



JOINT CSO STATEMENT ON THE ILLEGAL CENSORSHIP AND POLICE INTIMIDATION AT THE 63RD NATIONAL DRAMA AND FILM FESTIVAL – A BETRAYAL OF THE BILL OF RIGHTS AND CREATIVE FREEDOM.

Nakuru City, Kenya – April 10, 2025

The Centre for Enhancing Democracy and Good Governance in Conjunction with INUKA Ni Sisi! Would like to express our deepest concern and collective condemnation over the continued harassment, censorship, and abuse of power targeting students and creatives at the ongoing 63rd National Drama and Film Festival in Nakuru City.

We strongly condemn the deplorable actions by police officers in Nakuru, who yesterday evening tear-gassed and manhandled journalists covering the arrest of Cleophas Malala, the writer of “*Echoes of War*,” a play being performed by Butere Girls at this year’s event. As if that was not enough, this morning, the police lobbed teargas canisters at Butere Girls Students upon their refusal to stage their play to an empty hall that had been stripped off any décor at Melvin Jones Academy.

The horrible actions by Law enforcement Officers and the deafening silence of the organizers of the event and the Ministry of Education Officials is disturbing to say the least. They negate the values of civic responsibility, accountability, and respect for human rights. They represent a gross violation of constitutional freedoms enshrined under Kenya’s Bill of Rights, particularly the freedom of expression, artistic creativity and freedom of the Media.

The banning of “*Echoes of War*”, despite a clear High Court ruling permitting its performance, and the subsequent blocking of students and their mentor from participating, is a shameful display of political intolerance. The Judiciary, through Justice Winfridah Okwany, acted with courage and constitutional clarity in directing that the Butere Girls students Play be reinstated to the festival. It is not only illegal but morally reprehensible that such orders would be undermined by the very

State that swore to uphold them. Clearly, the Kenyan State is not keen to promote the Rule of Law and the Democratic ideals enshrined in Our Constitution

Let it be known: **Art is not a crime**. Artistic Expression is not sedition. Performance is not provocation. The State **MUST be made aware that the poet cannot be killed!** Trying to gag artistic expression through brute force is a recipe for chaos!

The Ministry of Education must be held accountable. The ongoing implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), particularly the Arts and Sports Science pathway, will remain theoretical unless we meaningfully invest in and protect creative expression. The staging of a national drama festival should be a celebration of talent and innovation—not a platform for political repression. Keep it going our valiant soldiers of justice

To Butere Girls Students – We celebrate you our Sheroiners for your bravery and patriotism. That Gesture where you defiantly sung our national Anthem is the Emblem of your courage and love for our dear Motherland

We call upon:

1. **The President** – to honor his commitments to the creative sector and immediately denounce any form of political censorship and intimidation of artists and students. **It is cowardice of you to attack children for pointing it out to you that you are naked!**
2. **The Ministry of Education** – to guarantee the full and unhindered participation of all qualifying schools and students in the festival.
3. **The National Police Service** – to cease all forms of intimidation and uphold their constitutional mandate to protect rights and freedoms, not to suppress them.
4. **All stakeholders** – to stand united in defending our democratic space, and the role of the arts in shaping a just, inclusive, and reflective society. The government, it is now clear, is driving all of us to silence... this is the path to Kenya being a kakistocracy!

This moment calls for courage—from government, from citizens, and from the youth. As civil society, we will not sit back and watch the erosion of rights under the guise of “order” or “national interest.” We stand with the students of Butere Girls, with creatives across Kenya, and with all defenders of constitutional democracy.

Art is a mirror to society. When you shatter the mirror, you don’t erase the truth—it only cuts deeper.

#StandWithButereGirls

#DefendArtisticFreedom

#ArtIsNotACrime

Signed,

Paul Masese– CEDGG

Kawive Wambua – Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi!