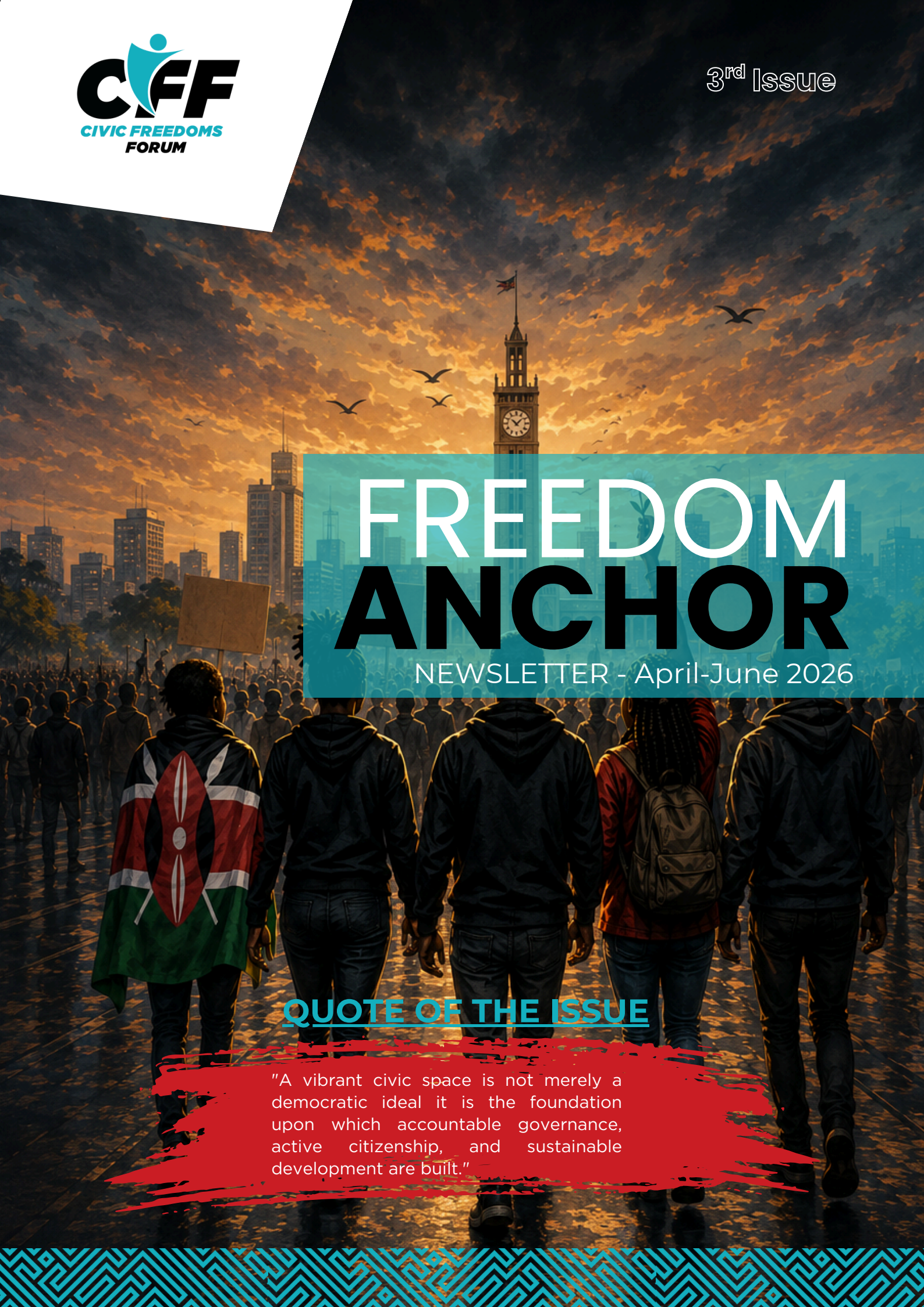




FREEDOM ANCHOR

NEWSLETTER - April-June 2026

QUOTE OF THE ISSUE

"A vibrant civic space is not merely a democratic ideal it is the foundation upon which accountable governance, active citizenship, and sustainable development are built."

