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Kenya

Kenya: Youth against the Ruto regime

- IV Online magazine - 2025 - IVP603 - April 2025 -

Publication date: Saturday 19 April 2025

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Last spring, huge demonstrations took place across Kenya against the finance bill under the slogan “#RejectFinanceBill2024”. This IMF-backed project aimed to impose new taxes on the population in order to pay off debts amounting to \$79 billion. The mobilization, mainly by young people, forced President William Ruto to cancel the bill.

89 kidnappings

Since the end of this mobilization, the authorities have continued to pursue a repressive policy, illustrated by kidnappings and extra-judicial executions. 89 people have been kidnapped, sometimes in broad daylight, by commando units of masked men. Among the victims were young people who had taken part in the demonstrations, and activists such as cartoonist Gideon Kibet, who caused a stir in the country and was able to regain his freedom. Unfortunately, this is not the case for everyone. To date, 29 of the 89 people abducted have still not been found, while others have been found dead.

The authorities insist that they have nothing to do with these practices. This denial was shattered by the Muturi case. This involved a young man, Leslie Muturi, who was kidnapped like others but whose father, a former state Attorney General and the current Minister of Public Service, intervened directly with senior police officials. The information obtained revealed that his son was in the hands of the intelligence services, after an intervention with Ruto. The young Muturi was released, demonstrating the responsibility of the government's repressive forces, even though Kenya has signed the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

Silencing dissent

These practices are not new, but they have accelerated. The aim is to create an atmosphere of fear among opponents. From one day to the next, anyone can find themselves in the hands of these commandos. The few people who agreed to testify in the Amnesty International report published a few weeks ago report beatings and ill-treatment during their confinement.

This repression is being used by the government to try and break up a youthful protest that is still active, as evidenced by the strong presence of activism on social networks. Messages, drawings and photos generated by artificial intelligence are circulating, ridiculing politicians and denouncing their incompetence and corruption. The digital space has become a place for debate and opposition to power, which could quickly turn from virtual actions into very real ones, given the country's worsening social situation.

[L'Anticapitaliste](#) 2 April 2025

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