



# *A Night of Food, Fun, and Human Rights Conversations – Dinner with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, H.E. Kajsa Ollongren*

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Rarely do you get the opportunity to be invited to an Ambassador's residence and enjoy a memorable culinary experience. But do you know what is even rarer? When the dinner table brings together ambassadors, senior diplomats, and civil society leaders for meaningful conversations about human rights. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, I was fortunate to experience exactly that.

To say the stars aligned would be an understatement – they truly did. I had the opportunity to participate in an informal dinner dialogue with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, H.E. Kajsa Ollongren, as she concluded her official visit in Kenya. The evening gathering was hosted at the Residence of the Netherlands, bringing together diplomats, youth representatives, and civil society actors in a relaxed but thoughtful session.

Both H.E. Henriette Geiger, Ambassador of the European Union to Kenya, and H.E. Henk Jan Bakker, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Kenya, were present, and alongside a dozen civil society leaders, we engaged in robust discussions on democracy, human rights, and youth engagement in governance.

I had the privilege of representing the EU Youth Sounding Board in this meeting, joining representatives from the Netherlands Youth Advisory Committee and other leading civil society organizations.

The evening offered us a unique opportunity not only to exchange perspectives with senior diplomats but also to reflect on how youth voices can meaningfully contribute to human rights and democratic governance in Kenya.

Unlike formal policy meetings with their protocols, the dinner created a more open and reflective atmosphere where we all could speak candidly about progress and persistent challenges in advancing human rights and democracy in Kenya.

Throughout the conversation, a recurring theme emerged on the gap between policy and practice. Our communities continue to experience police brutality, abductions, goon violence and exclusion from governance processes despite the constitution guaranteeing freedoms and dignity. The effectiveness of these laws ultimately depends on how they are implemented and experienced by citizens.

In my remarks, I reflected on the importance of ensuring that youth perspectives are integrated into conversations about human rights and democratic governance. Drawing from my experience in the YSB, I emphasized the importance of meaningful youth engagement in policymaking and the value of including diverse voices in implementation. Anything for us, without us, is against us.



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