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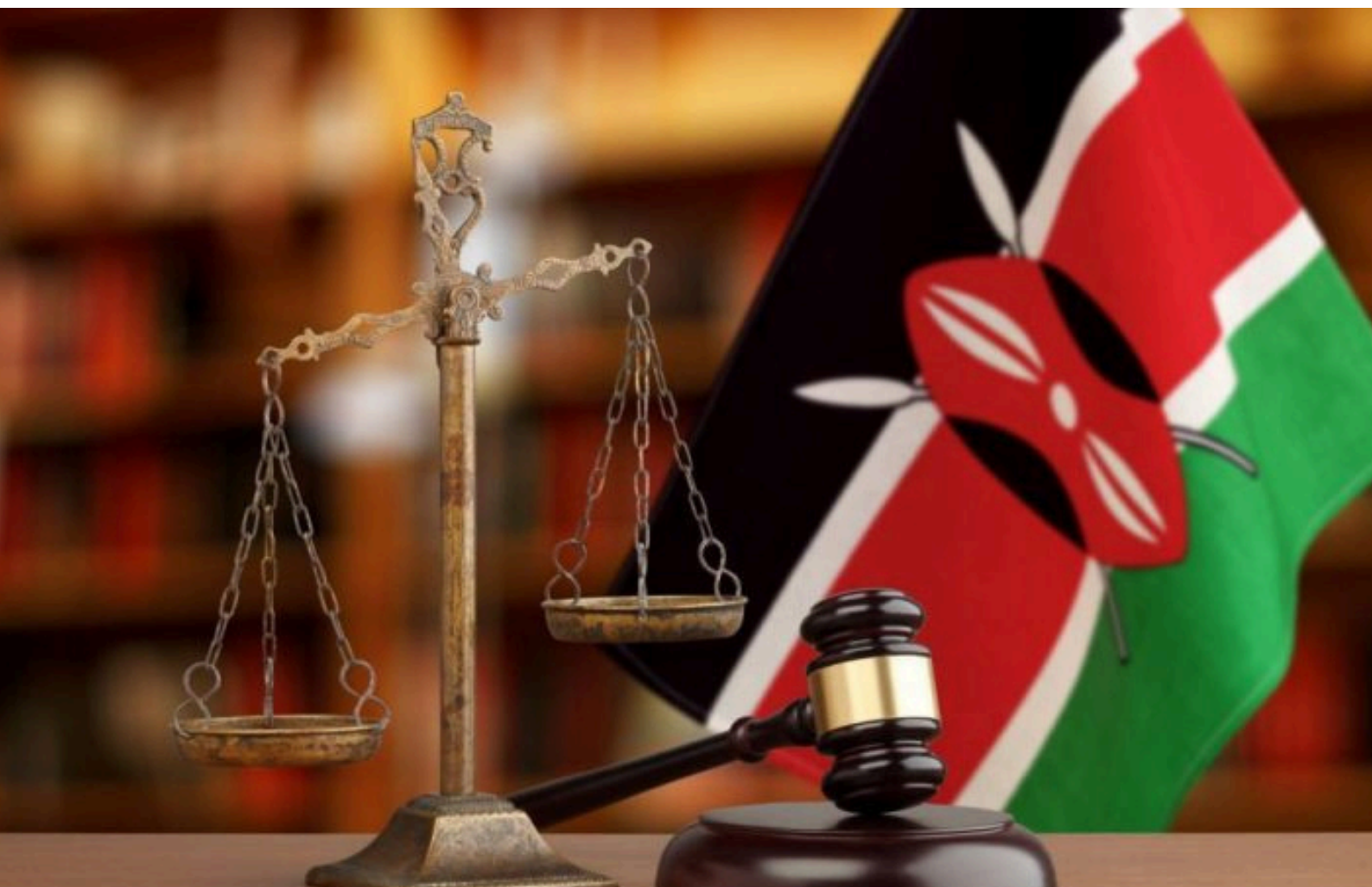
Welcome to the third edition of Freedom Anchor, the Civic Freedoms Forum's newsletter dedicated to documenting and analyzing developments shaping civic space, democracy, human rights, and citizen participation in Kenya and beyond.

In this edition, we examine key developments influencing the civic space landscape, including important regulatory changes affecting Public Benefit Organizations, growing concerns over the protection of the right to peaceful assembly, emerging conversations on the governance of artificial intelligence, and Kenya's expanding engagement in global governance processes.

As the civic space landscape continues to evolve, Freedom Anchor remains committed to delivering timely analysis, sector insights, and stories that inform, inspire, and strengthen civil society. We hope this edition serves as a valuable resource for practitioners, partners, policymakers, and citizens working to advance democratic values, protect fundamental freedoms, and promote meaningful public participation.

