



## **PRESS STATEMENT**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**16<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2020**

### **THREATS TO SOCIAL COHESION AND UNITY IN COVID 19 TIMES**

There is a universal containment effort to halt the spread of COVID-19 has had far-reaching impacts on the economy at both the world and national levels. Kenya just like any other country is today tackling the effects of the Covid 19 pandemic. We are all struggling to survive through the pandemic. The social and economic impact has been felt by all sectors in Kenya. We commend the Government of Kenya under the leadership of His Excellency President Uhuru Kenyatta as well as the citizens for stepping up to ensure the spread of Covid 19 is curtailed.

We reiterate the significance of practicing everyday preventive actions that can help prevent the spread of Covid 19 which include : Avoid close contact with people; Stay home as much as you can; Cover your coughs and sneezes with a disposal tissue or cough into flexed elbow; Wear masks while in public spaces; Clean frequently touched surfaces and objects; Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 40 seconds; use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 70% alcohol.

That being said we are however concerned about the violation of the Ministry of Health and Government guidelines and rules issued to combat Covid 19. In the recent times there has been reports about meetings which have been held with total disregard to guidelines. The most quoted is the meeting of a section of leaders in Ilbisil Kajiado County despite the lockdown affecting some counties that include Nairobi and Mombasa. Such violation strain relationships and further erodes the public trust on the leaders. Leaders are expected to be stewards of values and role models in abiding in established rules. What was witnessed in Kajiado is not only unacceptable but also a recipe for strained relationships among different communities in Kenya. Such acts brew tension between social clusters in the country where the political class is perceived to be above the guidelines and can break the law with impunity. We therefore call on the relevant Government agencies to ensure that anyone who breaks the law is held responsible.

Secondly, peaceful coexistence is paramount in the fight of Covid 19 pandemic. Thus, we have continued to monitor the social media platforms as well as other public spaces for hate speech and ethnic contempt. We note with concern the hate and all sorts of propaganda propagated on these platforms is a threat to the fragile social cohesion. Thus we have summoned a number of suspected offenders to appear before the Commission for further interrogations. Investigations of many other cases are at different stages. I wish to remind Kenyans and in particular political leaders that it is too early

to preoccupy their energies in the 2022 succession politics. Political realignments as well as ethnic based conflicts will not only limit the efforts of fighting Covid 19, but will also threaten the fragile cohesion fabric.

Thirdly, in the past three months there has been an abrupt increase in crime, banditry incidences, cross border violence, ethnic violence and gender based violence,. These are all pointers to burdened economy and broken social systems. Of interest and concern to the Commission are the ongoing conflicts and ethnic violence in Marsabit County, Narok County, parts of Coast, Kisumu and Nandi Borders among others. The effect of such violence is a major set back in the fight against the pandemic as well as the journey towards a peaceful nation. We urge leaders from these regions as well as the communities to embrace dialogue in resolving their differences. The Commission has engaged various strategic stakeholders from these communities to foster peace in the regions and we are glad to report that good progress has been made.

We shall not relent in our efforts at working with the government and engaging the communities, Faith Based Organizations and Community Based Organizations to ensure that peace thrives in this difficult time of the pandemic. On the same note I wish to point out that as part of its mandate the Commission has endeavored to advise Government on the impact of Covid 19 on social cohesion, integration and unity. Thus we have produced two policy

documents namely; - ***Kenya: State, Personal Responsibility and Community Cohesion; Key to Fighting Covid 19 Pandemic.***

***The Impact of Covid 19 on Kenyan Youth.***

***And also an Advisory note on To Open, or Not to Open; That is the Question?***

These documents can be found in the NCIC website.

Fourthly, Covid 19 has not only highlighted existing inequalities but has also anchored on magnifying such pre-existing inequalities in the Kenyan Society. Despite the clear guidelines of distribution of resources, we restate with concern that inequality continues to thrive in many instances. Certainly, this form of discrimination is forage for further disintegration of the social cohesion fabric in Kenya. We therefore urge the responsible institutions and individuals to uphold fairness and transparency in distributing resources to all deserving Kenyans.

Fifth, we are cognizant of the fact that the pandemic has led to adverse socio- economic impacts which has thrown most Kenyans into a panic state. As a result, uncertainty of the future has gripped the nation. This kind of state has triggered fear and anxiety among the citizens. We therefore want to encourage Kenyans to be compassionate to the less fortunate and focus their energies on mutual solidarity and being each other's keeper.

In conclusion, it is our firm conviction that every crisis and calamity has also an opportunity. Covid-19 should be considered as a uniting factor since it affects all of us equally. And it is our common humanity that is threatened by the pandemic. Therefore it is a factor around which to galvanize the Kenyan people to seek to discern a major paradigm shift in the way we relate as a people and communities and in governance. That way the pandemic could midwife a new socio- political dispensation.

It is during such difficult times that Kenyans should overcome their differences and embrace patriotism on the basis of that which unites us in fighting a common enemy which does not respect ethnic, religious, political, social and class differences. Difficult as it maybe it is time for us to focus more on our national values and ethos and foster brotherhood and sisterhood amongst ourselves as Kenyans. Together we shall prevail upon the pandemic and come out a more cohesive and integrated nation. **FOR WE ARE ONE PEOPLE AND ONE NATION WITH ONE DESTINY.**

**REV. DR. SAMUEL KOBIA**

**CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL COHESION AND INTEGRATION  
COMMISSION**