

Kenyan government bans demonstrations ahead of October 26 election re-run

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On Thursday the government of Kenya, attempting to quell days of mass unrest ahead of the October 26 election re-run, issued a ban on protests in the cities of Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu. Continuing for an indefinite duration, the ban specifically bars demonstrations in the central business districts of the three cities.

The proscription on demonstrations is the latest action from a government mired in crisis, coming after the Kenyan Supreme Court nullified the August 8 election which had declared that incumbent Uhuru Kenyatta defeated opposition candidate Raila Odinga for the presidency. In its ruling, the court cited that it found the vote tally was “tainted by irregularities and illegalities,” and ordered a new election to take place within 60 days.

The news of the protest ban sparked widespread outrage and thousands poured into the streets in defiance of the government edict. During the past two weeks Odinga’s National Super Alliance party (NASA) have called regular demonstrations to protest changes to the country’s election laws that would block the Supreme Court from overturning future election results.

The issuing of the protest ban displays a clear shift toward police state methods of rule by the government. The government’s violent crackdown on demonstrations and its enacting of the Electoral Amendment law constitute an attack on the democratic rights of the Kenyan population, reflecting the fear within the ruling elite of the growth of mass opposition to its rule.

In the Western town of Siaya on Friday, police fired live rounds into a crowd of 2,000 demonstrators, killing two and wounding three more. Demonstrators in the western city of Kisumu blocked streets and burned tires, and threw rocks at police who fired tear gas.

Concurrently, Nairobi police fired tear gas and live rounds at thousands of protesters marching towards the city center, and the police in Mombasa deployed tear gas and beat demonstrators.

In the weeks after the August 8 poll declaring Kenyatta the winner in the hotly contested election, frequent demonstrations and unrest have occurred in the three major Kenyan cities, with police responding violently, killing at least 45, including a number of children caught in police crossfire, according to a joint Amnesty International/Human Rights Watch report.

The two organizations documented that the victims of police violence were largely the poor residents of slum districts of urban centers, including Mathare, Kibera, and Kawangware in Nairobi, as well as scores of victims in Kisumu.

Witnesses recounted to researchers that police fired randomly at protesters, and when protesters attempted to flee the volley of bullets they were chased down and beaten or shot to death.

When questioned by the media regarding the report’s allegations, Kenya’s police chief Joseph Boinnet denied the police carried out the killings and said the report was “totally misleading and based on falsehoods.” Boinnet claimed the police were only aware of 12 deaths, which are still under investigation.

Odinga called for the daily protests to push the government to enact reforms of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). Amid a series of suspicious circumstances which occurred during the August 8 poll, Odinga accused the IEBC of not fulfilling its obligation to ensure a free and fair election.

The opposition candidate officially withdrew his participation in the October 26 re-run last week in protest of proposed election law changes being pushed

by Kenyatta. The following day the government rammed through parliament the anti-democratic Electoral Amendments Law, which curbs future nullifications of elections by the Supreme Court.

The crackdown on demonstrations is motivated by fears within the Kenyan ruling elite of falling bank and corporate profits and a decline in foreign investments as a consequence of uncertainty caused by the continued unrest.

Interior Minister Fred Matiangi in announcing the protest ban told the media, “Due to the clear, present and imminent danger of breach of peace, the government notifies the public that, for the time being, we will not allow demonstrations within the central business districts of Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu.” He went on to deride demonstrators as criminals who were taking advantage of the chaos to loot businesses.

Significantly, Matiangi met with the Kenyan Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), an organization comprised of Kenyan and Western capitalists, hours before issuing the ban. Matiangi afterward stated to the press that he had “received complaints from the business community about the negative effects the protests were having on their businesses.”

Since the beginning of the election crisis, Kenyan stocks have suffered a fall and yields on its Eurobonds have soared. According to *Bloomberg*, growth in East Africa’s top economy could fall short of the 5.5 percent previously projected.

Kenyan Central Bank governor Patrick Njorege, in Washington on Saturday to attend the annual gatherings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, stated, “The growth rate won’t be as strong as we expected, but I don’t think we can say that we’ve gone over the precipice.” Njorege also spoke of the historic famine affecting Kenya, which is damaging profits in the agricultural sector with markets anticipating lower crop yields.

In a press statement last Wednesday to the media, KEPSA attempted to soothe the jittery nerves of international markets by insisting that despite the election crisis, Kenya was still an attractive investing destination. “To all investors, Kenyan and international: Kenya remains an attractive investment destination. Our noisy, colorful and very long election will, in fact, result in the country becoming an even more attractive investment destination, as dispute

resolution institutions and mechanisms, and other guarantors of the rule of law, become further entrenched as they pass through this institution ‘character building’ election period.”

For its part, Washington is concerned that its imperialist projects in Kenya and East Africa are not derailed by the chaos erupting due to massive unrest. Kenya has forces conducting a US-backed war in neighboring Somalia to stabilize its puppet government in Mogadishu.



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