

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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#### **FoLT Demands Accountability Following Preventable Death and Femicide in Turkana: State Failures, Constitutional Obligations, and the Unfinished Business of the Baraza Report**

Lodwar, Kenya - Friends of Lake Turkana (FoLT) is demanding urgent government action following three recent incidents that expose critical failures in maternal healthcare, gender-based violence response, and access to justice in Turkana County.

These are not isolated tragedies. They are the predictable outcomes of systemic failures in state responsibility, resource allocation, and service delivery. Failures that leave governments distant, both geographically and institutionally, from pastoralist communities whose mobility and remoteness are not reflected in how services are planned or delivered.

#### **A Preventable Death: The State's Unmet Constitutional Duty**

Aurien died on 8th February 2026 while giving birth after failing to access timely medical care. She was part of the wider FoLT community, a pastoralist woman who opened her home and her life to us. During recent research, our team lived alongside her and her family, moving with them between Lokipoto-Garite, Locharakan, Moruapolon, sharing in daily life, learning from her knowledge and lived realities. Aurien was not a statistic. She was a mother, a guide, a woman who trusted us to walk with her people and tell their story. She welcomed us into her kraal, fed us, sheltered us, taught us. And when her time came to give life, the systems meant to protect her were nowhere to be found. Her death is not merely a tragedy. It is a constitutional matter. Her life reflected the realities of pastoralist communities — mobility, distance, and reliance on systems that too often fail to reach them.

Article 43(1)(a) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 guarantees every person the right to the highest attainable standard of health, including the right to health care services — with the state obligated under Article 21 to take legislative and other measures to progressively realise these rights. For Aurien, that right existed on paper and nowhere else.

Turkana County is further bound by the Turkana County Health Services Act, which mandates the County Government to ensure accessible, equitable, and community-responsive health services across the county. Pastoralist mobility is not an exception to this duty — it is a central feature of the population the Act must serve. Aurien's death raises serious questions about whether the County Government has met its statutory obligations, particularly regarding maternal health provision along migration routes and in remote settlements. Maternal mortality among pastoralist women in Turkana is not a natural phenomenon. It is the consequence of investment decisions that do not account for how these communities live, move, and access care.

***“Pastoral Women in Turkana are being failed by gaps in healthcare, by unequal investment, and by systems that do not reach them when they need them most. This is not just a service delivery issue; it is a question of justice, equality, and whose lives are valued. No woman should face a higher risk of death simply because of where she lives. When***

*distance, neglect, and underinvestment determine survival, then we must confront the reality that our systems are not working for everyone.*’ Dr Ikal Ang'elei, Director and Founder of Friends of Lake Turkana.

### **Justice Denied: Femicide and Sexual Violence Traded for Livestock**

Two additional cases highlight systemic failures in protection and justice:

- Amuria Ekeno, a resident of Lokipoto in Letea ward, Turkana West Sub County was killed by her husband in Karamoja in early February. The case is reportedly being handled through livestock compensation with her life reduced to a negotiated demand of cattle rather than formal prosecution through the justice system.
- In Katelemot, Letea Ward in Turkana West Sub-County, one woman was raped and another was sexually harassed. The case was reportedly handled informally, with the perpetrators providing 10 goats as compensation, shared between the two women. FoLT is withholding the women’s identities to protect their safety and dignity.

This reduction of femicide and sexual and gender based violence to a handful of goats and cows is deeply troubling. It reflects not only the lack of formal systems but also the extent to which survivors are left without recourse, protection and a recognition of the gravity of the crimes committed against them. These are not disputes to be settled. They are women whose lives have been taken, whose bodies have been violated, whose rights to safety and justice have been denied. The two women in Katelemot are still here, still carrying the weight of what was done to them, still waiting for a justice system that has not shown up.

Femicide and sexual and gender based violence are criminal offences. Their resolution through informal compensation does not reflect cultural preference; it reflects the failure of the state. The killing of Amuria Ekeno is femicide — prosecutable under the Penal Code and, as the Technical Working Group on Gender-Based Violence Including Femicide chaired by former Deputy Chief Justice Dr. Nancy Baraza has explicitly recommended, should in future be codified as a standalone crime with targeted investigative and prosecutorial mechanisms. That report, received by President Ruto on 26th January 2026, found that the absence of femicide as a distinct legal category has led to gaps in accountability, data collection, and policy response. Amuria’s case is precisely the gap the Baraza report describes.

The Baraza TWG report identified systemic barriers in the justice system — slow police response, prosecutorial delay, and geographical inaccessibility — that compound vulnerability for women in rural and pastoralist communities. It called for dedicated GBV courts, mobile justice mechanisms, and county-level accountability frameworks. As of the date of this press release, the 30-day deadline set by President Ruto for the Gender Cabinet Secretary to present a Cabinet Memorandum implementing the Baraza report has lapsed without action. Civil society organisations including Amnesty International Kenya, the ENDFemicideKE Movement, and the #HumanIsMyID Alliance have written to Cabinet Secretary Hanna Cheptumo urging immediate action. FoLT adds its voice to this call and demands that implementation of the Baraza report explicitly address the situation of pastoralist women in marginalised counties, whose invisibility in GBV data and justice systems makes them among the most vulnerable in the country.

