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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NAIROBI, Kenya, April 10th, 2025 - Inspector General of Police Must Take Responsibility for the Human Rights Violations During the 63rd edition of the National Drama and Film Festivals.

Civic Freedoms Forum (CFF), yet again, strongly condemns the shocking and unlawful actions of the National Police during the 63rd edition of the National Drama and Film Festivals held at Kiribon High School in Nakuru County. Anti-riot police armed with batons and teargas canisters sealed off the venue. Members of the public and the media were locked out. At least six journalists including **Maryanne Nyambura** (Citizen TV), **Peter Kimani** (KTN), **Robert Maina** (Inooro Tv), **Joseph Kipsang** (whose camera was destroyed during the incident) **Kennedy Gachuhi** (Standard Group) and **Evans Asiba** (Citizen TV) were attacked and assaulted by police officers while covering the chaotic arrest of the scriptwriter and director of the play and former Kakamega Senator Cleophas Malala.

It is also troubling that the official charged with adjudicating the National Drama and Film Festival, working with the police, ordered the students to perform without an audience, without their trainers, without even a soundtrack. Further, no cameras or journalists were in the hall where the performances were set to take place. These restrictions were also placed on the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) crew to stop them from filming the performance of the play. In an act of courage and solidarity, the Butere Girls' team did not perform the play, instead, they sang the National Anthem and left the stage. Outside the hall, solidarity turned to chaos. Police lobbed teargas at students and supporters who had gathered peacefully.

This was not an accident. It was a reckless, targeted attack meant to intimidate and silence the media fraternity. These actions are not only unacceptable and unlawful, but they are also a direct assault on press freedom and the freedom of artistic expression and an affront to Kenya's constitutional democracy.

These unconstitutional acts were sparked by the performance of the *Echoes of War*, a play presented by Butere Girls High School that mirrored the current state of Kenya's underwhelming governance and the Gen-Z-led protests in 2024. While initially disqualified during the Western Region Drama Festivals, it took a High Court directive for the school and scriptwriter to earn the right to present it in the national line-up.

The CFF reiterates that freedom of the press and expression are paramount for democracies to function. When the press is under attack, democracy itself is under threat. The role of the media in holding power to account must be protected, not punished. This kind of state-sponsored violence on artistic expression and media freedom sets a dangerous precedent and must be urgently addressed.



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We, therefore, call for:

1. **Immediate and transparent investigations** into these incidents by the Independent Policing and Oversight Authority (IPOA) and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to lawfully prosecute culpable officers.
2. The National Police Service (NPS) officers **adhere to the law and standing orders** regarding the use of force as per NPS Act and Service Standing Orders.
3. **A public apology** from the Ministry of Interior and Inspector General of Police to the Butere Girls' Team and the journalists affected.

Signed by

ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa	Kenya Human Rights Commission - KHRC
Constitution and Reform Education Consortium - CRECO	Muslims for Human Rights - MUHURI
Defenders Coalition	Partnerships 4 Empowerment and Networking in Kenya (PEN KENYA)
Independent Medico-Legal Unit - IMLU	Inuka Kenya Ni Sisi!
InformAction Tv	Haki Yetu Organization
Initiative for Inclusive Empowerment - IIE	Transparency International - Kenya