

Press statement on the agenda of The Youth Congress' Citizens Convergence for Change initiative that seeks to empower citizens to organize for change, and engage meaningfully and actively in the 2022 general elections and beyond

Thursday 06 January 2022 from 10.00 am at Radisson Blu-Arboretum Park lane

This is a decisive year for Kenya, as we grapple with politics that will pre-occupy our space in the coming months. Being a transition election, the debate is expected to be intense. More new entrants are expected in the political scene in all elective positions, as has happened in every electoral cycle, with many incumbents not making it back.

We should have a reflective moment where every one of us, as citizens, needs to determine just who we are, the challenges we face as a country, and importantly our agenda, role and the kind of leadership we need to fix our country.

These questions should resonate more with young people who take the biggest burden of bad governance and ironically is the constituency with the largest number to turn an election tide. It is a crucial moment when young people should view elections as a serious leadership and governance process that will impact their lives and the economy as opposed to an ordinary event.

The character and leadership of the people we elect are of paramount importance. Kenyans have gained experience out of the turbulent times they have gone through by having wrong leadership at the helm as well as prosperity where they have elected the right leadership. Therefore, this makes the August elections more important than any other in our history.

Much political rhetoric will be made by various people seeking elective positions in the coming days - who will come in many hues and colours. It is important, as voters, to look at what they stand for in the society, their leadership history, moral standing, and more importantly, interrogate how their development blueprints rhyme with the public expectations. Youth must seek leaders who will tackle their myriad of problems with joblessness leading the pack.

To make informed choices, the youth must question aspirants and political parties as well as their belief in democracy and the role of young people in today's governance. What does a particular political party or candidate stand for? What policy ideas does a candidate or political party subscribe to and how will it promote the interests of young people are all pertinent questions.

Over the years, the political class has used young people to add to their vote baskets. Noteworthy, the electioneering process has become an extremely expensive exercise in this country. By turning a blind eye to this harsh reality, political party leaders have over the year failed to take affirmative actions to elevate young people into leadership positions through the elective process.

Young people have themselves to blame as well. They are apolitical and when they vote, they do so in an uninformed manner. The youth have not crafted strategies to participate effectively in elections to influence policies that can benefit them.

The participation of citizens especially the youth in elections is critical to the future of the country. Real change comes when citizens organize, work together and engage in governance and development processes.

As the saying goes the most important title is 'citizen' – ordinary men and women. A citizen is a powerful force for change. That is why The Youth Congress has unveiled Citizens for Change, to undertake serious undertakings that include:

1. Mobilizing citizens especially the youth to register in great numbers when the Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission (IEBC) opens the second mass registration in the coming days. The stakes are really too high for them.
2. Pushing voter turnout - The truth is, when we stay home, things stay the same, or they get worse. But when we all vote, we get new ideas and new energy. We get leaders who share our values and listen to our voices. That's how we change Kenya.
3. Carrying out civic and voter education to help citizens participate meaningfully in the electoral process and make informed choices – to understand their rights, the political system, the contest they are being asked to decide and how and where to vote.
4. Supporting citizens to develop people and youth manifestos that contain the aspirations, expectations, approved resolutions, decisions and recommendations of the people.
5. Vetting candidates to ensure they fulfill the requirements of chapter six of the Constitution, on leadership and integrity - the Constitution raises the

bar on leadership in terms of ethics and integrity. It is imperative, that all aspiring political leaders meet and comply with the requirements.

6. Encouraging, drumming up and providing support to young aspirants with vision and values. Youth are not inadequate; they are full of fresh ideas and are energetic and creative – they are powerful beyond measure.
7. Monitoring and engaging institutions involved in electoral processes to attend to the needs and concerns of citizens and ensure peaceful, fair, free and verifiable elections, and guard against interference with the right to vote.
8. Supporting and mobilizing for action grassroot, community based and civil society organizations – civil society is so essential to hold leaders accountable, and make governments more responsive and more effective.

It is citizens-ordinary men and women, determined to forge their own future, who throughout history have sparked all the great change and progress. That is why we urge citizens to effectively play their role in the 2022 general elections and beyond.

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