Derrick Wesley Otieno, CFF's Communications

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"MAISHA NI GHALI!" FUEL PROTESTS TURN DEADLY

"From the Pump to the Streets"



Kenya witnessed nationwide protests and transport sector disruptions following a sharp increase in fuel prices that significantly affected the cost of transportation and living.

The demonstrations, which began as a public transport strike, quickly escalated into nationwide protests in several towns and cities.

According to reports, at least 4 people lost their lives while more than thirty others sustained injuries during confrontations between protesters and security agencies.

Authorities also confirmed the arrest of approximately 348 individuals linked to the demonstrations.

The protests highlighted growing public frustration over the rising cost of living and the economic burden placed on households and businesses.

For civic space actors, the events reignited important conversations regarding:

- The constitutional right to peaceful assembly;
- Proportional use of force by law enforcement agencies;
- Accountability for protest-related deaths and injuries;
- Protection of civic participation during periods of public dissent.

CFF joined other human rights organizations in condemning the loss of life and calling for independent investigations into allegations of excessive force by security agencies.

Anchor Point: Protest is not a crime. The Constitution protects peaceful assembly and public participation.

PLOT TWIST AT CENTRAL POLICE STATION

In a development that generated significant public interest, Nairobi Central Police Station Officer Commanding Station (OCS) Chief Inspector Dishen Angoya was arrested following allegations that he authorized the release of 64 individuals arrested during the fuel-price protests.

Police authorities accused the officer of abuse of office, claiming the release occurred without lawful authority.

The incident sparked national debate concerning police discretion, detention procedures, and the rights of individuals arrested during public demonstrations.

Human rights defenders have continued to emphasize the need for adherence to due process and protection against arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly during periods of political or economic unrest.

The case remains an important reminder of the delicate balance between law enforcement responsibilities and constitutional safeguards.

Anchor Point: The rule of law requires both lawful policing and protection of constitutional rights.



GOONS Zii !!!

Kenya cannot afford to normalize violence as a tool for silencing citizens.

Recent allegations of organized groups disrupting peaceful demonstrations and civic gatherings including the disruption of a public budget forum hosted by the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) in a church paint a worrying picture of shrinking civic space. Whether politically sponsored or operating with impunity, such actions undermine constitutional freedoms and threaten the democratic values Kenyans have fought hard to secure.

The Constitution guarantees every Kenyan the right to peaceful assembly, expression, association, and public participation. These rights must never be curtailed through intimidation, violence, or fear.

As the Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF), we condemn all forms of violence used to suppress civic engagement. Democracy thrives on dialogue, not disruption; debate, not intimidation; participation, not fear.

Allowing the culture of "goons" to flourish risks normalizing political violence and discouraging citizens from exercising their constitutional rights. Today it may target civil society, tomorrow it could be any Kenyan simply exercising their freedoms.

We call upon all duty bearers to ensure the protection of peaceful assemblies, investigate incidents of violence impartially, and hold perpetrators accountable, regardless of political affiliation.

Our message is simple: Goons Zii. Civic Space Ndiyo. Democracy Ndiyo.





June 25, 2026: Remembering the Fallen, Defending Civic Space

A peaceful nationwide commemoration of those killed during the June 25, 2024 Gen Z protests was met with heavy security deployment, road closures, arrests, and tear gas in parts of the country. Families, young people, and civil society groups gathered to honour the victims and renew calls for justice and accountability.

The commemorations also highlighted Kenya's continuing civic space concerns. By the end of the day, 355 people had been arrested nationwide, with human rights groups and observers raising concerns over arbitrary arrests and the handling of peaceful mourners. Police dispersed gatherings in Nairobi using tear gas, preventing some families from laying flowers at Parliament in memory of their loved ones.

Key Civic Space Highlights

- 355 people arrested during the June 25, 2026 commemorations.
- At least 6 peaceful mourners were detained outside Parliament before being released or processed.
- At least 60 people were killed during the June 25, 2024 protests, according to human rights documentation.
- The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights documented 63 deaths, 610 injuries and 74 enforced disappearances linked to the 2024 protests, with 26 people still reported missing as of the second anniversary.

As Kenya marks two years since the historic Gen Z protests, the quest for justice continues. While the commemorations honored lives lost, they also underscored the urgent need to protect the constitutional rights to peaceful assembly, expression and remembrance, rights that remain central to a free and democratic civic space.



The KNCHR Reparations Framework in protection of Human Rights

By: Catherine Mbui, ARTICLE 19 EASTERN AFRICA.

Kenya has an extensive history of citizen participation in protests and demonstration against a range of key issues, including vague laws on public order management, police non-compliance with assembly guidelines, use of excessive force in management of demonstrations, and unlawful arrests and detention of protesters. In 2024 and 2025, the June-July protests led by young people and human rights defenders focused significantly on concerns about high taxation, governance, and extra judicial killings.

On August 26 2025, the President of Kenya, H.E. William Ruto gazetted a Panel of Experts to lead work on compensation for protests victims by providing accountability and reparations for both civilians and security personnel affected between 2017 and July 2025. However, civil society pushed back on this initiative on the basis that the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR or Commission) is constitutionally mandated to deal with human rights violations. A case was instituted at the High Court in Kerugoya Petition E010 of 2025, to halt the panel from proceeding. On 4 December 2025, the court affirmed that the Commission holds the exclusive constitutional and statutory mandate to design reparations for human rights violations, invalidating the establishment of the presidential committee as unconstitutional.

On 6 March 2026, the president made a Proclamation and Gazette Notice, pursuant to Article 254(2) of the Constitution, requiring the KNCHR to submit a report containing a Framework for Compensation and Reparations to victims of human rights violations within sixty (60) days.

The KNCHR expanded the mandate to develop a reparations framework that is based on the United Nations Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparations; that include compensation (monetary amounts), restitution (restoring rights and status where possible), rehabilitation (medical and psychosocial support), satisfaction (acknowledgement, apology, memorialisation and truth-telling) and guarantees of non-repetition (institutional reforms to prevent recurrence of violations). The Reparation Framework covers all cases of violations perpetrated by public officers and not limited to compensation for protests victims.

The KNCHR formally handed over the Framework to the President on 15th June 2026.

The key highlights of the Report and Framework are:

1. Identified structural deficits within Kenya's human rights protection architecture:

These are the absence of a comprehensive and institutionalized reparations regime; persistent non-implementation of recommendations of prior public inquiries; and the lack of legislative framework on protest under Article 27 of the Constitution.

2. The Commission recommends development of a National Reparations Policy, enactment a Reparations Act, facilitate a Reparations Fund and establish an independent Reparations institution for implementation. KNCHR remains as an oversight institution as they coordinate the efforts of the relevant State agencies.

3. The main human rights violations highlighted and compensation packages are: right to life (Ksh.2.5 million); aggravated sexual violence, rape, defilement and sodomy (Ksh.750,000 – Ksh.2 million); freedom from torture (Ksh.2 million); freedom and security of the person (Ksh.50,000 – Ksh.1 million); right to property (Ksh.100,000); and enforced disappearance (Ksh.1.5 million). The total number of verified cases reaching 1101 victims. Lastly, any person aggrieved by the decision or award can seek a review by the Commission or file an appeal to the High Court.

Once the report was submitted, the next steps should be: government formally adopts the Framework and passes related policy and law. This would prompt treasury to allocate and disburse funds to the Panel of Experts who would facilitate compensation to the victims and their families. Lack of the legal structures before making compensations undermines the initiative to be a political manoeuvre and not a genuine government reform action.

The right to reparations is a fundamental principle of international human rights law, entitling victims of human rights violations to immediate, short-term and long-term remedies. This aims to repair harm, restore dignity, and address root causes of violence, holding states responsible for human rights violations of commission or omission.

Sources:

1. <https://www.article19.org/resources/kenya-national-commission-on-human-rights-framework-for-reparations/>

1. <https://www.knchr.org/Our-Work/Reparations>

LAWS & LEGISLATIONS

AI: INNOVATION OR SURVEILLANCE?

"The AI Bill Under the Microscope"

Kenya's proposed Artificial Intelligence Bill, 2026, has generated significant discussion among policymakers, technology experts, civil society organizations, and digital rights advocates.

The Bill seeks to establish a legal framework for the development, deployment, and governance of artificial intelligence systems in Kenya.

Key proposals include:

- Classification of AI systems according to risk levels;
- Human rights impact assessments for high-risk AI systems;
- Transparency obligations for AI developers and deployers;
- Creation of an Artificial Intelligence Commissioner;
- Restrictions on AI systems are considered to pose unacceptable risks.

While the Bill is widely viewed as an important step toward AI governance, stakeholders have raised concerns regarding implementation, institutional capacity, accountability mechanisms, and protection of fundamental rights.

Civil society organizations continue to advocate for a human-rights-centered approach to AI regulation that protects privacy, freedom of expression, non-discrimination, and public participation.

