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#KeptOn - Preserving Digital Rights and Economic Prosperity: A Call Against Internet Shutdowns in Kenya during #RejectTheFinanceBill2024 picketing.

Nairobi, Monday, June 24th, 2024: We strongly urge the Kenyan government to refrain from enforcing any Internet shutdowns or information controls in response to the ongoing protests against the Finance Bill 2024 through the hashtag **#RejectFinanceBill2024**. Such measures would infringe on the fundamental rights and freedoms of Kenyans as well as negatively impact Kenya's economy, democracy, and reputation in the eyes of the international community.

Kenya's constitution and international human rights legislation safeguard the fundamental rights to freedom of expression, access to information, and picketing, which would be violated by internet shutdowns, censorship, and other information controls. By preventing citizens from engaging in public conversation and holding the government accountable, internet disruptions subvert democratic processes.

A blackout of the internet in Kenya will have disastrous economic effects for example:

1. Kenya's thriving e-commerce business would be severely disrupted. Kenya's e-commerce market is predicted to reach US\$801.4 million (Ksh 103 billion) by the end of 2024. The Internet Society's Pulse NetLoss calculator estimates that a total Internet outage may cost Kenya's economy Ksh 810 million (US\$6.3m) in lost Gross Domestic Product (GDP) every day.
2. Millions of Kenyans who depend on these services for daily transactions including banks, would be impacted by the paralysis of the mobile money industry, which includes M-Pesa, which handles over Ksh 6 billion transactions annually valued at over Ksh 6.4 trillion (US\$50 billion).
3. There would be major setbacks for Kenya's digital startup sector, which attracted Ksh 141.3 billion (US\$1.1 billion) in funding in 2022 and would cause investor confidence to decline.
4. However short-lived, Internet disruptions affect many facets of the national economy and their effect persists far beyond the days on which access is disrupted. They carry reputational risk, hurt investor confidence, disrupt supply chains, and can discourage foreign direct investments (FDI).
5. The tourism sector, which makes up a sizeable portion of Kenya's GDP, would suffer because travelers rely mostly on internet connectivity to make reservations and obtain information.
6. Furthermore, Internet shutdowns would hinder emergency services and access to vital information during crises. They would also damage Kenya's reputation as a hub for technology and innovation in East Africa, as well as Africa's Silicon Savannah.

The **#FinanceBill2024** has already encountered strong opposition, and in particular, using digital activism. This has prompted the Kenya government to withdraw several contentious clauses. This illustrates the value of having open lines of communication between the public and the government and the influence that public discourse may have.

We urge the government to respect democratic values, have an honest conversation with demonstrators, and answer their concerns transparently.

A peaceful resolution of the current crisis and the maintenance of Kenya's democratic and economic development depend on keeping lines of communication open and protecting and prioritizing Internet access.

For any clarification and media briefing, contact info@kictanet.or.ke.

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