BULLETS AND DRUGS CLEANSING YOUTHS IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN KENYA.

(Minoo) Poverty is the worst form of violence under capitalism. Unemployment is a major crisis in informal settlements especially for young people. Poverty has made life unbearable. The capitalist system has failed to provide employment hence leading many young people into crime. Unemployment has negative psychological consequences such as loss of identity and self-esteem, increased stress from family and social pressure.

In addition to this state of affairs, greedy politicians have looted funds made for national development. In a case study in 2015, the National Youth Service lost 791 million Kenya Shillings within the Ministry of Devolution and Planning which was headed by its Cabinet Secretary, Ann Waiguru. And as a consequence of corruption most young people in informal settlements lost their jobs as they depended on the NYS for income. In light of this, extra judicial executions by the police increased due to high rate of crime as a direct consequence of unemployment. Cases of mob justice due to criminal activity also increased. It is correct to therefore conclude that the Cabinet Secretary for Devolution and Planning, Ann Waiguru, was directly responsible for the loss of lives among many young people in informal settlements.

Born and raised in Mukuru kwa Njenga, I have experienced the direct impact of poverty. Those who are religious get to survive by hopes for a better life then die miserably as they await to be rich in heaven. In our reality, though, the health care system is pathetic. There is no proper housing. Schools are over populated, under-staffed and under-equipped. There are extremely high cases of police brutality, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. We lack legal proper electricity connection. There is literally no water connection. Our drainage system is a problem and the little water we have is contaminated. An extremely high rate of drugs and substance abuse is a major problem in informal settlements; many young people have been jailed as a result of using drugs and committing crimes.

Young men and women in informal settlements have resorted to crime majorly due to poverty. It is extremely difficult to live in conditions where basic needs are not a guarantee while family awaits you to put food on the table. Looking at the matter closely, therefore, we can also conclude that these are victims of capitalism. Personally, before becoming a member of
Mukuru Community Justice Center, I almost resorted to crime. I became frustrated with the conditions of poverty; this led me to thinking that maybe crime was the only way. You see, here in Kenya, realistically, education is not the key to success. The key to being successful is knowing people who are already successful or knowing people who know people or if you are a woman you have to lower your dignity for the sake of employment. I refused to lower my dignity so I thought that perhaps crime would be the only way. Luckily, however, before I could take a step in that direction, the Social Justice Movement came in and restored my hopes for a socially just country.

I have lost many of my friends through extra judicial killings as a result of criminal activities. Members of the community in informal settlements have also killed many young people through mob justices over petty crimes. Usually, young people involved in crime use hard drugs to boost their confidence to commit crimes. Drugs are sold by individuals in the community who collude with police for protection. This makes it even harder to reduce crime in informal settlements. In an expose, ‘Guns Galore’, aired on Kenyan media station Citizen TV by Purity Mwambia, an investigative journalist, exposed the police in their involvement in crime and complicity in illegal activities. Although, the Directorate of Criminal Investigations denied the involvement of police officers in criminal activities and lending out guns, uniforms and hand cuffs at very cheap prices to criminals, from my experience in informal settlements I can say these are things that happen often. The police are directly involved in enhancing crime in the slums. An example of a criminal gang that was working closely with the police and funded by politicians was known as Gaza, based in Kayole, a working-class settlement in Nairobi. The gang was well funded by politicians and after using the youths to execute their operations, the politicians turned their backs on the youths by criminalizing them. Enforced disappearance, police harassment and extrajudicial killings became a norm against the criminalized members of the gang.

Capitalism is the cause of violence in informal settlements and must be fought by all means possible. In order to save the lives of the numerous people living in extreme poor conditions, it is absolutely necessary to make a structural change in the manner in which our society is organized. Each and every citizen should have access to the basic necessities of life. Each and
every citizen should be economically liberated in order for them to be free from criminal activity.

........ (Waigumo)The capitalist state continues to create hopelessness and frustration to its citizens. Noam Chomsky and Mary Waterstone in their book *CONSEQUENCES OF CAPITALISM* provide a great analysis on the effects of capitalism. Provision of basic rights is a non-priority to a capitalist state and especially in informal settlements. Having access to quality and enough food and affordable shelter is a wish for many of us and a dream that seems to be shattered so far. Basic needs are no longer basic or we should just say that we slept one night just to wake up and find that these needs had been reduced to secondary needs.

If hopelessness and frustration was a place, then it would be in informal settlements. Youths are driven by the social setting of different families in the slum areas living in extreme poverty. Youths from such families become stressed and when their needs are not met and end up indulging into drugs as a way to cope with their problems. On the other hand, parents who are unable to cater for their families sees themselves as failures and result in alcoholism as a way of dealing with life’s frustration. Recently I interacted with a young mother of two who is an alcoholic. As she narrated her story, she wept bitterly and her tears reminded me of how capitalism has robbed off joy to a lot of people. She is a school dropout due to lack of school fees in a country said to offer free basic education and immediately I wondered where this free education is being offered if not to such deserving cases? She is unemployed and putting food on the table is a struggle. As a result, one of her children has turned into a beggar as the mother indulge into alcoholism as a way of running away from the hard reality. She claims that it is only drugs that you can get for free since people in those spaces tends to sympathize with your situation by offering free alcohol and other drugs. You see, people in the informal settlements are generally caring and united but we have nothing else to offer, no food, no money, no nothing, all we have is drugs at our disposal!

Drug abuse is a booming business in the informal settlements and Kenya. Psychotropic substances and narcotic drugs such as bhang/marijuana are common drugs used by the youth. Interestingly, bhang/marijuana is grown in the Western region and from neighbouring countries
like Ethiopia. However, how it finds its way to the informal neighborhood of Nairobi is still a puzzle many. With Covid 19 pandemic, it is more engrossing to think of the fact that even with road blocks and checkpoints put as a way of enforcing lockdown and cessation of movement as a preventive measure, drugs still find their way to the informal settlements. How these drugs pass through various road blocks undetected is still a big question to us, unless there is involvement of the government itself in the drug business.

The fight against drug abuse has been taken lightly by those carrying out the mandate. We have NACADA (National Authority for the Campaign Against Alcohol and Drug Abuse), a government agency that is tasked with the sole purpose of coordinating public education and awareness campaign against drug abuse in Kenya, but hardly is their impact felt. There have been no activities geared towards fighting drug abuse that have been carried out in our informal communities which can be directly linked to them. Most people feel that this agency was instituted just to ‘flower’ the government and add several egomaniac individuals to the payroll. Moreover, despite the government coming up with measures such as Mututho law and promulgating acts like the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Control Act, the problem has not been effectively deterred, including production, consumption and even trafficking of drugs.

Drugs and substance abuse are some of the factors that lead to crime. The urge to commit a crime by those abusing drugs is motivated by the desire to support their habits and also by the fact that drugs impair one’s judgement. Drug and substance abuse is perceived to have effects on both the human mind and body; thus may create mental/physical state that facilitate aggression and making decisions that are in contrast to the governing social norms and laws and principles of the society. Increase in cases of gender based violence and child negligence can to some degree be linked to drug abuse for those involved. Drug abuse has also resulted to a lot of deaths of young people who are times executed as a result of a deal gone bad.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that not all crimes are as a result of drug abuse. However, I strongly feel that if the menace of drug abuse is solved, so many crimes will have been
countered with. The government should start by addressing the root cause which is mainly lack of basic education for all and unemployment.