As AI increasingly influences governance, employment, financial services, and public decision-making, the conversation around digital rights is expected to remain a key civic space issue.

Anchor Point: The future of AI must be human-centered, rights-based, and inclusive.



KEY CONVENINGS

THE LAW LIBRARY FOR CIVIC SPACE IS GETTING BIGGER

"Know Your Rights. Know the Law."

Civic Freedoms Forum recently convened a stakeholder validation meeting for the second edition of the Compendium of Laws on Civic Space in Kenya commissioned by Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC). Supported by KIOS Foundation, the meeting brought together civil society organizations, legal experts, researchers, and other stakeholders to review and validate the publication.

The compendium provides an analysis of laws, regulations, and policies that affect civic space in Kenya and serves as an important resource for organizations, advocates, researchers, and policymakers. Participants reviewed key legislative developments, emerging regulatory trends, and practical experiences from across the sector.



The validation process reflects CFF's commitment to evidence-based advocacy and strengthening understanding of the legal and policy environment affecting civic freedoms.

Once finalized, the publication is expected to serve as a valuable reference tool for advancing civic space protection and democratic participation in Kenya.

Anchor Point: Knowledge remains one of the strongest tools for defending civic freedoms.

KEY CONVENINGS

ADVANCING THE CIVIC FREEDOMS MONITOR

Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF) has taken another significant step towards developing Kenya's Civic Freedoms Monitor following the successful Second Experts' Convening held on 26 May 2026 in Nairobi.

The meeting brought together experts in human rights, governance, monitoring and evaluation, digital security, software development, and public policy to review and validate the Monitor's framework, methodology, and digital architecture. Building on insights from previous consultations and pilot activities, the convening focused on strengthening the platform to ensure it delivers credible, evidence-based data on the state of civic freedoms across Kenya.

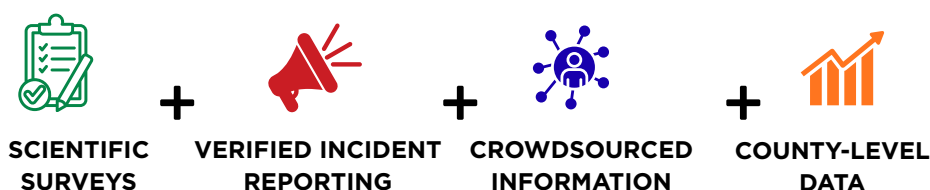
As civic space continues to face growing challenges including restrictions on peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, access to information, and the protection of human rights defenders the Monitor is being developed as a reliable digital platform to track civic space trends across all 47 counties. It will combine scientific surveys, verified incident reporting, crowdsourced information, and county-level data to provide timely insights that support advocacy, accountability, and policy reform.

During the convening, experts endorsed the overall direction of the project while recommending enhancements to strengthen civic space indicators, improve data verification, and reinforce cybersecurity and privacy protections. Participants also supported the use of Artificial Intelligence to enhance data analysis while maintaining human oversight to ensure accuracy and credibility.

The meeting further emphasized the importance of strategic partnerships, standardized reporting, and capacity building for county monitors to ensure the platform remains sustainable and produces high-quality data.

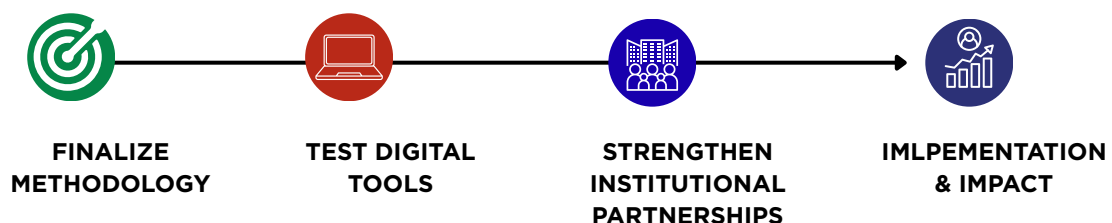
With a clear roadmap for the next phase, including finalizing the methodology, testing digital tools, and strengthening institutional partnerships, the Civic Freedoms Monitor is steadily moving towards implementation. Once launched, it will serve as a powerful evidence-based resource for monitoring civic space, informing public policy, and strengthening the protection of civic freedoms across Kenya.

HOW THE MONITOR WILL WORK



All 47 Counties | Timely Insights | Advocacy | Accountability | Policy Reforms

THE ROAD AHEAD



CFF IN HELSINKI: CIVIC SPACE THROUGH A GLOBAL LENS

By: Michelle Mwelesa, CFF's Advocacy Officer

The Helsinki trip was an enriching experience filled with learning, unlearning, and meaningful exchanges. From the moment I arrived, everything felt new from the long flight to the extended daylight that stretched late into the night. These small but striking differences set the tone for a truly memorable visit to Finland.

The World Village Festival provided an excellent platform for CFF to share insights on the current state of civic space in Kenya and across the East African region. Presenting the Kenyan human rights experience was both liberating and eye-opening. Engaging with an audience whose democratic context differs from ours was particularly empowering, as it allowed us to tell our story and bring greater awareness of our realities to the Finnish public. One of the most impactful moments of the trip was meeting representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Parliament. This experience was a true light-bulb moment, as it exposed me to a different approach to public service and governance. Unlike the bureaucracy and bottlenecks often encountered in Kenya, the interactions here were efficient and open. This contrast was both inspiring and thought-provoking, offering a glimpse into what is possible.

I also had the opportunity to engage with Finnish NGOs working on democracy and human rights issues. The exchange of ideas and experiences was the highlight of the trip. Despite operating in different contexts and at varying scales, there was a strong sense of shared purpose that made these conversations feel familiar and deeply rewarding. Visiting the offices of our partners; the KIOS Foundation was equally exciting. It was truly fulfilling to finally put faces to the names behind the emails and to see firsthand where their impactful work takes shape. The experience felt both personal and inspiring.

My biggest takeaway from this trip is the importance of strengthening the relationship between rights holders and duty bearers. Building trust and confidence in governance systems and in the leaders we elect, is essential for creating sustainable and inclusive societies.

Overall, the trip to Finland was both inspiring and transformative. I am grateful for the experience and look forward to future opportunities for collaboration and engagement.



PARTNERS CONTRIBUTION

Stronger Together!

WELCOMING KITUO CHA SHERIA TO THE CFF FAMILY

Our 13th Member Organization

<https://kituochasheria.or.ke/>



ABOUT KITUO CHA SHERIA



Founded: 1973



Mission: “To empower the poor and marginalized people to effectively access justice and enjoy their peoples’ and human rights in Kenya through advocacy, networking, lobbying, legal aid education and representation and research.”



Vision: A Just and Equitable Society



Values: Respect, Commitment, Solidarity, Courage, Service, Transparency, Obligation, Professionalism, Teamwork



Impact: Contributing to landmark legal victories, influencing policy change, and advancing the rights of marginalized communities across Kenya

THE IMPACT ON CFF

- ✓ 1. Stronger legal expertise within the Forum.
- ✓ 2. Enhanced capacity to defend and expand civic space.
- ✓ 3. Broad reach and deeper impact in communities.
- ✓ 4. A more united and powerful voice for civic freedoms.

We are delighted to welcome Kituo Cha Sheria (Legal Advice Centre) as our 13th member organization, further strengthening the Forum’s collective commitment to protecting and expanding civic space in Kenya. Established in 1973, Kituo Cha Sheria is one of Kenya’s oldest and leading public interest legal organizations, dedicated to promoting access to justice for marginalized and vulnerable communities. Through legal aid, strategic litigation, human rights advocacy, civic education, and policy engagement, the organization has played a pivotal role in advancing constitutionalism, defending human rights, and empowering citizens to claim their rights. Guided by its new Strategic Plan, **“Advancing People-Centred Justice for All in Kenya and Beyond, 2026–2030,”** Kituo is strengthening its commitment to accessible, inclusive, responsive, and community-driven justice.

Kituo’s admission into CFF brings decades of legal expertise and experience in defending civic freedoms, making the Forum better positioned to respond to emerging threats to democratic space. Its contribution will strengthen CFF’s work in legal advocacy, strategic litigation, policy reform, and the protection of human rights defenders, while enriching collaborative efforts to promote accountability, justice, and citizen participation. As CFF continues to grow, the addition of Kituo Cha Sheria reflects the Forum’s commitment to building a diverse and united coalition capable of safeguarding Kenya’s civic space. Together, we look forward to advancing a future where every citizen can freely participate, express themselves, and enjoy the rights guaranteed under the Constitution.



SAUTI YAKO, NGUVU YAKO

Whether online or on the streets, civic participation is not reserved for politicians, lawyers or just activists.



In Partnership with





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Defending Civic Space & Human Rights

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