

**AGENTS OF PEACE 2020 REPORT**



## **About Us**

### **Who are we?**

Agents of Peace, was created in response to the growth of violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism acts against innocent lives in Kenya.

Agents of Peace main work is to Prevent and to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization within our community and to promote peaceful coexistence among our society regardless of Religious, Ethnicity and tribal backgrounds.

### **Vision**

To promote peaceful co-existence among our societies regardless of religion, ethnicity, race and color.

### **Mission**

To provide a platform for peace in which people's differences and misunderstanding can be dealt with non-violently and through dialogue and discussions.

### **Our work**

Agents of peace runs different programs throughout the year. Our programs include: -

- Street campaigns addressing and awareness on violent extremism and terrorism;
- Peace walks against terrorism attacks and peace summit;
- University programs on preventing/countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism;
- Sport for peace and mental development
- Mentorship programs (Primary and High schools);
- Community Peace forums;
- Youth forums on peace and Security;

## **CORONAVIRUS AND THE RESONSE OF AGENTS OF PEACE.**

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses which may cause illness in animals or humans. In humans, several coronaviruses are known to cause respiratory infections ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases. The most recently discovered coronavirus disease is COVID-19. COVID-19 is a new virus and disease which was unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. This virus is a global pandemic affecting majority of the countries worldwide. The disease spreads primarily from person to person through small droplets from the nose or mouth which are expelled when a person infected with COVID-19 coughs, sneezes or speaks. These droplets are relatively heavy, do not travel far and quickly sink to the ground. People can catch COVID-19 if they breathe in these droplets where COVID-19 is circulating<sup>1</sup>.

In Kenya, the first case was reported on 11th March, 2020. This had a domino effect, where the President suspended learning in all learning institutions in the country. A few weeks later, there was a cessation of movement from the Nairobi Metropolitan area. This lockdown is still enforced. People are encouraged to stay home when possible, practice social distancing and are required to wear a face mask when in public. These measures have been legalized and those not adhering are to face the full force of the law.

Agents of Peace, in partnership with Community leaders and government security agencies, conducted a sensitization, public outreach and awareness on coronavirus to vulnerable populations including elderly people and distributed Hand sanitizers and facemasks to control the transmission of the virus.

The main goal was to reach as many community members as possible and educate them the reality of the virus and equip them with the right and relevant information on COVID-19, to empower them to make better decisions and change their behaviors to protect themselves and others.

Due to increased transmission or spread of the virus within the community in Eastleigh, the government executed a two-week cessation of movement in and out of Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya on Wednesday, May 6 2020. That was a direct negative impact not only on residents of Eastleigh but thousands of business people who operate in bustling little business hub. The lockdown or cessation of movements into and out of Eastleigh not only affected Somali community but also other workers from Majengo, Kibera, Huruma and other slums who walked Eastleigh every morning for menial jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization

There was a heavy presence of security officers in all parts of Eastleigh, with roadblocks mounted at all major entry points to prevent movement in and out of the densely populated area inhabited mostly by natives of the Somali community.

The closure of businesses, including expansive malls, restaurants and markets will affect mostly small traders who have a hand-to-mouth livelihood. Those engaged in hawking, house chores, loading and cleaning services will suffer a severe economic impact.

The coronavirus pandemic has had many effects in Kenya;

#### The Economic

The Lockdown, curfew and stay-at-home directives from the President have really affected the economic status of the country. Many workers in the informal sector have been unable to earn an income. Many businesses have also had to shut down as the majority of the workforce has been directed to work from home. The most affected are those in the hotel and restaurant industry and quite a number of the staff have been put on unpaid leave and salaries have been reduced.

