

Kenya's President William Ruto locks down Nairobi to prevent Gen-Z protests

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25 June 2026

The Kenyan government of President William Ruto moved to suppress demonstrations in Nairobi on Thursday.

Demonstrations had been called across social media and backed by sections of the capitalist opposition to commemorate those killed in the Gen Z-led protests of 2024 and 2025, and to demand justice for the killings, abductions and mass arrests by the government and the state.

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. At least 200 protestors remain languishing in jail on trumped up charges.

The protests were anticipated to be large. To prevent this, thousands of police officers were deployed across the capital to lock down large sections of Nairobi.

The scale of the security operation revealed a government sitting atop a social powder keg. From as early as 2 a.m., police mounted roadblocks throughout Nairobi, choking routes into the Central Business District and severely restricting the movement of motorists and pedestrians. Businesses and restaurants in the city centre shut their doors, while police fired tear gas at groups attempting to gather.

Parliament Buildings were transformed into a fortified enclave by the General Service Unit (GSU), the paramilitary force established by the British colonial administration during the 1950s Mau Mau uprising. Long associated with the violent suppression of political opposition, the GSU has remained a central instrument of post-independence governments, used against workers' strikes and popular rebellions.

Major roads around the complex were sealed off with

layers of razor wire, barbed wire and metal barricades, while police vehicles and water-cannon trucks were stationed outside the precincts.

The operation was aimed at preventing any repetition of the 2024 uprising, when youth protesters stormed Parliament and set sections of it ablaze. Ruto's government was determined that the building, which had become the symbolic centre of the previous year's revolt, would not again be approached by mass demonstrators.

The operation extended far beyond Parliament. Major arteries into central Nairobi were blocked, along with numerous feeder roads. Police forced cars and buses to turn back, effectively sealing off the capital from surrounding working-class areas.

Any signs of protests were rapidly clamped down. By the end of the day, at least 355 people were arrested nationwide, including 161 in Nairobi.

The whole operation aimed at preventing workers and youth from converging in the streets and giving collective expression to the anger that exploded in 2024. None of the conditions that drove that movement—soaring living costs, unemployment, IMF austerity and police killings—has been resolved. On the contrary, they have deepened.

The government now confronts growing opposition to its alignment with the imperialist powers. This includes the proposed US-backed Ebola quarantine facility at Laikipia Air Base, Washington's deal with Ruto for access to Kenya's strategic mineral resources, and the expanding military and commercial partnership with France, including French interests in the port of Mombasa and wider Indian Ocean region.

The crackdown was prepared in advance. Days before the protests, Ruto declared that they "will not happen". The day before, Nairobi Regional Police Commander

Issa Mohamud declared gatherings illegal, claiming that police had not received notification of the planned events. This was despite the widely reported submission of a notification by opposition figures the preceding Thursday, followed by a press conference outside the police station.

Police spokesperson Muchiri Nyaga likewise asserted that all protests in Nairobi were illegal, threatening that the police “know what they are supposed to do.”

These plans were 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.”

Sections of the capitalist opposition have now declared the June 25 commemorations a success. Democratic Action Party of Kenya (DAP-K) leader Eugene Wamalwa, said, “We are happy that the march was successful. Today has turned out to be a public holiday.” He said that commemorations had occurred across Nairobi, Mombasa, western Kenya, the Rift Valley and Nyanza, and proposed that a future government would indeed formally declare June 25 a public holiday.

Siaya Governor James Orengo made the same assessment. Speaking in Nairobi, he claimed that participation had taken place “in the whole country,” as well as in Europe, and hailed what he called a “spirit of patriotism.”

Thanking those who either joined the demonstrations or stayed away from normal activity, Orengo declared: “Our main stay overall today was a successful day and continues to be a successful day.” He further insisted that, where notice had been given for a demonstration, the police were legally obliged to provide security and protect demonstrators’ rights.

Orengo is aligned with the Linda Mwananchi faction of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), alongside figures including ODM Secretary General Edwin Sifuna and Embakasi MP Babu Owino. This faction criticises the ODM leadership’s entry into Ruto’s government, which followed the 2024 Gen-Z uprising and placed ODM figures, including Treasury Secretary John Mbadi, at the centre of imposing IMF

austerity. Orengo’s factions seeks to preserve an opposition posture while channelling mass anger into parliamentary manoeuvres for the 2027 elections.

The claim that the day was a success must be placed in its real political context.

Ruto’s government was compelled to lock down central Nairobi because it is terrified that the mass movement of workers and youth which erupted in 2024 will re-emerge on an even broader scale. But a police-state operation cannot be described as a success for the working class and youth. Ruto, the butcher of Nairobi, remains in power. His government retains the support of the military-police apparatus and the imperialist powers, while continuing to impose IMF-dictated austerity, criminalise protest and expand the repressive machinery of the state.

Workers and youth are not confronting Ruto alone, nor can the crisis be resolved by removing him and replacing him with another representative of the Kenyan ruling class. They confront the capitalist state, its police and military apparatus, the courts, the trade-union bureaucracy, the bourgeois opposition parties and the financial aristocracy whose wealth is protected through austerity, repression and the destruction of democratic rights. And behind Ruto stand the major imperialist powers.

The struggle must therefore be developed as one against capitalism and imperialism. Kenyan workers are part of a growing global struggle against austerity, inequality, war and police state rule. The way forward lies in building an international socialist movement, capable of uniting workers across Africa and internationally against the capitalist system.



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