focuses of the KNAP on UNSCR1325 is to promote the active & increased engagement of women on issues of peace & security at all levels through deliberate gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women in all processes.

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