Kenya's gross domestic product (GDP) is projected to decelerate substantially in 2020 due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. Economic growth projection remains highly uncertain and the outcome will hinge on how the pandemic plays out internationally and within Kenya, along with policy actions taken to mitigate the situation. The latest World Bank Kenya Economic Update (KEU) predicts growth of 1.5 percent in 2020 in the baseline scenario, with a potential downside scenario of a contraction to 1.0 percent, if COVID-19 related disruptions in economic activity last longer<sup>2</sup>.

The hardship from the crisis would disproportionately befall the poorest and the most vulnerable households in Kenya. Many of these depend on farming (for the rural), self-employment and informal wage (for the urban). Protecting their earnings and reaching households through cash transfers is considerably more challenging due to a nascent system of social safety nets, lack of proper physical address system, and updated welfare registers.

#### Travel and Tourism Industry

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<sup>2</sup> World Bank

The travel and tourism industry throughout the world has been adversely affected by the pandemic in a number of ways. Airlines have been grounded, hotels have closed, and strict travel restrictions have been imposed by nearly all countries. According to the UNWTO estimates, the pandemic has dealt an unprecedented blow to the travel and tourism sector by drastically reducing international tourist arrivals in the first quarter of 2020 to a mere fraction of what they were in the first quarter of 2019. Available data points to a double-digit reduction of 22% in the first quarter of 2020, with arrivals in March down by 57%. This translates into a loss of 67 million international arrivals and about USD 80 billion in receipts. The losses to be suffered by airlines and especially mega carriers by the end of this year may be unfathomable. Current scenarios point to declines of 58% to 78% in international tourist arrivals for 2020, depending on how quickly the pandemic is contained and the duration of travel restrictions and shutdown of borders. Whatever the scenario, the prospects look bleak and the recovery of the industry may take a long time. According to the UNWTO Panel of Experts, the likely time for recovery of international demand may be in 2021. Industry analysts and experts around the world are of the view that domestic demand would recover faster than international demand<sup>3</sup>.

The industry faces major challenges ahead, starting with the unknown duration of the pandemic and travel restrictions, in a context of a global economic recession. Countries around the world are implementing a wide range of measures to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak and to stimulate the recovery of the travel and tourism sector. All worldwide destinations have introduced travel restrictions in response to the pandemic, with Kenya, a top tourism destination in Africa included. The overall result of all these travel restrictions was total disruption and paralysis of international travel and tourism industry worldwide.

## The Education System

Before the onset of the covid 19 pandemics, Kenya had a well-structured system of education. The primary and Secondary school calendar ran from January to December. The terms

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<sup>3</sup> University of Nairobi Research

comprised of three months of fully learning and a month in-between for holidays. The syllabus were structured for nine months.

With the free primary and lessened school fees in the secondary schools, public schools received the largest enrolments, with teacher learner ratio of 1:35.

On the flip side, Private schools have outshone public schools for the longest time possible. This is owing to the fact that the learners' enrolment in private schools is lower, and teachers have enough time and resources to work contentedly wherefore great outcomes.

To reduce the spread of the virus, the Government closed all learning institutions in Kenya. Learning institutions were expected to implement online instruction using technology and the Internet. Teachers were advised to prepare work for the learners to do at home. However, nearly 80% of school children in Kenya lack access to Internet or cannot afford the cost, this limited the amount of e-learning available to learners.

Only close to 25% of learners and especially living in urban settings could access virtual classes amidst challenges of connectivity to parents with insufficient education to assist their children at home.

## Health Care

The government's immediate action has focused on strengthening the health system which faces an extraordinary challenge to contain the spread of COVID-19 and care for the infected. Further health policy measures such as working from home, travel restrictions, the closure of schools, the suspension of public gatherings, and a nightly curfew, are necessary to delay the spread while the country ramps-up investment in its healthcare systems. Nonetheless, they are also quite costly to the economy by reducing social interaction, production and demand across all sectors.

