

# Kenya and Tanzania deploy security forces against Gen-Z-led Saba Saba protests

Kipchumba Ochieng  
7 July 2026

Security forces were mobilised across Kenya and Tanzania on Tuesday July 7 to suppress Gen-Z-led Saba Saba Day protests.

Saba Saba—“seven seven” in Kiswahili—has a distinct history in each country, but in both it has become synonymous with confrontation between the state and the working class.

In Tanzania, Saba Saba commemorates the 1954 founding of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), the petty-bourgeois independence movement led by Julius Nyerere that became the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) following independence from British rule. For decades, the anniversary has served as a state ritual through which the CCM sanctifies its uninterrupted hold on power. It has now been banned, amid fears that it could become a magnet for broader social opposition.

In Kenya, it commemorates the 1990 rally in Nairobi when the capitalist opposition led by Raila Odinga defied Daniel arap Moi’s one-party dictatorship after its leaders had been banned, arrested and beaten off the streets. The state’s repression only accelerated the crisis of one-party rule, which collapsed within a year.

Both regimes have reacted with the same police terror tactics.

In Kenya’s capital Nairobi, police mounted roadblocks before dawn along the main roads towards the central business district, subjecting motorists to security screening and leaving commuters stranded. Roads leading to Parliament were barricaded with barbed wire, while the main road linking the major industrial city of Thika with Nairobi was closed and buses were barred from the central business district.

Throughout the morning, uniformed and plainclothes officers moved through the CBD detaining people attempting to gather, with footage showing protesters bundled into police vehicles, and in one case an activist appearing to be placed into the boot of a car.

The day before, Nairobi Regional Police Commander Issa Mohamud declared the planned march unlawful for lack of

notification—the usual excuse used by the Kenyan government to clamp down on protests, openly violating the constitutional guarantees of freedom of protest and assembly. The Grassroots Economic Justice Movement said they had formally notified police the previous week.

The demonstrators intended to present a petition demanding an end to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and excessive use of force by security agencies—demands rooted in the bloody toll of Kenya’s youth-led protest wave since 2024 which has left over 250 gunned down by Ruto’s police. Last year’s Saba Saba anniversary was the deadliest in decades: at least 41 people were killed.

As usual, the government attempted to give a semblance of normality, while imposing a lockdown that disrupted mobility and business across the capital. Government spokesman Isaac Mwaura insisted Tuesday was “a normal working day” and called on Kenyans to report to work.

The head of the trade union bureaucracy, Secretary-General of the Central Organisation of Trade Unions Francis Atwoli, urged workers to stay off the streets and instead pursue “the ballot.” He then said, “Even if Raila [Odinga] and I had taken over the government, they would be troubling us in the same way they are troubling William Ruto now.”

This was an open admission that were he, the leader of the trade union bureaucracy, and Raila Odinga, who for decades before his death in October 2025 led the official opposition in Kenya, been in power, they would have imposed the International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) austerity on Kenyan workers, and the police would have been sent to gun down protesters.

Having been a critic of Ruto during the 2022 election campaign, Atwoli made his peace with the government within weeks of its inauguration, explaining that, as a trade unionist, he had to “work with the government of the day”. He has become one of the government’s key props, endorsing the violent repression of protesters, backing strike-breaking against workers, helped shut down struggles

against privatisation and layoffs, and calling for social-media censorship to curb opposition.

Odinga played the same filthy role. For more than four decades, across the regimes of Moi, Kibaki, Kenyatta and finally Ruto, he was a political fixer, stepping in whenever mass opposition threatened the ruling class and redirecting it into constitutional reforms and elite power-sharing pacts: the coalition with Kibaki after the 2007–08 post-election violence that killed over 1,200 people, the 2018 “handshake” with Kenyatta, and finally the “broad-based government” he joined under Ruto in 2024, in the immediate aftermath of the Gen Z protests he had postured as supporting. By the time of his death in October 2025, his personal fortune was in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The government he backed continues to kill. In April, police shot dead two residents of Mbeere North protesting the collapse of a public hospital because lack of investment. Weeks later, the state responded to nationwide protests against fuel hikes by locking down Nairobi’s streets and killing four protestors. In early June, police killed at least two more in Nanyuki, where residents were opposing the construction of a US-built Ebola quarantine facility. On June 25, marking two years since the 2024 Finance Bill protests, police shot dead another demonstrator, abducted and tortured six others, and arrested 355 people. The month ended with the shooting of a slaughterhouse worker in Mathare as residents protested the disappearance of two young men last seen in police custody.

Days before this year’s Saba Saba, on Friday, a convoy belonging to the capitalist opposition Linda Mwananchi movement was ambushed by state funded goons with stones and clubs. Vincent Osiemo died after falling from a moving vehicle as the convoy sped off under the barrage of stones as uniformed police stood by.

Across the border, the Tanzanian government of President Samia Suluhu Hassan enforced its nationwide ban on political rallies through a mass deployment of soldiers, police and water cannon in Dar es Salaam and other cities. Checkpoints were concentrated in the working-class districts of Kimara, Ubungo, Magomeni, Kinondoni and Tandale, the epicentre of the uprising following October’s fraudulent election, when as many as 3,000 protestors were killed. Similar deployments were reported in Arusha, Mwanza and Mbeya. Central Dar es Salaam was reported largely deserted.

In the days before the anniversary, Tanzanian police accused unnamed organisers of plotting to assassinate government and security officials and seize weapons, and said officers had arrested several people. No evidence was presented. Prime Minister Mwigulu Nchemba claimed that there is a foreign plot to seize Tanzania’s mineral wealth,

alleging that protestors are paid by outside forces to send young people “to their deaths.”

The army warned against “disruption of peace,” while authorities have banned X, restricted JamiiForums, suspended Jambo TV and maintained continuous surveillance of WhatsApp and TikTok activity since the election.

The security operations follow directly from a state visit by Ruto to Tanzania in May, during which Suluhu openly called for the two governments to coordinate the suppression of youth-led protestors. Describing Gen Z organisers as “ill-mannered children” who “cause chaos, burn things, and disturb their governments,” Suluhu urged that “when evils occur in Kenya, they are our evils,” and pledged reciprocal action: activists who came to either country would be dealt with so as to “behave.”

Kenya and Tanzania’s youth opposition are part of a single continental and global process, driven by the same underlying conditions: crushing IMF-dictated austerity, a debt spiral that consumes more than half of many national budgets, youth unemployment that reaches into the tens of millions, and a ruling class whose fortunes depend on maintaining and deepening exactly the conditions young people are rising against.

In both countries the youth have shown they can transcend the ethnic divisions long exploited by the ruling class; in both, they confront a political establishment—from pro-business Chadema in Tanzania to Kenya’s discredited opposition figures, several of whom share responsibility for killings carried out while they themselves held state power—that offers no alternative to the capitalist order driving the crisis.

The events of Saba Saba 2026 make clear that the defence of democratic rights in East Africa depends on the independent mobilisation of the working class across national borders, against austerity, police violence and the deepening authoritarianism of the region’s ruling elites.

For a fuller analysis underlying the Kenya’s Gen-Z insurgency in 2024 and those of Tanzania in 2025, readers are encouraged to read “Kenya’s Gen Z insurgency, the strike wave and the struggle for Permanent Revolution” and “The December 9 protest in Tanzania, Nyerere’s ‘African Socialism’ and the struggle for Permanent Revolution”.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**