

Kenya's President Ruto threatens June 25 Gen-Z anniversary protests

Kipchumba Ochieng
23 June 2026

Kenyan President William Ruto has issued a deadly threat ahead of the June 25 anniversary of Gen-Z protests this week.

The protests, which erupted in June 2024 against the Ruto government's International Monetary Fund-backed Finance Bill, rapidly developed into a mass youth-led uprising against austerity, unemployment, soaring living costs, police violence and the political establishment.

Speaking at the National Productivity and Performance Conference in Nairobi, Ruto declared that Kenya "believes viciously in order," insisting that it is "a civilised nation" and "an organised society" which believes in "the rule of law."

While claiming that citizens have the right "to petition or to protest," Ruto warned, "The one thing that is not going to happen is that people will be mobilised to destroy property or to cause chaos or mayhem. That will not happen." He repeatedly insisted that "that will not happen."

His concern is to prevent any interruption to the generation of profits: "Workers will go to work because that's how we raise the productivity of our nation. Businesses will open and grow our economy. Farmers too and everybody so that we can take the nation forward."

This is a warning from a government with a bloody record of police-state repression. Since taking office in 2022, Ruto has killed over 250 protesters, carried out thousands of arbitrary arrests, overseen the abduction of at least 74 protesters—23 of whom are still missing—deployed the army, banned protests, and mobilised state-funded goons to disrupt demonstrations.

Ruto's threats have been backed by Francis Atwoli, secretary general of the Central Organisation of Trade

Unions (COTU), nominally representing 1.5 million workers across 36 affiliated unions. Atwoli said, "I want to appeal to Kenyans to stay far away from demonstrations on the 25th... And let our people who are doing casual jobs in hotels and other places to go to their places of work undisturbed."

He appealed directly for police violence against protestors: "I am also appealing to the Inspector General to come out in full force to protect the workers who are reporting to duty. They need to make a day for their living."

Atwoli's intervention is a stark demonstration of the role played by the trade-union bureaucracy in policing capitalist rule over the working class. He calls on workers to remain at work to produce profits and appeals for police deployments to enforce this demand.

None of the fundamental conditions that drove millions of young people and workers into opposition in 2024 have been resolved. Kenyan workers confront a crushing cost-of-living crisis. The price of fuel, transport, food and basic necessities continues to eat into already meagre wages. The recent surge in fuel costs was intensified by the disruption of oil markets by the US-Israeli war against Iran. In May, pump prices rose sharply, with diesel reaching record levels. The increases reverberate through every section of economic life: public transport fares, food prices, the cost of moving goods and the daily survival of workers and the rural poor. Millions of young people face unemployment, underemployment or casual work, while families are pushed deeper into debt and poverty.

The June 25 demonstrations are being driven above all among young people mobilised through social media by hashtags like #HakiSasa and #JusticeNow. Their immediate focus is the commemoration of those killed in the 2024 uprising, the demand for an end to

police violence and the insistence that those responsible for killings, abductions and repression be held to account.

But the struggle against police violence cannot be confined to appeals for police accountability. The police are an institution of class rule: their essential function is to defend imperialist interests and the wealth of the 125 individuals who now control more wealth than 77 percent of the population, over 42 million people.

As long as capitalism survives, the state will retain armed bodies of men to enforce bourgeois rule. Every government will ultimately rely on the police to defend private property and suppress the working class. The struggle against police killings must be connected to the broader class struggle against social inequality, opposition to austerity and resistance to war. It requires the independent mobilisation of workers and rural masses against the capitalist state and the financial aristocracy it serves.

The bourgeois opposition parties and the Stalinist organisations are intervening to co-opt and neuter the June 25 protests. They promote illusions that the crisis can be resolved through police “reform” or the removal of Ruto. Such demands leave untouched the capitalist state, the IMF-dictated austerity programme, the domination of imperialism and the extreme social inequality from which police violence arises. This diverts explosive anger away from a struggle against the entire ruling class and into the dead end of parliamentary manoeuvres prior to the 2027 elections.

Veteran politician and Siaya Senator James Orengo led relatives of protestors on Thursday to officially notify the police of planned protests. He is aligned with the Linda Mwananchi faction of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), which also includes ODM Secretary General Edwin Sifuna and Embakasi MP Babu Owino. They remain key figures in ODM, the party whose leadership entered into Ruto’s government after the 2024 Gen-Z protests and filled key posts, including Treasury Secretary John Mbadi, who is responsible for implementing IMF attacks.

Orengo represents a faction within ODM that has criticised this collaboration and seeks to retain a posture of opposition. In the 1990s, he emerged as a prominent figure against the Western-backed dictatorship of Daniel arap Moi, calling for a return to

multiparty elections. In 2005, he joined Raila Odinga’s ODM. Following the 2007 election theft of President Mwai Kibaki in 2007, which sparked post-election violence that left more than 1,200 people dead and around half a million displaced, Orengo entered Kibaki’s government as Minister for Lands between 2008 and 2013 to stabilize capitalist rule.

Another key figure backing the June 25 protests is People’s Liberation Party leader Martha Karua, who joined Orengo in last Thursday’s protest notification to the police. Karua served as justice minister in Kibaki’s government and publicly defended the administration during Kibaki’s election theft. The security forces of the government she defended were responsible for the majority of the killings.

Boniface Mwangi, a prominent anti-corruption campaigner and presidential aspirant, has also backed the June 25 protest. Referring to the recent police killings of three people opposing a proposed US-backed Ebola quarantine facility in Nanyuki, he said: “With all these happening, we are justified to unite and pour into the streets to demand a stop to the trend.”

Communist Party Marxist-Kenya (CPM-K) General Secretary Booker Omole also backed the June 25 protests, calling for an end to Ruto’s regime. In an interview with K24 TV last week, he said the aim was “to set the demise of William Ruto”.

Workers and youth must reject every attempt to subordinate their struggle to the bourgeois opposition parties and Stalinist organisations seeking to channel mass anger behind police reform and parliamentary manoeuvres.

The way forward in the struggle against the Ruto government is the independent organisation of rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools, universities and working-class neighbourhoods, uniting the fight against police violence with strikes, resistance to austerity, opposition to imperialist war and the socialist struggle against capitalism.



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact