

Demonstrations Continue in Kenya as Youth Call for the Resignation of President Ruto

Two weeks of unrest has exposed the government for its inability to address the burgeoning economic crisis

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Protests erupted again on July 2 across Kenya against the worsening economic crisis and the impunity exemplified by President William Ruto.

Since June 18, youth-led demonstrations have been met with repression resulting in the deaths of at least 39 people according to the Kenyan National Human Rights Commission, a government-funded agency.

A representative of the Kenyan Medical Association told the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in an interview that another two people had died on July 2. The KMA noted that they are very active in providing care to those injured in the clashes between the police and demonstrators.

This same KMA spokesperson said that physicians are treating gunshot wounds, injuries from teargas canisters and the inhalation of chemical agents being deployed to disperse the crowds in the cities of Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, among many others. On July 2 it appeared as if less live ammunition was fired on protesters since the death tolls were far lower than on June 25 when the parliament building was attacked by demonstrators.

Police have utilized batons, water cannons, teargas and live ammunition in attempts to force people from the streets of Nairobi. An area in the central business district was targeted by demonstrators where enterprises were vandalized and set on fire.

The initial round of demonstrations was prompted by the attempt to pass the Finance Bill for 2024 which included substantial tax hikes impacting the overall cost of living. Increases in

taxes for consumer goods and services would have a detrimental impact on workers, youth and farmers.

President William Ruto said during late June that he would not sign the Finance Bill sealing its fate. He then called for dialogue between the “Occupy Parliament” organizers and the government on a way forward in addressing the economic crisis.

Youth in Kenya have not responded positively to the overtures from Ruto. Supporters of the Occupy Parliament movement are pointing to the number of people killed by police during mass demonstrations in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu and other regions of the East African state.

Criticism has centered not only around the now defunct Finance Bill, other charges of corruption by leading government officials within the ruling Kwanza Party of Ruto have also surfaced. There have been cracks as well within the president’s party where some are blaming leaders for being indifferent to the plight of the Kenyan masses.

In the second largest Kenyan city of Mombasa on the Indian Ocean coast, thousands of young people and workers took to the streets as well on July 2. During the early morning hours, many businesses remained closed in anticipation of possible violence.



Kenya young people demonstrate demanding the resignation of President Ruto (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

Demonstrators held their own self-made signs condemning the current state of the economy while accusing the Ruto administration of being corrupt and inefficient. One protester carried a sign saying, “not one project promised by the government has been completed over the last two years”, the time period since Ruto was elected in 2022.

Meanwhile in Kisumu, crowds of youth marched in the streets demanding accountability from the Ruto administration. They paid tribute to the people who have lost their lives and called for the resignation of the president.

What has fueled the anger of Kenyans is the seeming lack of remorse on the part of the

president related to the deaths of civilians. Ruto has not condemned the police for their heavy-handed tactics. In a statement on June 30, the president said that complaints against the police would be handled through the normal channels already in existence within the government.

There are numerous reports of abductions of activists by the police. The Kenyan Supreme Court Chief Justice Martha Koome has issued an order forbidding any extra-judicial detentions by law-enforcement agents. (See [this](#))

In an article published on July 2 in the [Kenyan Post](#), a Cable News Network (CNN) correspondent conveyed his eyewitness account of the brutality utilized by the police. The journalist wrote that:

“When peaceful protesters stormed Parliament last Tuesday (June 25), Nairobi police boss Adamson Bungei was personally leading the operation. It is believed that Bungei issued the shoot-to-kill order that left three protesters, among them a 27-year-old student from the University of Nairobi, dead. CNN journalist Larry Madowo aired a video of Bungei watching as police used live bullets to disperse the protesters. ‘Nairobi police boss Adamson Bungei personally led the operation,’ Madowo said. Freelance journalist, Chris Sambu, also said that he witnessed Bungei passing by without uttering a word as bodies of peaceful protesters lay outside Parliament. For clarity, the 25th, June 2024 police killings on protesters was an operation led by the Nairobi region police commander Adamson Bungei. ‘As the chief commanding officer on the ground, he had the ability to order no firing live bullets at protesters. History will Judge him harshly,’ he wrote. ‘I took this video moments after protesters accessed parliament buildings and a shooting ensued. When guns went silent and tear gas smoke filled the Parliament road, a number of protesters lay dead. Bungei just passed there without uttering any word.’”

In response to the police killings there are those calling for the dissolution of parliament and the scheduling of new elections. These elements within and outside the government believe that the legitimacy of the Ruto administration has been fully eroded.

Economic Crisis Prompts Additional Borrowing by the Government

Rather than address the internal crisis within Kenya, some government officials have accused criminal elements of “infiltrating” the youth-led protests. Referring to people as “goons” and “thugs”, these detractors who are in support of the Ruto administration are calling for harsher measures to end the demonstrations. (See [this](#))

There were reports on June 26 that the Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) were activated to prevent further unrest. Many businesses have been attacked in Nairobi and other cities since June 20. However, these actions are more reflective of the desperate socio-economic conditions prevailing among youth and workers.

With the collapse of the Finance Bill 2024 due to nationwide demonstrations, the president has indicated that Kenya will be forced to borrow up to \$US7.8 billion to meet existing public obligations. In addition to a 67% increase over already planned borrowing, there could very well be massive cuts in public employment and services.

[The Kenyan Financial Standard](#) wrote on the present situation emphasizing:

“President William Ruto’s embattled administration faces a herculean task in the

months ahead in funding public services, implementing development projects and programs and paying public debts. This follows the decision to reject the Finance Bill 2024 amid unprecedented public pressure. President Ruto last week moved to avert a financial crisis for his administration as the legal budget deadline loomed. The most workable option is borrowing more money to fund this year's Sh3.9 trillion (\$US30.3 billion) budget. On Sunday night, President Ruto alluded to this, saying Kenya would need to borrow Sh1 trillion (\$US 7.8 billion) nearly double what was initially planned following the move to withdraw the Finance Bill 2024."

Like in many other African states, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have played a negative role during the post-colonial period beginning in the 1960s until the present. When governments face financial difficulty due to their continued dependency within the world capitalist system, they are forced to renegotiate terms of repayment for their monetary obligations.

IMF conditionalities often result in the imposition of austerity measures within developing countries. Governments are required to lay-off public servants including educators and healthcare workers in order to pay debt service to financial institutions based in the imperialist countries.

Kenya will be faced with very difficult decisions moving forward. Any acquiescence to the IMF requires the passing on of the debt obligations to the workers, farmers and youth who are already facing high unemployment and underemployment.

In the same above-mentioned article published by the Financial Standard it notes:

"The IMF has been pushing Kenya to ensure her fiscal strategy is centered on firmly reducing debt vulnerabilities and achieving a newly approved debt anchor by 2029 while protecting high-priority service delivery programs. Kenya first agreed with the IMF in July 2021, which is subject to review every six months before further funding is released."

Perhaps the suggestions emerging from the youth movement and certain members of parliament for fresh elections could open a national discussion and debate over the future of Kenya. Obviously, a continuation of the status-quo will only result in ongoing mass demonstrations and further alienation by young people and workers from the government.

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Featured image: Kenya youth march in Mombasa, July 2, 2024 (Source: Abayomi Azikiwe)

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