



# COMMUNIQUE ON THE WEBINAR ON MENTAL HEALTH AND THE SECURITY SECTOR

## 25 May 2021

# Introduction

- 1. The Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ Kenya) held a webinar on 25 May 2021 to discuss mental health and the security sector in Kenya. The webinar was convened in response to the mental health crisis in Kenya's police force.
- 2. The panelists comprised of representatives from the medical fraternity, National Police Service Commission (NPS), and the Senate who brought in social, medical, and legal perspectives of mental health issues in Kenya
- 3. The participants in attendance were drawn from a diverse field representing all sectors, including development partners, civil society, the legal fraternity, and the private sector.
- 4. The participants and the general public joined the webinar through our zoom platform and online streaming services, including YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp.
- 5. The panelists and participants acknowledged and noted THAT:
  - a) Cases of mental illness in Kenya have been on the rise, especially since the Covid 19 pandemic.
  - b) Most Kenyans perceive mental illness negatively, thus resulting in a lack of focus and prioritization of the importance of mental wellness.
  - c) Depression and anxiety disorders are the leading causes of mental illnesses diagnosed in Kenya, followed by substance abuse disorders. However, among the different types of substance abuse, alcohol contributes to the most significant burden of substance use-related illnesses in Kenya.
  - d) Secondly, there is a growing number of reported incidents of police officers being perpetrators of domestic violence, alcoholism, absenteeism from work, and in extreme cases, murder and attempted suicide, amongst others;
  - e) Thirdly, stress and trauma experiences that the National Police Service undergo while maintaining law and order often leave them with psychological and emotional scars that require healing for effective and efficient service delivery;
  - f) Fourthly, there is inadequate data and information on the prevalence of mental health in Kenya. In addition to this, mental health is significantly underfunded;
  - g) Lastly, various efforts have been put in place by the National Police Service Commission to advance the psychological well-being of police officers. However, to effectively handle the mental health crisis, a multi-sectoral approach would be the most suitable approach.



# Therefore, given the preceding, ICJ Kenya calls upon:

### A. The National Treasury to:

i. Increase the budgetary allocations to the National Police Service to enable the Commission to cater to the provision of psychosocial services within the NPS.

#### B. The Ministry of Health to:

- i. To prioritize mental health as much as other well-known diseases in the budgetary allocations received from the National Treasury.
- ii. To conduct more research on the prevalence of mental illness to have statistics that will enable awareness creation of the crisis.

### C. The National Police Service Commission to:

- i. Assess and address institutional and administrative challenges which contribute to occupational distress within the police force.
- ii. Ensure that the psychological counseling services policy guidelines are fully implemented and functional.
- iii. Ensure the continued psychosocial care and support of police officers.
- iv. Ensure that mental health reporting channels are put in place and are functional.
- v. Provide support to police officers who suffer from or undergoing treatment for mental health-related issues such as facilitating transfers.
- vi. Establish a conducive working environment where police officers can have conversations around mental health.
- vii. Ensure that all policies and practice guidelines on addressing occupational distress within the police force are implemented.
- viii. Continue with the campaign to increase awareness on mental health within the force towards addressing barriers that may prevent police officers from seeking mental health treatment.
- ix. Conduct routine physiological "fitness for duty" evaluation tests explicitly tailored for the police force.

#### D. The National Police service to:

- i. The Inspector-General should ensure that all police commanders are trained on the importance of mental wellness and mental illness triggers.
- ii. The commanding officers ensure the creation of an exemplary reporting environment where junior officers can freely report cases of mental illness or distress at work.
- iii. The commanding officers should ensure that patients with mental illness who have recovered are protected from stigma by fellow officers.
- iv. The commanding officers should ensure that they are not the cause of mental distress amongst junior officers.

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### E. Parliament to:

- i. First track the enactment of the Mental health (Amendment) Bill 2020 in Kenya.
- ii. Champion the conversation on mental health and its importance in society.

## F. Kenyan citizens to:

- i. Encourage persons with severe mental distress to discuss it with a mental health professional.
- ii. Realize that a mental illness is a disease like any other, and therefore persons with mental illnesses should not be stigmatized or discriminated against by society.
- iii. Make it a personal responsibility to take care of their mental health.

### G. Civil Society Organisations to:

- i. Conduct civic education aimed at changing attitudes towards mental illness to reduce the stigma associated with mental illnesses.
- ii. Work with the National Police Service in promoting the mental well-being of police officers.

#### ICJ Kenya commits and undertakes to:

- i. Create awareness on mental illness towards ending the stigmatization of persons with a mental illness.
- ii. Advocate for the promotion of the mental wellness of police officers towards ensuring the practical realization of their mandate.
- iii. Support policy and institutional reforms necessary to ensure effective responses to mental health issues.

Signed,



Kelvin Mogeni Chairman



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