



July 2024

Kenyan Youth Protests Making Headlines

Dear friends,

The recent Gen Z protests in Kenya made international news headlines and prompted several of you to write us asking about our personal welfare and safety. Thanks for your concern and for reaching out to us. We appreciate your prayers and ask you to continue praying for us, for St Paul's, and for Kenya.

After the protests on June 25, classes were moved online for the rest of the month. We are back to having physical classes this month, although that could change if protests continue. Up to 41 or more protesters were killed and hundreds wounded. Many activists were abducted and some are still missing. One of our student leaders was abducted, but we thank God he has been found and released. Several other St. Paul's students and recent graduates joined the protests, including some of our younger Gen Z clergy.

What the youth were protesting was a finance bill introduced to increase government tax revenue to cover increased debt repayments. Kenya's debt is now 68 percent of its GDP and interest payments take up 25 percent of government revenue. Instead of reducing spending, President Ruto and his party tried to increase taxes to cover the difference, including taxes on basic necessities: food, fuel, phones, etc.

In 2022, President Ruto was elected by a slim majority after promising to help the "hustlers"—the small-scale informal workers—who make up the majority of workers here. 70 percent of Kenyans are under 34 years old but 40 percent of the working-age population is officially unemployed, surviving by hustling daily. Ruto promised one million new jobs but unemployment has increased as has income inequality.

In 2023, Ruto increased income tax and added a new housing tax. Then in 2024, he proposed more new taxes: hospital insurance tax, business turnover tax, and a 16 percent tax on fuel and bread. In response, many people started calling him Zakayo, the local version of Zacchaeus, the infamous tax collector in the New Testament. Perhaps, if like the biblical Zacchaeus, he climbs down and gives away half his wealth they will forgive him. (After the protests, he did agree to reduce government spending, so that is good).

The Kenyan economy is growing but not for everyone. Income inequality is increasing and most of the urban poor live in "informal settlements"—large slums of many small rooms made from iron sheets with no plumbing, no sidewalks, no government services, no police, etc. where life is very hard. Africa has the fastest urbanization in the world and Kenya is no exception, but the infrastructure is not keeping up.

Would you like to receive these updates digitally? Please email Kelli at kgilmore@rca.org to be added to the email list. You will receive more timely updates from the missionary you support and help us be good stewards of our resources.

As you continue to pray for us and Kenya please include the following in your prayers:

Pray for more peaceful dialogue between the elected government and its citizens, especially the youth. May a solution to the current problems be found that is more equitable and transparent.

Pray for more jobs and equal opportunities for people everywhere, especially for the unemployed. May inflation and interest rates decrease so businesses can expand instead of reduce their hiring.

Pray for reform of the police and security officers. May they be “content with their pay” (Luke 3:14) and not use their power for extortion but instead truly serve and protect all the citizens of Kenya.

Pray for church leaders and pastors as they seek to minister in this volatile environment. May they speak truth to power, comfort the afflicted, and lead God’s people wisely in these tense times ahead.

Pray for the leaders of schools like St Paul’s University as they decide how to keep their institutions running and provide an education for the youth. May they have much wisdom and discernment.

Thanks again for your support. We are staying safe and remain confident of God’s protection.

Jane & Rowland Van Es