

**PRE-ELECTION STATEMENT BY CHILD RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS IN KENYA
ON SAFETY, SECURITY & PROTECTION OF ALL CHILDREN
ISSUED ON 5TH AUGUST 2022**

Recognizing that over 22 million people in Kenya are children (46.1 percent of Kenya's population) out of whom 49.6 percent are female, 50.4 percent are male and 0.003 percent are intersex,

Recognizing that children in Kenya have the right to participation and to be involved in decision making just like adults as provided for in the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and other laws,

Noting that the right of children to participate in decision making does not include the right to be registered as voters, because they are below 18 years old (which is the requirement for one to get a national identification card, that is used as the basis for voter registration),

Acknowledging that majority of children in Kenya have been participating in the ongoing political discourse at the household level through engagement with their parents, caregivers and in communities through interaction among themselves, community members as well as leaders,

Noting that there are instances in the country where political leaders have had positive engagement with children with an objective to include children issues in their manifestos,

Concerned that there are instances during the political campaigns where children's safety, security and protection have been compromised - including children being involved in negative political campaigns mobilization,

Noting that schools are currently closed, and all children are at home under the care of parents and caregivers,

We the underlisted 30 child rights organizations issue this statement in the best interest of children in Kenya.

1. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

We note with concern that during the campaigns, some parents and caregivers have been neglecting their duty to protect their children from loitering in campaign venues and being misused by some politicians for campaign mobilization.

We further note that very young children have been left at home unattended to or under the care of other children as their parents attend political events.

There have been reported cases where children are being exposed to child protection risks including harassment by the elderly due to political affiliations, child labour associated with campaign events; selling campaign merchandize, injuries during campaign-related skirmishes, staying a whole day without food and other forms of abuse.

In situations where there have been negative parental conversations in households and communities on political affairs, children have found themselves in between opposing political interests thereby affecting them psychologically and emotionally.

We call on parents and caregivers to prioritize safety, security and protection of all children at all times.

Parents and Caregivers should have specific focus and attention to all children with various forms of disability and ensure that their safety, security and protection is enhanced within the households and communities.

As we approach the elections day, we appeal to all parents and caregivers to ensure that no child attends political events either in private or public.

On the elections' day, we urge all parents and caregivers not to take along their children with them to the polling stations, but if they must do, then safety, security and protection of all the children should be guaranteed.

Recalling that in the previous elections, there were instances in some polling stations where one child was “used repeatedly” by several voters to gain priority access to the polling station, which amounts to child abuse, we urge all voters to monitor and report persons who bring children to the polling station for purpose of getting priority access to vote

Should any parent, caregiver or member of the public come across any child abuse case, please call the **Toll-Free Child Help Line 116 or 0722116116**.

Parents, caregivers and members of the public can also report child protection concerns to the nearest Police Station or the Chief’s office.

2. USE OF SCHOOL VEHICLES FOR POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

During the campaigns period, we have noted several instances where public school vehicles including buses are being used for political campaigns. In some situations, public school buses are overloaded and used late in the night.

We appeal to the Ministry of Education to take stock of all school buses that have been used during political campaigns, the conditions of those buses assessed and the individual political leaders who used such buses and the head teachers who released the vehicles to be held individually accountable.

We recommend that the Ministry of Education conducts a rapid assessment on the use of school buses for political campaigns and publish a status report. Any bus that might have been damaged as a result of political campaigns should be repaired before schools open.

3. USE OF SCHOOL COMPOUNDS AND CLASSROOMS AS POLLING STATIONS

Over 30,000 schools will be used as polling centres and stations out of the 46,232 polling stations.

In previous elections, school property has been misused and destroyed on the elections’ day during polling and tallying.

We appeal to the National Police Service and other state security agencies to ensure availability of adequate security officers with firm instructions to protect school classrooms and other property on the elections day.

4. POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

As the political campaigns come to an end, we applaud various political parties for ensuring peaceful campaigns albeit with some cases of disruptions and violence.

In the remaining days towards elections, we urge campaigns teams not to misuse children in anyway, either in private or in public space to advance their political agenda.

5. OUTCOME OF ELECTIONS

We trust that the elections will be peaceful, transparent and credible, and that the results that shall be declared at the Polling station, Constituency tallying centres (for MCAs and MPs), County tallying centres (for Senators, Governors and Women Representatives) and at the National tallying centre (for President) will be readily accepted by the respective candidates and voters.

We appeal to all candidates who may not agree with the election results as declared to explore legally established mechanisms to petition the results among which includes going to court.

