

Kenyan filmmakers arrested in crackdown over BBC exposé of Gen-Z massacre

Kipchumba Ochieng
4 May 2025

Kenyan filmmakers Nicholas Gichuki, Brian Adagala, Mark Denver Karubiu, and Chris Wamae, were arrested in Nairobi May 2, for their alleged involvement with the BBC's documentary *Blood Parliament*.

The arrests were made without formal charges or warrants, indicating that the government of President William Ruto, now in alliance with the former opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) led by billionaire Raila Odinga, is escalating mass repression prior to the one-year anniversary of the Gen-Z uprising.

Blood Parliament depicts the Kenyan bourgeoisie's violent response to the largest youth-led uprising in the country since independence. Released by *BBC Africa Eye* and available on YouTube, it centres on June 25, 2024, when at least 100,000 protesters gathered in Nairobi to oppose the Finance Bill aiming to raise \$2.7 billion. The bill imposed sweeping new taxes on essential goods, including bread, cooking oil, sanitary products, and fuel, amid a deepening cost-of-living crisis.

State repression left at least 65 people dead across the country and hundreds injured. Thousands were arrested. Dozens more were abducted, never to be seen again. Ongoing investigations, led by the misnamed Independent Policing Oversight Authority, have never been made public and are whitewashes.

Using open-source intelligence and more than 5,000 crowd-sourced images and videos, the BBC identified security personnel who opened fire on unarmed protesters outside Parliament. The investigation singles out not only the officers who pulled the trigger, killing at least three young men, but also senior commanders who issued the shoot-to-kill orders.

Crucially, the documentary reveals that the first killings did not occur when protesters momentarily stormed the parliament fence, but afterward, once they had been pushed out and were retreating. Far from being acts of chaotic self-defence, it shows senior police officers

ordering “kuua, kuua” (“kill, kill” in Kiswahili), as officers cover themselves with masks before firing live ammunition.

Galvanised by the killings, protesters then stormed Parliament, breaching the compound and setting parts of the building alight. After just five minutes, they withdrew. As the crowds dispersed, a member of the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) opened fire again on retreating demonstrators, killing at least one and injuring two others.

This revelation implicates the military in the bloodshed, even before it was formally deployed by the Ruto government the following day. It breaks Kenya's longstanding “pact of silence” surrounding its military, which the ruling class protects against public scrutiny regarding its role in domestic political repression and violence abroad, particularly in Somalia.

Drawing on ballistic evidence, CCTV footage and eyewitness testimony, the documentary reveals that officers were given explicit shoot-to-kill orders. This is corroborated by forensic analysis and survivor accounts, painting a picture of a deliberate and coordinated massacre.

The documentary fails to explicitly indict Ruto and the government for the killings. Kenya's police have a long history of acting with impunity, repeatedly implicated in extrajudicial killings, torture, and disappearances, particularly against social opposition to austerity, corruption and soaring costs of living. The year before, anti-austerity protests led by the opposition were violently suppressed, leaving at least 31 people dead and injured hundreds. No serious reckoning has ever taken place.

It also pays no attention to the role of imperialist powers. Behind closed doors, Washington, London, and European capitals alongside the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were working with Ruto. Their concern was not Kenyan lives, but the risk that the protests could

destabilise its key regional ally and capitalist regimes across the continent. They advised Ruto to temporarily withdraw the Finance Bill and stagger the imposition of austerity measures to defuse public anger, while continuing to fund and train the military and police.

Ruto complied, while leaving the austerity agenda firmly in place, with new measures included in the 2025 Finance Bill set to be unveiled on Tuesday.

The BBC has denied that the arrested individuals were involved in the production of the film, stating that they were not staff, crew, or contributors. Nevertheless, authorities detained them, seized their equipment, and subjected them to interrogations.

The arrests are a naked attempt to intimidate journalists and suppress further dissemination of the documentary's findings. Just days earlier, police shut down a planned screening of the documentary and accompanying panel discussion at Unseen Nairobi cinema.

Despite official censorship, *Blood Parliament* was viewed over five million times on YouTube within just five days of its release. The total audience is likely even larger, as many have watched it in groups. Hashtags like #BloodParliament and #FreeTheFour have trended for days, with many users demanding justice for the slain protesters, the removal of the Ruto government and an end to police brutality.

Government spokesman Isaac Mwaura said the documentary risked “inciting Kenyans to violence”. Several lawmakers joined a coordinated campaign to discredit the film. George Peter Kaluma said it risked “destabilising” the country. John Kiarie accused the BBC of harbouring “a foreign agenda”, adding, “We must ask whether this is BBC journalism or the voice of British foreign policy. Kenya cannot be lectured by a country whose own soldiers have committed atrocities on our soil.”

ODM lawmaker Peter Kaluma also condemned the BBC, calling for its Africa bureau's operating licence to be revoked and denouncing the documentary as “twisted, partial, reckless, and intended to incite chaos in Kenya.”

That the BBC is the official voice of British imperialism, cloaked in a fiction of neutrality, is beyond dispute. But Kiarie, and the rest of the Kenyan political class, are stooges of imperialism. The politicians denouncing the BBC have signed defence cooperation agreements to maintain British military bases in Kenya, while Ruto himself paid tribute to Queen Elizabeth II, the monarch who presided over the brutal suppression of the anti-colonial Mau Mau uprising that left hundreds of

thousands dead. Britain remains Kenya's largest European investor, a key donor of development aid, and a strategic partner in military and counterterrorism operations.

ODM Senator Edwin Sifuna defended the documentary, insisting it contained no “fabrications.” But Sifuna remains part of a ruling coalition responsible for the very atrocities the documentary exposes.

In the run-up to the one year anniversary of the Gen Z protests, Chief of Defence Forces General Charles Muriu Kahariri has threatened youth protesters. Francis Atwoli, head of Central Organization of Trade Unions, has called for sweeping censorship of social media. Even schoolchildren's plays have been violently suppressed for being critical of the government.

The arrest of the filmmakers epitomizes the profound crisis of legitimacy facing the Kenyan bourgeoisie, which is rapidly sliding back into the authoritarianism of the dictatorship of Daniel arap Moi under whom President William Ruto was a loyal protégé.

Moi's 24-year rule (1978 to 2002) was marked by arbitrary detention without trial, widespread torture, surveillance, and extrajudicial killings. The notorious Nyayo House in Nairobi became emblematic of state terror, where countless journalists, students, unionists, and opposition figures were tortured or disappeared. Ethnic violence was whipped up to divide workers and the rural masses. In the horrific Wagalla Massacre in 1984, the Kenyan army rounded up thousands of ethnic Somali men in Wajir county, held them at an airstrip without food or water, and slaughtered an estimated 1,000 people. Many of the regime's leading figures, including politicians, senior police, military officers, judges, and civil servants, remained in power in the post-Moi era, some up to the present day.

Confronting this descent into barbarism demands the unified mobilisation of the working class on a socialist programme. Armed with the lessons of history and guided by the principles of internationalism, workers and youth in Kenya must join their struggles across borders in Africa, in the United States, Europe, and beyond.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact