



LBDH/ 023 /2026

Kampala, September 7, 2026

To His Excellency Mr. William Samoei Ruto, C.G.H.

President of the Republic of Kenya

Nairobi, Republic of Kenya

Subject: Call for Responsibility, Protection of Social Cohesion, and Strengthening African Solidarity

Your Excellency Mr. President,

The Burundian League for Human Rights ITEKA is honored to address Your Excellency with deep respect for your high office, for the sovereignty of the Republic of Kenya, and for the major role your country plays in the peace, stability, and integration of East Africa.

Our approach is driven by a matter of principle and prevention following some recently reported statements and guidelines regarding the participation of foreign nationals in some economic activities in Kenya. The ITEKA League fully recognizes the sovereign right of any state to define its economic policies, regulate access to some professional and business activities, and take the measures it deems necessary to protect the interests of its citizens. This right is legitimate.

But it comes with an equally important responsibility: **making sure that public policies and the messages that go with them don't create collective stigma, a sense of insecurity, or hostility toward foreign nationals who live, work, and contribute legally to the national economy.** It is precisely in the name of this responsibility that the ITEKA League wishes to respectfully call on Your Excellency for the utmost vigilance.

The Power of Presidential Speech and the Responsibility to Prevent Tensions

Excellency Mr. President,

The words of a country's highest authorities are never just simple statements. They shape public debate, influence behavior, and can either build trust or deepen divisions. When it comes to foreign populations, this responsibility is even greater. An otherwise legitimate economic measure can, depending on how it is presented or interpreted, be seen by some people as an invitation to view foreigners as responsible for economic difficulties or as unwanted competitors.

However, such a perception can quickly go beyond the economic sphere. It can fuel mistrust, encourage discrimination, expose some communities to acts of hostility, and, in the most serious situations, weaken personal safety and social cohesion. The ITEKA League does not at all claim that such actions would be the intention of the Kenyan authorities.

Our concern is precisely about the need to prevent any interpretation or manipulation that could produce such effects. Prevention is better than reaction when social trust begins to deteriorate.



East Africa: a community of peoples before being a space of borders

Excellency Mr. President,

The history of East Africa is that of peoples whose relationships have long gone beyond the borders inherited from the colonial period. Families, traders, workers, students, entrepreneurs, and communities in our region move between states every day. A Burundian can work in Kenya. A Kenyan can do business in Burundi. A Ugandan can trade in Tanzania. A Rwandan can study or invest in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This mobility is not unusual. It is one of the fundamental realities on which the regional integration project is based.

That's why the ITEKA League believes that **protecting national economic interests and regional integration shouldn't be presented as two conflicting goals**. Kenya can protect its citizens and its economy while still being a welcoming place for foreigners. It's possible to fight illegal business practices, unfair competition, or economic abuse without turning nationality into a reason for suspicion. **Africa doesn't need new mental borders**. It needs more trust, mobility, cooperation, and solidarity.

Preventing the normalization of rejection rhetoric

Your Excellency, Mr. President,

Recent history in Africa shows that economic and social tensions can sometimes lead to blaming foreigners for unemployment, economic competition, or deteriorating living conditions. Without equating contexts or making mechanical comparisons between countries, the episodes of xenophobic violence, especially those in South Africa, serve as a serious reminder of what can happen when economic frustrations meet exclusionary rhetoric.

The risk, then, doesn't just lie in any particular policy. It lies in **the gradual normalization of the idea that foreigners are automatically an economic or social threat**. Once that perception takes hold, it can trigger a chain reaction: discrimination, retaliation, diplomatic tensions, reciprocal measures, and eventually, a deterioration of relations between peoples who actually share a common regional history. The ITEKA League believes it's up to African leaders to prevent these dynamics before they become irreversible.

A special responsibility of Kenya

Excellency Mr. President,

Kenya holds a unique place in East Africa. With its economic weight, diplomatic influence, regional role, and commitment to peace processes, your country wields influence that goes far beyond its borders. This position also gives its leaders a particular responsibility. Kenya can set an example of a state that legitimately protects its economic interests while strongly asserting that **no foreign national should be collectively stigmatized because of their nationality**.

In this respect, the ITEKA League encourages Your Excellency to ensure, in particular, that:

- Economic policies targeting some activities are formulated and implemented in a way that avoids any collective stigmatization of foreigners;
- Security forces and administrative authorities guarantee the protection of all people legally residing in Kenya, regardless of their nationality;



- Public speeches clearly remind that economic measures cannot serve as a justification for discrimination or hostility toward foreign communities;
- Economic disputes involving foreign nationals are handled with respect for the law, human dignity, and non-discrimination principles;
- Dialogue with representatives of foreign communities is prioritized when measures likely to affect their activities are being considered.

These precautions would in no way lessen the authority of the state. On contrast, they would strengthen Kenya's credibility as a country committed to both its sovereignty, the rule of law, and regional integration.

A call to the leaders of the East African Community

The ITEKA League believes that this issue now goes beyond just the relations between Kenya and its foreign nationals. It concerns the very future of the East African Community integration project. The EAC can not be just a collection of treaties, institutions, and economic mechanisms. It must also be a space where people learn to live, work, trade, and build together across national borders.

The ITEKA League therefore respectfully calls on the Heads of State and Government of the EAC partner countries to maintain a continuous dialogue on issues that could affect the mobility, economic activities, and security of their citizens. **Regional integration would lose some of its meaning if the free movement of people and opportunities were accompanied by a flow of mistrust.**

A call for vigilance from the African Union

The same responsibility falls on continental institutions. The African Union has a historic ambition: to gradually remove the barriers that separate African peoples and build a community based on solidarity, cooperation, and shared prosperity. This ambition cannot be fully realized if Africans start seeing other Africans as unwelcome foreigners.

The question is therefore broader than that of the presence of foreigners in Kenya. **It concerns the kind of Africa we want to build.** An Africa where each state gradually closes in on itself, or an Africa where states legitimately protect their interests while recognizing that their economic and security destinies are deeply interconnected?

For the ITEKA League, the choice should be clear. Africa should be able to protect its economies **without turning its people against each other.**

Excellency Mr. President,

Our approach is neither a challenge to Kenya's sovereignty nor a dispute over its right to regulate its economy. It is a call for **caution, responsibility, and prevention.** We are convinced that a state can defend its economic interests without undermining the dignity of foreign nationals.

We are convinced that a government can protect the opportunities offered to its citizens without creating a climate of insecurity for neighboring peoples. We are convinced that national patriotism and African solidarity are not incompatible. We can defend our economies without rejecting our neighbors. **We can protect our citizens without exposing foreigners to fear. We can assert our sovereignty without weakening our African brotherhood.**

That's why the Burundian League for Human Rights ITEKA respectfully calls on Your Excellency to promote, in your speeches as well as in the actions of public institutions, a clear message of responsibility, social cohesion, respect for human dignity, and non-



LIGUE BURUNDAISE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

"ITEKA" association sans but lucratif

Agréée par l'ordonnance ministérielle n°530/0273 du 10 novembre 1994 revoyant l'ordonnance 550/029 du 6 février 1991

Membre affilié de la fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (F.I.D.H)

discrimination. We also encourage you to make Kenya a regional example of this necessary balance between **national sovereignty, economic protection, personal security, and African solidarity.**

In the same line of ideas, we call on the leaders of the East African Community and the institutions of the African Union to remain attentive to any developments that could affect peaceful coexistence among african peoples and to prioritize dialogue when tensions arise related to the presence of foreign nationals. **The security of one people cannot sustainably be built on the insecurity of another.**

When distrust crosses borders, it is not just one community that is weakened: **it is the stability of an entire region that can be affected.** The Africa we want to build should not only bring states closer together. **It should also bring peoples closer together.**

Please accept, Your Excellency Mr. President, the expression of our highest consideration.

For the Burundian League for Human Rights ITEKA¹



Anschaire NIKOYAGIZE
President

Copies for information to:

- Heads of State and Government of the member states of the East African Community (EAC),
- Chairperson of the African Union,
- Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
- Secretariat of the East African Community,
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),
- Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights,
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights,
- Involved diplomatic missions

¹ *It is a member of the Inter-African Union for Human and Peoples' Rights (UIDH), an affiliated member of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), has observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights under reference number OBS.236, and is a member of ECOSOC. The Iteka League is decentralized into 17 federations and 32 sections.*