

## **Think about the Children of Kenya....**

### **Statement by NGOs working with and for Children in Kenya:-**

After the announcement of presidential results of the national elections on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2007, our country Kenya has experienced the worst violence ever since gaining independence in 1963. As the bleeding continues, CHILDREN have, and are bearing the worst brunt of this senseless violence. Innocent children have been killed, maimed, burned, drowned in sewerages, defiled, displaced, starved and abused. Children's uniforms and learning materials have been destroyed and the once peaceful playing grounds have turned into battle fields. Now, children cannot play or walk freely for fear of death. Yet they didn't vote!

According to government statistics over 250,000 people have been displaced while almost 500 have so far lost their lives to the violence. Although the government has not provided disaggregated data, we estimate that more than half of these figures represent children. In the displacement camps, children are exposed to poor sanitary conditions, insufficient food and water, and cold weather as they are sleeping in the open, most without blankets.

It is not a secret that this state of affairs has crippled the lives of all children if not all Kenyans. Many families, even those who have not been displaced continue to experience the effects of violence as some have gone without food since foodstuffs are not reaching these areas due to lack of transport. The price of food, fuel and other basic needs have skyrocketed to the point that many families cannot afford to purchase them.

This violence **MUST** stop now. Why? We are putting the development process of children on hold, we are building trauma in children, we are sowing seeds of discord and hatred – as we remain in the fighting mode. Children have a constitutional right to development, children should be in school now, but the opening date had to be rescheduled in view of the violent situation in the country. The future of children is uncertain due to this violence and the stalemate being witnessed.

We, agencies working for and with children, therefore propose the following roadmap for ensuring children – who constitute 51.6% of the population of the country, to regain their rightful place in Kenya:-

1. We appeal to law enforcement officers to avoid firing live bullets whenever they battle demonstrators in estates as innocent children are being maimed and injured instead of being protected. At the same time, we call upon parents to ensure the safety of their children.
2. We appeal to NGOs, hospitals, religious institutions and counseling institutions as a matter of urgency, to send counselors to the IDP camps and police stations where displaced persons are staying to assist children who have been orphaned and traumatized by the violence.
3. We further ask donor partners to authorize for re-allocation of project funds meant for ongoing activities of January and February 2008 to go towards counseling, medical and feeding costs of children who have been traumatized by the violence, especially those who have lost their parents or siblings to the violence.
4. As schools re-open next week, we ask the government to guarantee security for both primary and secondary going students, especially in slum areas and those acutely affected by the violence. This applies to children in clash prone areas and those traveling to far flung boarding schools. We also believe that the promise of free secondary education still stands and the government should put measures in place to ensure this is realized. School management committees should not be left in confusion on who should be paying school fees.
5. We further state here that children who have been displaced be assisted to realize their right to education. We propose that displaced children living with relatives or those in displacement camps should be allowed to attend nearby schools while the government finds a solution to the resettlement of their parents. We appeal to schools to accept such children without any restrictions of uniforms, user fees or other extra curricula charges.
6. We appeal to children homes to admit children who have been orphaned or lost parents as a result of this violence and request donor partners, the government through the cash-subsidy program and other development workers to cater for the extra costs of such children.
7. As much as we appreciate the short term IDP camps that have been given to displaced persons, we see this as a temporary measure. The solution lies in

such persons being able to settle in their own houses. Given this, we call upon employers of displaced persons to give them salary advances for the month of January to enable them start off their lives again. This would enable those who were previously living in rented houses to seek rental accommodation and thus be able to fend for their children as they have always done.

8. We urgently appeal to the elected Members of Parliament (MPs) to go back to their constituencies and begin preaching & building peace. This will aid the process of healing that this country so much needs.
9. As a sign of commitment to the survival of children in this country, we appeal to all leaders of goodwill including elected members of parliament to start or continue contributing financially or otherwise support to go towards assisting children affected by violence especially those who have been orphaned.
10. In order to effectively direct recovery efforts to the displaced victims, we urge the government, through the Ministry of Special Programmes to collate and collect disaggregated data by age and sex of all displaced persons especially the children.
11. We applaud the efforts of the Kenyan media, both electronic and print of promoting peace in the country, and urge them to continue with the same motto as way of healing this country.
12. Our earnest appeal is to the two warring leaders who offered themselves for election as president of Kenya through Party of National Unity (PNU) and Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) and got the highest votes, to listen to voice of reason, embrace dialogue, accept mediation, put the lives of Kenya before power, verbalize (speak out) positive thoughts so as to bring this unnecessary violence to a quick halt.

***In conclusion;***

We remind Kenyans that children are seeing what is happening, and they are learning the wrong thing – that you exercise your democratic right to vote, then resort to violence as the way to resolve issues. If the current situation is not handled now and well, it will be a precursor to the same violence in future when the children of today will be adults. So, let us put an end to this madness now.

Remember, Violated children of today will be violent adults of tomorrow.

***Dated: 9<sup>th</sup> January 2008***