



PRESS STATEMENT

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PRWG-K CONDEMNS STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE, POLICE BRUTALITY, AND UNPRECEDENTED ATTACKS IN THE OL KALOU BY-ELECTION

Nairobi, 20th July 2026

The Police Reforms Working Group Kenya (PRWG-K) is profoundly shocked and decries the blatant display of state violence, police brutality, voter intimidation, and targeted attacks on journalists witnessed during the Ol Kalou constituency parliamentary by-election. What was meant to be a peaceful democratic exercise for the residents of Ol Kalou to choose their representative freely was instead transformed into a theater of terror. Heavily armed, hooded, and masked militia operating in civilian clothes, alongside suspected plainclothes police officers, invaded polling centers, fired live ammunition into the air, lobbed tear gas, arrested human rights observers and monitors, and violently assaulted journalists to suppress independent reporting and hide electoral malpractices from public view.

Despite these harrowing circumstances, PRWG-K extends a huge appreciation to the courageous people of Ol Kalou. Beating all odds, facing down armed intimidation, and refusing to be cowed, they showed up in large numbers to cast their votes. Their resilience is a powerful testament to the unyielding democratic spirit of Kenyans.

Concurrently, we strongly condemn the blatant attempts to herd democracy by trying to disrupt peaceful voting. A democratic election belongs to the voters, and any effort to force, manipulate, or violently disrupt their peaceful participation is unacceptable. Further, deploying unidentified, masked individuals in official state security vehicles completely obliterates police accountability, fosters impunity, and transforms a public service into an instrument of state-sponsored terror.

We commend the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) for its efforts in managing the election day logistics under such volatile conditions. However, we must firmly call out the IEBC for its failure to manage and mitigate pre-election malpractices, including widespread corruption, violence, hate speech, and open voter buying. Turning a blind eye to these systemic irregularities before the first vote is cast compromises the integrity of the entire electoral process.

We condemn the physical attacks on journalists performing their constitutional duties related to enhancing access to information. Enos Teche, a photojournalist with *The Star*, was physically assaulted by armed, masked men outside St. Joseph's Catholic Comprehensive School. The attackers fired shots in the air, discharged tear gas, assaulted him, and confiscated his professional camera equipment, leaving him injured. Similarly, George Kieru, an *NTV* cameraman, was beaten, tased, and robbed of his camera equipment, while Brygettes Ngana of the *Nation Media Group* was assaulted by suspected plainclothes officers who unlawfully seized her team's gear. In an even more chilling act of intimidation, an unnamed female journalist was held at gunpoint, with a pistol pressed to her stomach, before having her mobile phone violently confiscated by these armed actors. This systematic targeting of the media is a deliberate effort to enforce an information blackout and shield perpetrators from accountability.

These actions stand in direct violation of Kenyan law and fundamental constitutional provisions. By physically assaulting and robbing journalists, state actors violated Article 34 of the Constitution, which guarantees that the State shall not interfere with or penalize any person for broadcasting or disseminating information. Furthermore, widespread voter bribery, physical violence, and armed intimidation directly breach the rights to free, fair, and safe elections as outlined in Articles 38 and 81, which mandate that elections must be free from violence and improper influence.

The deployment of masked and unidentified armed state actors also violates the National Police Service Act and regional policing standards, which strictly require all police officers in operational theaters to be clearly identifiable by name and badge number to prevent impunity. The physical beatings, theft of media cameras, and pointing of firearms at unarmed civilians are serious criminal offenses under the Penal Code (Cap 63). Finally, the involvement of administrative officers and security organs to advance partisan political agendas violates the Public Officer Ethics Act and Section 16 of the Election Offences Act, which forbid partisan policing and the misuse of public resources.

We further decry the arbitrary arrest and harassment of human rights defender Ademba Allans, who was targeted and detained by police officers simply for observing the by-election. While he has since been released on police bail, his mobile phone and camera were retained by the police in a transparent effort to frustrate his election monitoring work.

PRWG-K demands immediate action to arrest this rapid slide into lawlessness. We demand immediate accountability through the following specific calls to action:

- The Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) is to immediately identify, arrest, and prosecute the masked individuals and plainclothes officers involved in the assault and theft from Enos Teche, George Kieru, Brygettes Ngana, and other media practitioners.

- The Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) must launch immediate investigations into the operational commanders who authorized the deployment of masked, plainclothes officers to intimidate voters and attack the press in Ol Kalou.
- The National Police Service (NPS) must immediately track down and return all confiscated cameras, phones, and media gear stolen from journalists. Additionally, unconditionally return all seized gadgets and equipment, and cease the systematic harassment and targeting of civic actors covering electoral processes.
- The Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP) must invoke their powers under the Election Offences Act (Act No. 37 of 2016) and investigate and prosecute individuals committing election offences.

We warn the State that the normalization of masked police units, the weaponization of security apparatus in local elections, and the violent suppression of the press represent a grave threat to Kenya's democracy. We will not stand by and watch the country return to the dark days of police-enforced political terror.

ENDS

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This statement is signed by the Police Reforms Working Group, an alliance of national and grassroots organizations committed to professional, accountable, and human rights-compliant policing. They include: Independent Medico-Legal Unit (IMLU), Kariobangi Paralegal Network, Defenders Coalition, Social Justice Centres Working Group (SJCW), Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ Kenya), International Justice Mission (IJM-K), HAKI Africa, Amnesty International Kenya, Women Empowerment Link, Social Welfare Development Program (SOWED), Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA- Kenya), International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ - Kenya), Transparency International Kenya, Shield For justice, Wangu Kanja Foundation, Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO), Kenyans for Peace Truth and Justice (KPTJ), Kituo cha Sheria, Article 19EA, Usalama Reforms Forum, Missing Voices Coalition, Physicians for Human Rights, Inuka Ni Sisi, Haki Yetu Trust and Peace Brigades International Kenya (PBI Kenya).