



At the Table: Youth Voices in a Conversation on Human Rights

On 11 February 2026, I had the honour of attending a dinner hosted by H.E. the Ambassador of the Netherlands to Kenya during the visit of H.E. Kajsa Ollongren, EU Special Representative for Human Rights. The evening brought together young leaders to engage in open dialogue on the breadth of the human rights agenda in Kenya.

The purpose of the engagement was simple yet powerful: to listen. It created a space where young people could speak candidly about the realities shaping civil, political, social, and economic rights in their communities.

One of the key themes that emerged during the discussion was the evolving nature of civic and political space in Kenya. Participants reflected on the role of young people in democratic processes, the challenges of participation, and the importance of ensuring that youth voices move beyond symbolic inclusion into meaningful influence.

Gender-based violence was another significant area of concern. Conversations highlighted persistent inequalities, including rising cases of femicide and the broader social dynamics that contribute to insecurity for women and girls. The discussion underscored the need for stronger prevention frameworks and community-based awareness.

What stood out most during the evening was the recognition that human rights conversations cannot be abstract. They are lived realities shaped by local beliefs, governance systems, generational perspectives, and access to information.

As a representative of the EU–Kenya Youth Sounding Board, I was reminded of the responsibility we carry to bridge policy and lived experience. Structured data collection, inclusive consultations, and youth-led dialogue mechanisms are essential to ensuring that human rights frameworks resonate beyond diplomatic spaces and into communities.

The dinner was not simply a formal engagement. It was a reminder that when young people are given space to speak openly, they contribute nuanced, grounded insights that enrich international dialogue.

Human rights discussions are complex. They require honesty, sensitivity, and respect for diversity of perspectives. What this engagement demonstrated is that youth are ready to engage in that complexity – constructively and thoughtfully.

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