



## **INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY 2019**

### **THEME: YOUTH STANDING UP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

#### **Call for a Public Dialogue in Isiolo to Address Police Killings and Enforced Disappearances**

From January 2019 to September 2019, Missing Voices documented 84 police killings and enforced disappearances. Although these statistics tell a tragic tale of the impacts of unlawful and violent policing, they fail to convey the true holistic image of police killings and enforced disappearances in Kenya. In fact, this data is just the tip of an iceberg as a majority of cases go unreported. As a result of diverse socio-political environments, documentation varies depending on the region. Isiolo is a region that represents the bottom of the iceberg as only a microscopic percentage of cases have been reported out of the jarringly high number of victims who have been killed or disappeared in the name of “national security” and “conservation”.

Isiolo county is vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism because of its location and high youth unemployment. As a result, the National Police Service (NPS) performs anti-terror operations which have resulted in unlawful deaths and suspected disappearances. Families of victims heavily fear reporting these violations as they are likely to be accused of supporting terrorism activities. This fear of repercussion has created a culture where many victims suffer in silence, rarely telling their friends when their loved ones disappear. On the rare occasion that the cases are reported, the ineffective bureaucracy of the NPS exasperates victims and sustains a culture of impunity making it very difficult to hold officers to account.

Isiolo is well known for its conservation activities that take place within Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and Meru National Park. Within these spaces the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) operate and police the area. What is omitted within the characterization of these entities are their “shoot to kill” policies that enforce the view that preservation of wildlife is inherently more important than human life. The NRT is an umbrella organization for many non-profit conservation groups which are heavily funded and controlled by Western states. As a result, there is a serious lack of national oversight that again maintains a culture of impunity with a lack of structure in place to hold officers accountable. KWS operates in a similar manner, in fact, a notorious example of this is the 2015 Isiolo protest that called for action to be taken against the unlawful policing methods of KWS. During this demonstration, KWS officials unlawfully opened fire on the protesters and killed 1 person while injuring 12. The officials were later suspected to have kidnapped and disappeared Mohammed Sheikh Abdullahi, a young human rights defender, who was one of the organizers of the protests.

Human life in Isiolo is being lost at a jarringly high rate and if victims continue to be silenced and officers fail to be held to account, this trend will continue to foster and normalize. For these reasons, Missing Voices wants to partner with Isiolo human rights defenders to coordinate the first public dialogue that will bring together NPS, KWS, NRT and community members. This dialogue will provide victims of police excesses’ the opportunity to speak out and be heard, which will break the culture of silence and promote the idea of speaking out and documenting human rights abuses. Appropriate security

assessments will take place prior to the event to ensure the safety of the victims after the dialogue. The conversation will also be centered around finding a solution for these human rights abuses and begin the process of mending the broken relationship between the community and NPS, KWS and NRT.

To achieve these, we cannot ignore the role of the youth in organizing the community against these violations. Thus, the dialogue will also focus on the contribution of Isiolo youth in the realization of human rights and how state actors and the community can support their initiatives.

### **Event Outputs**

- Raise national awareness of the impacts of unlawful policing in Isiolo
- Mitigate the relationships between NRT, KWS, NPS and the community
- Create safer environments for victims to report and document their cases
- Begin the healing process for victims by affording them a space to speak about their experiences
- Commitments by state actors to support human rights efforts by the Isiolo youth
- Create a safer space for human rights defenders to monitor human rights work
- Begin the process of finding solutions that balances human rights and the conservation of wildlife