

15 May 2020

Kenya: Death threat against woman human rights defender Ruth Mumbi

On 12 May 2020, woman human rights defender **Ruth Mumbi** received a message from an unknown number, threatening to make her “disappear” if she did not remove posts she had made on social media. The posts documented the eviction of 5000 households in Kariobangi, an estate in north-eastern Nairobi, and the impact of the evictions on the tenants.

[Ruth Mumbi](#) is a woman human rights defender, a community mobiliser, and coordinator of Bunge La Wamama Mashinani, a women’s chapter of Bunge la Mwananchi founded in 2008. Bunge la Mwananchi is a movement which advocates for and campaigns on social justice issues and accountability in different parts of Kenya. It aims to enable women in informal settlements to engage with one another through a platform which gives them access to education, information and training opportunities. Ruth Mumbi is also the coordinator of Grassroots Women Initiative Network (GRAWINET) and was a finalist for the 2013 Front Line Defenders Award for Human Rights Defenders at Risk.

On 12 May, Ruth Mumbi received a call from an unknown man who identified himself as an officer with the Kariobangi police force and told her that she would be receiving a text from him. The text message threatened the defender that if she did not remove the posts she had made on social media about the evictions in Kariobangi, he would make her “disappear”. Ruth Mumbi posted evidence of the threatening text message on her social media and reported the incident to the Kariobangi Police Station.

The woman human rights defender believes she is being targeted for her reporting on the evictions taking place in Kariobangi and her criticism of the government’s role in the evictions. On 2 May 2020, residents of Kariobangi Sewage village were given a 24-hour verbal warning by the Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company (NCWSC) that they were to leave the land, despite the fact that they pay rent to Nairobi City County. The NCWSC forcibly evicted more than 5,000 households on the land, in spite of a court order issued by the Kenya High Court on 4 May 2020 to halt the evictions.

During the evictions and in the days after, Ruth Mumbi and human rights defenders **Beatrice Karore**, **David Warui** and **Emily Kwamboka** reported on the evictions through social media. They posted videos, photos and shared stories of individuals and households affected by the situation and who are increasingly vulnerable in the context of COVID-19. The coverage of the event and its impacts on residents allowed them to gain visibility and support through donations.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned regarding the death threat against woman human rights defender Ruth Mumbi as it believes that she is being targeted solely as a result of her peaceful and legitimate human rights work, reporting on victims of evictions in Kariobangi.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Kenya to:

1. Strongly condemn the death threat against Ruth Mumbi, as it is believed to be directly motivated by her peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
2. Take all necessary measures to guarantee the physical and psychological integrity and security of Ruth Mumbi and the human rights defenders working with her;

3. Carry out an immediate, thorough and impartial investigation into the threat against woman human rights defender Ruth Mumbi with a view to publishing the results and bringing those responsible to justice in accordance with international standards;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Kenya are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including harassment and threats.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 12 (1 and 2): *“(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director