LOBBY LAUNCHES COAST EARLY WARNING AND EARLY RESPONSE SYSTEM (CEWER)

Kenya Community Support Centre has launched the Coast Early Warning and Early Response System to prevent conflicts from escalating into violence. This being an election year, the organisation is seeking to tap on all peace structures and actors in the Coast to complement the work of the various state and nonstate actors' efforts in Kenya to promote tolerance and prevent violent conflicts as well as creating a peaceful environment as the country gears towards next year's general elections. KECOSCE seeks to do this through establishment of a system for provision of alerts and necessary information in good time to allow for conflict resolution and management. Speaking during the Launch of the system at KECOSCE offices, the Executive Director Phyllis Muema said that "Conflicts are often grounded in the stories and narratives that people tell themselves and the emotions that these stories generate. Narratives shape identity and the social construct of reality—we interpret our lives through stories. These have the power to transform relationships and communities".

"We have set up a 50,000 strong member SMS subscriber list in Mombasa, Tana River, Kwale, Malindi and Lamu to leverage mobile technology for awareness raising and civic engagement with the aim of preventing possible violence during next year's Elections". She said. The campaign focus is on voter education, community cohesion and rumor prevention. The system is designed not just to gather alerts on conflict; but also disseminate the same online to actors for immediate response and follow up and adds up to a growing number of conflict early warning systems developed in the country ahead of the forthcoming elections. This Early Warning Early Response system seeks to create awareness amongst Peace building CSOs and the general public about the need to inform of impeding danger and take appropriate remedial actions.

This comes in handy especially this time when the Coast is experiencing increasing tensions and ethnic based debates on the forthcoming General elections with members of Mombasa Republic Council calling for a boycott of the elections on one side and the government through IEBC preparing for the elections to take place in all regions in Kenya Said Phyllis Muema. With this mechanism KECOSCE hopes that conflicts and tensions alerts will be identified at an early stage and adequate measures taken to prevent conflict escalation. We encourage Peace actors and the general public being encouraged to keep sending sms alerts to 0726549400 for speedy interventions.

KECOSCE has already trained over 36 peace monitors and is working closely with the peace committees and civil society organizations in the Coast to enhance citizen participation in conflict prevention. The system builds on the already established network of peace actors, the District Peace Committees (DPCs), the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) and National Steering Committee on Peace Building and Conflict Management (NSC). This way, KECOSCE hopes to link the governmental approaches to violence prevention to the civil society actors and local social groups at the local level.

This system will also provide a platform for gathering and providing information about conflict and potentially dangerous situations; support peace actors to adequately respond to conflicts and to monitor the aftermath of conflicts settlements; the platform will also serve to enhance coordination of state and non-state actions to conflicts, and communication from grassroots to national level. We believe the this program will be used to catalyze behavior change vis-a-vis peace and conflict issues at the community level by amplifying new narratives via SMS and online system.