

Press Release - Kenya: Civil society calls on government to end abuse of refugees International Rescue Committee 22 January 2013

Several civil society groups on Tuesday demanded that the Kenyan government end police harassment and abuse of refugees and protect the basic human rights of all refugees and Kenyan citizens.

“Since the Kenyan government announced in December that all refugees and asylum-seekers in Nairobi should move to Dadaab and Kakuma camps, we have seen a dramatic increase in attacks on refugees and Kenyans of ethnic Somali origin,” said Lucy Kiama, Executive Director of the Refugee Consortium of Kenya speaking on behalf of the Urban Refugee Protection Network (URPN), an umbrella organization of agencies promoting human rights of refugees in Kenyan cities.

“Worryingly, the harassment and abuse are perpetrated not only by criminal gangs but also by the very law enforcement officials who are supposed to protect everyone in this country,” Lucy Kiama added. “We have also seen an increase in police-round ups, arbitrary arrests and harassment of refugees and persons of specific ethnicities by security officers in Nairobi. The URPN has documented reports of extortion, physical abuse and loss of property.”

URPN said these incidents were sparked by the government’s December 18 order for all Somali refugees and asylum-seekers to move to Dadaab Refugee Camp northeastern Kenya, and for all other refugees and asylum-seekers in the country to move to Kakuma Refugee Camp in the northwest of the country.

The groups also voiced concerns about media coverage they said links refugees to insecurity without producing evidence.

“This has aggravated xenophobic attitudes towards genuine refugees and asylum seekers who are law-abiding people seeking protection from persecution and conflict in their home countries,” said Solomon Wasia, Programme Coordinator on Forced Migration, Kituo Cha Sheria. “Refugees and asylum seekers are not a threat to national security.”

At the same time, URPN said it condemned all acts of terrorism. URPN said and said it remains committed to helping the Government of Kenya to build a strong asylum system – which would exclude criminals from refugee status, as is the practice in international law. (...)

The URPN called on all security officers to respect fundamental human rights and for all members of the general public to be tolerant of all persons regardless of nationality as we strive to work towards efforts for our collective security and protection of human rights for all. The Urban Refugee Protection Network (URPN) is a coordination forum comprising of agencies working on protection and promotion of human rights and welfare of refugees in urban areas in Kenya. (...)

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