



SPEECH BY H E SUSAN KIIHIKA, NAKURU COUNTY GOVERNOR, DURING THE MEMORIAL FOR STUDENTS WHO PERISHED IN THE UTUMISHI GIRLS SENIOR SCHOOL FIRE TRAGEDY HELD IN GILGIL ON 12TH JUNE, 2026

My Lord Bishop and members of the clergy,

Families of the departed students,

Teachers, students, fellow leaders,

Ladies and gentlemen.

1. Today, we gather under a cloud of grief that hangs heavily over our county and our nation. We have come together not because we have answers to every question, but because our hearts are broken by a tragedy that has robbed sixteen young girls of their lives and shattered the dreams they carried.
2. As we remember the sixteen students who perished in the fire at Utumishi Girls Senior School in Gilgil, we stand with families whose pain is beyond words. No parent expects to outlive their child. No mother carries a daughter for nine months, nurtures her, sacrifices for her education, and dreams of her future, only to receive the devastating news that she will never come home again.
3. To the parents and guardians gathered here today, and to those mourning from their homes across our country, we share in your sorrow. We may not fully understand the depth of your pain, but we want you to know that you do not walk this difficult journey alone. Nakuru County, and indeed the entire nation, mourns with you.
4. We also remember the teachers and staff of Utumishi Girls Senior School. Many of you dedicated yourselves every day to guiding, protecting and mentoring these children. Today, you carry not only grief but also trauma, difficult memories and painful questions. Please know that we stand with you and appreciate the burden you bear.
5. To the students who survived and to the friends of those we have lost, your pain is real. The empty desks, the silent dormitories, the missing laughter of your classmates will remain painful reminders of this tragedy. We pray that God grants you comfort, healing and strength in the difficult days ahead.
6. As we gather in prayer today, we also remember those who remain in hospital receiving treatment. We pray that God's healing hand rests upon them. May He strengthen the doctors, nurses and caregivers attending to them. May He comfort their families who wait anxiously by their bedsides. And may every injured child recover fully and return home safely.

Fellow Kenyans,

7. Moments like this compel us to reflect deeply on the safety of our children. Every parent entrusts their child to a school with the expectation that they will learn in a safe environment and return home unharmed. This tragedy reminds us that safety in our schools cannot be taken for granted.

8. As leaders, we must ensure that safety standards are not merely written policies but daily practices. School infrastructure, emergency preparedness, fire safety equipment, regular inspections and clear response mechanisms must become priorities, not afterthoughts.
9. Parents, too, have a role to play. The values we teach at home matter. The conversations we have with our children matter. Discipline, respect for life, respect for authority and peaceful conflict resolution begin in our homes long before they are reinforced in schools.
10. At the same time, we must confront an uncomfortable reality as a nation. We are witnessing increasing cases of unrest, indiscipline and destructive behaviour in some of our learning institutions. Reports indicate that more than 80 schools and over 2,000 students have been affected by closures and disruptions arising from unrest. This should concern every Kenyan.
11. We cannot ignore the influence of the environment in which our children are growing up. They observe us. They listen to us. They imitate what they see. When children constantly witness adults resolving disagreements through chaos, destruction, confrontation and lawlessness, we should not be surprised when some begin to believe that disruption is an acceptable way of expressing dissatisfaction. This is not a political statement. It is a call for collective reflection.
12. Leaders across all sectors—political, religious, educational and community leaders—must recognize the example we set for the younger generation. We must model restraint, responsibility, respect and constructive engagement even when we strongly disagree.
13. Perhaps the time has come for a serious national conversation involving parents, teachers, religious leaders, policymakers and young people themselves. We must ask difficult questions about discipline, values, mental health, social influences, leadership and the kind of society we are building for our children.
14. If there is any lesson we can draw from this heartbreaking moment, it is that protecting our children is a shared responsibility. It belongs to all of us. Today, however, our foremost duty is to honour the sixteen young lives we have lost. Though their time on earth was brief, their memories will remain in the hearts of their families, classmates, teachers and communities forever.
15. May we honour them not only with our tears, but also with our commitment to build safer schools, stronger families and a more responsible society. May God comfort every grieving family.

Thank you.

H E SUSAN KIHKA, EGH

GOVERNOR, NAKURU COUNTY