

Policy Forum

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Policy Forum statement in response to recent statements by the Minister for Education against HakiElimu and the Education Circular No. 5 of 2005

Policy Forum is an association of 84 non-governmental organizations working in Tanzania.

We have always had much faith in Government-led development processes, which is why we have chosen to work closely with several government ministries. These include the Vice President's Office, the Ministry of Finance, and the President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government, to name a few, to achieve our mutual goal of improving the livelihoods of all Tanzanians. For example, Policy Forum was and continues to be actively involved in the MKUKUTA and PER processes. Until now our experience of this collaboration has generally been positive, constructive and productive.

It is for this reason that we are alarmed by the recent punitive action taken against one of our member organizations, HakiElimu, by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Ministry is reportedly "interdicting HAKIELIMU from undertaking and publishing any articles/studies regarding Tanzanian Schools" and threatening to "take stern measures against any school/college which does not adhere to these directives". The contents of this circular have been widely reported in the recent press.

Article 18, subsection 1 of the Constitution of our country states that:

"Without prejudice to the laws of the land, every person has the right to freedom of opinion and expression and to seek, receive, and impart or disseminate information and ideas through any media regardless of national frontiers..."

It is our belief that a Government that strives to be accountable to its citizens, and we believe this to be the case of the Third Phase Government, could never condone the harassment of those individuals and organizations that seek to assist the Government in achieving this goal of accountability to its citizens. We believe that the Father of the Nation and his Government included the above article in our Constitution to demonstrate that we are a democratic nation that tolerates and values constructive diversity of thought. Constructive diversity of opinion breeds healthy public debate. It is in such

debate that new and innovative ideas and solutions are born. It is through these ideas and solutions that a nation develops. Healthy public debate can only take place when citizens have access to a full and balanced picture of a current situation. This includes both the positive and negative aspects of the situation in question. To suppress our constitutional right to freedom of opinion and expression is to suppress our right to develop as individuals, as a society and as a nation.

Having seen the tireless and sincere efforts that have been made by Government to bring about the development of all Tanzanians, we can only conclude that the punitive action taken against HakiElimu is inconsistent with the position of Government. This being the case, we urge the Government to take appropriate action as follows:

1. Immediately lift the interdiction on HakiElimu from undertaking and publishing articles/studies regarding Tanzanian schools and rescind the Ministry of Education and Culture Circular Number 5 of 2005.
2. Introduce deliberate and concrete measures to ensure that the constitutional right of all individuals and organizations in Tanzania to “seek, receive, and impart or disseminate information and ideas” is safeguarded and protected at all times.
3. Promote open dialogue, public debate and full participation of civil society in all policy processes, including education.

Finally, we would like to reaffirm our commitment to a continued collaboration with all parts of Government and with all other stakeholders in the interest of promoting human rights and development of all Tanzanians. We would welcome a meeting with relevant Government officials to discuss our concerns in order to arrive at a constructive and mutually acceptable solution.

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On behalf of Policy Forum