## Conclusion

It is critical, therefore, for the country to scale up available social assistance programs to provide poor households with food, water, and other basic supplies to cope with the crisis. It is also important, to customize COVID-19 spread containment measures to reflect local context and

peculiar constraints faced by government such as limited fiscal space, and much less operational capacity to respond to help households and firms weather the crisis.

It is also important for Community Based Organizations to contribute to the society by assisting with implementing the of the Government's directives and to ensure they are aware of preventive measures in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

## COMMUNITY PEACE FORUM

Embracing Inter-Religious Harmony and Religions for Transformation and Peaceful Coexistence

#community based approach towards peaceful and social cohesion

#community based approach towards preventing and countering violent extremism

Agents of Peace is a Community Based Organization based in Kenya whose mandate is to create awareness on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. The team through the founder, Mohammed Abdirizak organized the maiden Monthly Community Peace Forum on the 15th of October 2020. It was held at the Taj Sultan in Eastleigh, Kamukunji Sub-County.

The Forum's theme was 'Community roles on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, crimes and drug at grass-root levels' with specific focus on the young people within the society. The focus on young people was to identify the issues that lead them to be attracted to crime, drugs and radical groups in society, particularly young men. There was also focus on what the community, including the madrassa teachers, community elders and both governments can positively impact the youth.

The heart of the conversation was linking collective religious hatred that has been weaponized and the use of religion to fuel the fire. Analysis was carried out on how this, overlaps with

national, racial and ethical hatred. The conclusion drawn was that one's faith should be a source of peace, charity and compassion not hostility and hatred.

Inter-religious harmony is crucial in building trust and confidence between different people. Living in a peaceful and harmonious environment is important when our society consists of diverse races and religious adherents. The existence of minor tension in our society to some extent has jeopardised inter-religious relations.

Our failure to preserve religious harmony could expose the society to conflict and give extremist groups an opportunity to divide us on religious grounds and create chaos within our society. Thus, community peace forum aims to provide a platform to discuss and elaborate the pertinent elements in sustainable harmony among our society in Kamukunji Sub-county, and also emphasises that elements such as acceptance, understanding, co-operation as well as right and justice as significant elements in sustaining religious harmony.

As we have witnessed religious hatred frequently overlaps with national, racial, ethnic or other forms of hatred, and in many situations it may seem impossible to clearly separate these phenomena. As a result, the label "religion" can sometimes be imprecise and problematic when used to describe complex phenomena and motives of collective hatred. Nevertheless, it remains obvious that religions and beliefs can serve as powerful demarcators of "us-versus-them" groupings.

Unfortunately, there are many examples testifying to this destructive potential of religion. At the same time, one should always bear in mind that anti-hatred movements exist within all religions and that most adherents of the different religious and belief traditions are committed to practising their faith as a source of peace, charity and compassion, rather than of hostility and hatred.

#### Schedule of events

The meeting started at 11:00am moderated by Ms. Grace Maina, the Agents of Peace Communications Director. The opening prayer was shared by Sheikh Salim an Imam and Edward Muthama from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, representing the Muslim and



Christian community respectively. Guests were welcomed by Mzee Hussein of the Kamkunji Sub-county Peace Committee Representative.

Speakers of the day were;

- Mzee Hussein - Kamkunji Sub-county Peace Committee Representative.
- Mr. Edward Muthama – Seventh Day Adventist Church
- Sheikh Salim – Board Member of Agents of Peace
- Sheikh Ahmad Sufyan
- Mr. George Omondi – Youth Leader
- Assistant Chief Famau Ali
- Assistant Chief Madam Jawahir
- Mr. Mohammed Gedow
- Khadija Abdi - Chairperson of Nyumba Kumi

The speakers gave advice to the youth and presented their opinions on the causes of radicalization and what one should do in instances where one finds themselves among radicalized groups.

The session then moved to open discussions and dialogue where the youth were encouraged to speak on the issues and challenges they are facing or have faced without hesitation or fear.

