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EASTERN AFRICA



Kenya Medical Association

Champion the Welfare of Doctors and Quality Healthcare in Kenya



Bloggers Association of Kenya



Statement on Possible Internet Disruptions during #RejectFinanceBill2024 Demonstrations.

24 June 2024: Twenty-seven international organisations and Kenyan associations of media editors, content creators, lawyers, medical officers and human rights defenders express deep concerns of the potential of possible internet and mass media disruptions during this week’s demonstrations to #RejectFinanceBill2024.

The internet and mass media are critical for the enjoyment of the public’s right to be informed, citizen’s self-expression, e-commerce and the digital economy that is responsible for close to 10 per cent of the GDP. Shutting down or throttling of the internet, shadow banning hashtags or a mass media ban on live reporting would be a gross violation of fundamental human rights. It will undermine the legitimate rights of people to organize, demonstrate and participate in policymaking processes.

#RejectFinanceBill2024 hashtag is not just a trending topic on social media. It symbolizes citizens’ organizing and important dialogue on the 2024 Finance Bill and its implications for our national economy and all our livelihoods.

Disrupting mass communication will also increase national uncertainty, cut off the public and authorities from reliable updates, choke the timely deployment of emergency medical services and tracing of missing persons. Internet shutdowns also halt online transactions, slow down economic activity and cause economic harm. Internet and mass media disruptions severely restrict human rights monitoring and reporting of government security operations.

As documented in the ACCESS 2023 report, total or partial internet shutdowns are becoming familiar Government strategies of responding to public protest. They also cover up grave violations of human rights, state-sanctioned violence against peaceful protestors, abductions and killings. The Kenyan authorities are obligated to protect the right to right to conscience, opinion, self-expression, association as enshrined in Kenyan law and international frameworks to which they are party.

At this critical democratic juncture in Kenya, it is important that the Government of Kenya appreciates the crucial role of the internet and mass media in policy discourse and refrains from any form of internet shutdown or media interference. We call upon the Government of Kenya and the Communications Authority to affirm that the people of Kenya can access an open, reliable, secure and free internet and a free press at a time when they need it the most.

Should the Government of Kenya attempt to block or restrict social and mass media during the #RejectFinanceBill2024 protests, we urge social media platforms to push back and uphold freedoms enshrined in Kenya’s constitution and international human rights standards. Censorship or restricting access to social and mass media will be unlawful and counterproductive at this time.

Signed by:

Access Now, Amnesty International Kenya, Kenya Editors Guild, Article 19 Eastern Africa, Law Society of Kenya, The Police Reforms Working Group, Bloggers Association of Kenya, Kenya Human Rights Commission and the Kenya Medical Association.