Yet the Baraza report itself contains silences that must be named. Its identification of “socio-cultural factors” as the leading cause of GBV in Kenya — ranked above political and economic factors — risks reproducing the very framing that FoLT has long resisted: the idea that violence against women in pastoral communities is primarily a cultural problem, requiring cultural solutions. The report does acknowledge weak governance, underfunding, and geographic barriers. But when cultural factors are foregrounded in the causal analysis, the structural failures of the state recede. This matters enormously for Amuria Ekeno’s case. Her killing was not the product of a culture that tolerates femicide. It was the product of a state that has never built the infrastructure — the police posts, the prosecutors, the courts, the referral pathways — that would make formal justice accessible to a woman living in Letea Ward. Culture did not kill Amuria. Impunity did. And impunity is a governance failure, not a cultural one.

When there is no accessible police post, no prosecutor who reaches our communities, no court within a reasonable distance, no survivor-centred support, no follow-up, no accountability, communities are left to manage. This is especially true in pastoralist settings, where distance, mobility, and limited state presence make formal justice systems even harder to access. And in many cases, women pay the price.

**“The narrative that this is 'our culture' is a convenient excuse for government absence,”** said Dr Ikal Ang’elei, Director and Founder of Friends of Lake Turkana. “It is also a political act. When those in power name violence as culture, they are not describing a practice — they are shielding themselves from accountability for the systems they have failed to build. It reframes a crime as a custom. It moves the conversation from the courthouse to the community, from the state to the victim. And it works: it has worked for years to keep pastoralist women outside the protection of the law. **Culture is not the problem. The absence of a police post is the problem. No maternal health clinic within a day’s walk is the problem. A prosecution system that has never set foot in Letea Ward is the problem. When communities settle for goats instead of justice, it is not because they do not understand the gravity of what happened — it is because the state has given them nothing else. Do not call that culture. Call it what it is: the consequence of deliberate underinvestment in the lives of pastoralist women.**”

A critical gap in the Baraza report is its treatment of poverty. While it correctly identifies economic hardship as a driver of gender-based violence (GBV), framing it primarily as a social condition that heightens personal risk fails to address the political dimensions of this issue. In Turkana West, poverty is not merely a backdrop; it is a direct outcome of decades of systemic exclusion from national budgets and essential infrastructure investments. The deaths of Aurien and Amuria Ekeno are not isolated tragedies; they exemplify a broader geography of abandonment perpetuated by state neglect. This systemic disinvestment has created an environment where economic dependence on male partners traps women in cycles of violence and vulnerability. The state’s ongoing failure to confront these structural inequalities is not just an oversight but a deliberate abdication of responsibility in safeguarding the rights and lives of marginalized women.

### **The Root Issue: Budget and Accountability**

These outcomes are linked to public investment choices. They are the direct result of investment decisions that do not reflect the realities of pastoralist life. The Turkana County Health Services Act and Article 43 of the Constitution do not contain a “geographic

exception.” Yet in practice, the distance between law and lived experience for pastoralist women in Turkana is measured in lives:

- Maternal and emergency health systems remain under-resourced and poorly adapted to mobile and remote pastoralist communities
- GBV prevention and survivor services do not reach women living across different settlements, grazing areas, and seasonal routes
- Justice systems remain fixed and distant, failing to serve communities whose lives are defined by movement, distance, and limited state presence

Budget data for Turkana County reflects this pattern directly. Across successive financial years, health allocations have consistently failed to account for the costs of reaching mobile, dispersed pastoralist populations — no provision for mobile health units along migration routes, no ring-fenced maternal health budget for remote settlements, no disaggregated line for pastoralist-specific delivery. The Turkana County Government is required under the Turkana County Health Services Act to report on equitable service access. FoLT demands that the next county budget cycle include transparent, disaggregated allocations for maternal health and GBV response that specifically account for pastoralist mobility — with timelines, delivery mechanisms, and public accountability measures attached. Budget lines without delivery mechanisms are not policy. They are a record of intent that never became action.

### **Call to Action**

FoLT calls on:

The Turkana West Sub-County Commissioner, the Turkana County Commissioner, and the Ward Administrator for Letea Ward to immediately account for the informal handling of these cases in their jurisdiction — and to ensure formal referral to the Director of Public Prosecutions. The killing of Amuria Ekeno and the sexual violence in Katelemot occurred within the areas of their administrative responsibility. State presence must mean more than ceremonial authority. The Gender Cabinet Secretary and the Office of the President remain accountable for ensuring the Baraza TWG Report Cabinet Memorandum — now overdue — reaches Cabinet without further delay.

Turkana County Government to prioritise maternal health, emergency care, and GBV response in ways that reach pastoralist communities where they are, including along migration routes and in remote settlements. This is a statutory obligation under the Turkana County Health Services Act and a constitutional duty under Article 43. It is not optional.

The Director of Public Prosecutions and Kenya Police Service to immediately open formal investigations into the killing of Amuria Ekeno and the sexual violence cases in Katelemot, Letea Ward. Informal livestock compensation is not justice. It is impunity. These are criminal offences and must be treated as such.

National Government, Law Enforcement, and Judiciary to ensure investigation and prosecution of femicide and sexual and gender based violence, and to adapt justice systems so they are accessible to mobile pastoralist populations.

**ENDS**

**About Friends of Lake Turkana (FoLT)**

Friends of Lake Turkana (FoLT) is an Indigenous women-led grassroots organisation founded in 2007, advocating for the social, economic, cultural, environmental, and territorial rights of communities in the Greater Turkana Basin.

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