

Wellbeing and Risk

The Struggle

I wanted to be human,
Treated like a human,
Fighting for the right to be human,
The dignity of being human,

Appreciated,
Valued,
Loved,

Yet-silenced,
Maimed,
Killed,
Abandoned,
Loved ones – disappeared,
Like the mighty storm- blown!

We fought – for our collective struggle,
Protecting human rights,
Defending our land,
Freedom and right to be human,

Yet
You stood,
Stared,
Never wondering why I existed?
Never bothered,
Yet critical of ‘development’
How it excludes, not includes,
How it leaves many,
Yet says – leave no one behind,

In the dusty streets we march,
Mobilize,
Protest,
Smoking in the teargas,
Protecting the constitution,
Locked up,
Silence and trapped,
We rise again tomorrow to be human,
Fighting to be human,
Our collective need to live in dignity,
Our human rights

Shrinking Spaces!

Standing where darkness shines no more,
where sand sinks,
claimed spaces shrink,
agency – lost,
voices silenced,
Is there hope?
Broken Mirror,
Shining darkness
Reflecting images
Of self?
Of us?
Broken Mirror,
Reflecting crookedness?
Where is the light?

Koinange

Down town Koinange,
The Red-light district,
Sleepless men and women,
Parking boys – wondering
Merchants awake,

I work here,
I live here,
I have been here,

No one knows I work here,
Only I know why I'm here
Some nights, lucky,
Some nights, arrested,
Some nights, beaten,

Look at her!
Slut!
Look at her,
Selling flesh,
Arrest her,
Take her money!

No please,
Don't take what I've worked for
What do you have?
Please let me free,

We let you free, if you allow us,
One more time...

Perceptions of Human Rights Defenders

Human Rights Defender

An enemy of the state,
Saviour of the poor,
Voice of the community,
Darling to the community,
Mirrors of society,
Voice of the voiceless,
Fighters of justice
Custodians of rights
Defenders of the weak and poor,
Putting your lives in harm's way,
How long?
How long will you die for us?
Suffer for us?
How long?

Unfinished Conversation

If all human beings are born free,
Equal in dignity and rights,
Why are some more equal than others?
If the right to a fair trial is fundamental to the rule of law and democracy,
Why execute? And kill?
Is democracy dead?
Have we lost faith in justice institutions?

Who defends the killed?
Who protects the killer?
Who represents the victims?
Where is justice?

Defender of human rights,
Who are you?
Who appointed you?
Who do you represent?
Whose human rights?
Whose interests?
Whose Cheque?

Remembrance

Defender of Rights,
Defender of the voiceless,
Defender of the weak,
Defender of excluded,
Defender of the widows,
Defender of the silenced,
Defender of the disappeared,
Defender of the just,
Defender of the killed,
We honour you!

When voices are silenced,
Voices killed,
Voices excluded,
Voices constricted,
Voices censored,
Voices suppressed,
You rise!

The City is mourning

Our sons have disappeared
Mothers are mourning,
Our sons have been shot,
Trumped up charges against them,
Our sons are dying,
Who will bury them?
Parents should never bury children,
Children should never die young,

Mothers are mourning,
Sons are dead,
Mothers are burying their children,

They say, they were criminals,
That's why they shot them,
They say they were radicalized,
Instant justice for the state,
Endless turmoil for beings
Will this end?

Nairobi – the tale of two cities

City in the sun,
City in the bustling hustles,
City full of investors,
Speaking of GDP, GNI and FDI

In suits and silver
In cars and jeeps
Of security escorts
Sirens to clear the way
Traffic to beat
No time to waste
Money is essence

City in the sun and moon,
Where women sell self to eat
Children hawk to school,
Sanitation a pipe dream,
The sun an aspiration
Tip-toe in the dark,
Shit! I missed it again,
Tomorrow is another day.

Kilio cha haki

Kilio cha haki,
Kilio cha mnyong'e
Machizi ya jamii,
Machizi ya wajane,
Machizi ya watoto,
Kilio kasikika
Haki twalia,
Siku njema – itakuja lini?

A cry of justice,
A cry of the weak,
Tears of the community,
Tears of the widows,
Tears of the children,
Cries are heard,
We cry for justice,
Waiting for a new dawn

I have fought the fight,
Held the baton,
Incomplete race,
But now rest,
Injustice lives
Corruption eats,
Ethnicity rife,
Women raped,
Human rights defenders – die,
Killings, Disappearances – a norm,
Who will stand?
I weep.

Written in response to research findings from the project 'Navigating Risk, Managing Security, and Receiving Support' managed by Dr Alice Nah at the Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, which focuses on the experiences of human rights defenders in Colombia, Mexico, Kenya, Egypt, and Indonesia.

www.securityofdefendersproject.org