The following issues were raised during this session;

- Drugs being sold in bars, chemists and shops to the youth. Administration was requested to investigate and shut down these operations.
- Need for fields and sports equipment to engage the youth.
- Ignorance on the consequences of use of drugs.
- The community has individual responsibility to ensure that there is peace. They should report to the local law enforcement any activities/individuals that is suspicious or unlawful.
- Parents were urged to participate, be attentive and guide their children.
- Lack of education is a key factor in promoting radicalization and terrorism. Those recruited by radical groups are ignorant of the religion of Islam and use it to justify the group's political and personal agendas.

When looking acts of terrorism, the victims are usually not targeted to a specific religion, race or nationality. Recruiters use unemployment, injustices, to justify what the extremists want the individuals to join. According to a study by the university of Maryland on Terrorism and Radicalization. One is encouraged to; have inter-faith dialogues, approach the local law enforcement, have the proper knowledge of the religion, have reliable sources of information.

It was realized that the youth and community at large, fear coming forward with information to law enforcement because there is no trust and assurance that they will be safe and will not face repercussions.

Religious leaders were requested to include in their Friday prayers (Khutba) and Sunday church service, the issues of radicalization, crime prevention and drug/substance abuse.

We had a keynote speech was presented by Mr. Tobias Okoth who serves as the Assistant County Commissioner (Kamkunji Sub-County). Mr. Okoth stepped in for Deputy County Commissioner, Mr. Samuel Kariuki who was away on official business.

Mr. Okoth recognized that religious leaders have a really important role to play in the Prevention of Radicalization and Countering Violent Extremism. He urged the youth to look at the people they associate with as the issue of wrongful arrest due to their association/relationship with suspects. He asked the youth to report any unlawful activities.

He spoke of the issue of converts to the religion of Islam, being easy targets for radicalization and violent extremism. He urged the Muslim community to modify and oversee that the converts should be taught the right teachings of Islam. He suggested for continuation of such engagements so that the youth can have a platform where they can state their issues and be heard. He emphasized on the seriousness of COVID19 and urged people to follow and uphold the protocols and measures put in place by the ministry of health in fighting and preventing infection from COVID19.

#### Conclusion

The meeting closed with a vote of thanks given by Ms. Sylvia Mathenge, the Head of Programs at Agents of Peace and Mzee Hussein the representative of the Kamkunji Sub-County Peace Committee. The attendees then proceeded to have lunch and departed on their own accord.

## **OBJECTIVES AND GOALS OF THE FORUM**

### **1 Engaging intra and inter-religious leaders to prevent all forms of violence and to embrace peaceful coexistence**

- Provide a platform to bring together all religious leaders at a local level to deliberate and to discuss about the value diversity, equality, and to embrace peaceful coexistence;
- Foster intra-religious dialogue also as a platform for all voices to be heard;
- Promote inter-religious and inter-communal cooperation on all social issues of relevance to communities, in particular through joint activities;
- Support the role of local religious leaders and communities who are better placed to act as mediators of religious and cultural doctrines;
- Encourage religious leaders to take public stances in support of religious groups other than their own, individually and in cooperation with each other;
- Encourage religious leaders to engage in dialogue with, rather than exclude, individuals with radical and extremist views;
- Provide community level initiatives to promote intra and inter-communal dialogue and respect for one another regardless of religious, ethnicity, political, and tribal background.

### **2 Engaging with community and youth to develop policies to prevent all forms of violent extremism**

- Engage with youth and community leaders to organize at a local level an annual “week of mutual respect for all youth and communities in Kamukunji”,

- Organise joint meetings of religious leaders with public officials, community, youth and political leaders at local and national level to deliberate on ways to work together as a team to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism.
- Keep security officials updated concerning risks that community, youth and religious leaders may face if they speak out or take action against violent extremism, radicalisation of youth, or in response to, xenophobia, racism or incitement to violence; if necessary, ask for protection for religious leaders who may be at risk;

# PHOTOS