6. SCHOOLS' REOPENING

It is our expectation that schools will reopen after the declaration of the presidential results. Prior to opening schools, the Ministry of Education should adequately engage with stakeholders including County Education Boards, Parents' Associations and Head teachers on the minimum safety, security and protection measures that should be in place in all schools.

Further, the Ministry of Education jointly with the Directorate of Children Services, the National Council of Children Services, County Education Boards and Parents' Associations should conduct a comprehensive child protection assessment and publish their findings and recommendations; and advise children, parents and caregivers appropriately.

7. HATE SPEECH AND MISINFORMATION

We have also noted several instances of hate speech and misinformation propagated through social and mainstream media.

Continued hate speech and misinformation is a risk factor to integration and cohesion among children.

We urge the National Commission for Integration and Cohesion, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, the National Gender and Equality Commission, and the Cyber Crime Unit under the Directorate of Criminal Investigations to continuously monitor social media and mainstream media postings and ensure that cases of hate speech and misinformation are pulled down as soon as possible.

8. CHILD PROTECTION RESPONSE MECHANISMS

We applaud the Directorate of Children Services for rolling out a sensitization exercise on child protection during the campaigns, including the use of key messages targeting various stakeholders.

As we approach the elections day, we urge the Directorate of Children Services and the National Council of Children Services to ensure that the National Elections Child Protection Response Plan is disseminated to parents, caregivers and all members of the public, State and Non-State actors for their appreciation and use as may be appropriate.

Across various Sub-counties there is emerging concern that Children Officers have not effectively sensitized the public on their Sub-County specific elections child protection response plans.

We urge the Directorate of Children Services to immediately ensure that the respective Sub-County Elections Child Protection Response Plans are shared with the public as a matter of urgency. This will go a long way in enhancing child protection preparedness in all parts of the Country.

The Directorate of Children Services should ensure that in all Sub-Counties there are Children Officers directly engaged in monitoring wellbeing of children before, during and after elections; and facilitating quick linkages to response interventions.

The Directorate of Children Services should further ensure that Sub-County Children Officers engage more intensively with all Police Stations for purposes of enabling timely and quality response of any child protection concerns that may require police interventions.

We should not wait for children, parents and caregivers in need of care and protection to be stuck.

9. ROLE OF THE MEDIA

While we appreciate the efforts of the media in covering political campaigns and all matters related to the 2022 elections, we are concerned that children issues including how the campaigns are affecting children are left behind.

Close to 4 million Kenyans are facing acute food insecurity across 23 arid and semi-arid Counties. Close to 1 million being children below the age of 5 years who are in dire need of nutrition interventions.

We urge the media to sustain public campaigns on how the current drought situation in Kenya should be addressed, alongside the political events coverage.

10. OUR COMMITMENT

In the best interest of all children in Kenya, we the underlisted child rights organizations commit to;

- a) Continue with sustained engagement with children, parents and caregivers to ensure that all children are safe and protected during the campaigns, on the elections day and beyond.
- b) Monitor and document any child rights violations during the ongoing campaigns, on the elections' day and beyond.
- c) Take appropriate actions in response to any documented child rights violations.
- d) After elections, engage with the expected new administration at the National and County levels, and assist where possible in ensuring that the commitments made by various political parties in their manifestos are implemented. This includes tracking and holding the political leadership accountable for their commitments to the people of Kenya including children.
- e) Continue advancing the rights of all children in Kenya

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STATEMENT ENDORSED BY:

1. AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR CHILDREN STUDIES
2. BEACON TEACHERS AFRICA
3. CENTRE FOR CHILD SOCIAL JUSTICE
4. CHILDFUND KENYA
5. CHILDLINE KENYA
6. CHILD SPACE KENYA
7. COUNTABLE
8. EAST AFRICA CENTRE FOR LAW AND JUSTICE
9. EASTERN AFRICA CHILD RIGHTS NETWORK
10. INERELA KENYA
11. INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION KENYA
12. JAZEEL EDUCATION CENTER
13. JESUIT HAKIMANI CENTRE
14. KENYA ALLIANCE FOR ADVANCEMENT OF CHILDREN
15. MISSING CHILD KENYA
16. MTOTO NEWS
17. NYOTA CARE INNOVATIONS
18. PEMA EDUCATION CENTRE
19. PLAN INTERNATIONAL KENYA
20. SAVE THE CHILDREN
21. SLUM CHILD FOUNDATION
22. SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES KENYA
23. TERRE DES HOMMES
24. THE EAST AFRICAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
25. THE NAIROBI WOMEN'S HOSPITAL COLLEGE
26. THRIVING CHILD KENYA
27. UNIFIED APBET SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION KENYA
28. USAWA AGENDA
29. WEMA COMMUNITY CENTER ORGANISATION
30. WORLD VISION KENYA