



# PRESS RELEASE

**Date: 26th February 2026**

## **KISUMU WOMEN CONDEMN THE RISING TIDE OF SEXUALIZED POLITICAL SPEECHES**

**Women United for Our Future and CSO Network**, demand an end to the culture of derogatory remarks directed at women and wish to warn against the the normalization of sexualized insults in political rallies. The remarks directed at the Ag. Secretary General of the ODM Party and by extension, all Kenyan women, is not merely about crude jokes, but represent a calculated historical strategy to dehumanize women candidates and reduce their intellectual and leadership contributions to sexual tropes. The latest remarks by Mr. Richard Omondi Odhiambo (alias Makamu wa Makamu) during the ODM Political rally in addition to the culture of misogyny, makes the path from verbal dehumanization to physical assault and violence against women and girls a present danger. These type of sexulized comments and humiliation have been a precursor to electoral violence.

This is not a new script, there is abundant evidence of this sort of language, where male politicians especially, continue to use sexual analogies to describe political alliances in public forums and has seemingly faced no consequences. Women continue to be objectified, trivialized and reduced to their physical appearance rather than recognized for their competence and leadership. We have witnessed women in rallies being encouraged to demean themselves for political entertainment. Such acts erode the progress women have fought hard to achieve and discourage young women aspiring to leadership.

If a woman cannot be respected on a podium, she cannot be safe on the campaign trail. Women in Kenyan politics have been told to ignore the insults and “grow thick skins”. However, the sexualized, humilitating and abusive comments have not stopped. Instead, our silence has embolden perpetrators breeding a culture of impunity. As women we must refuse to turn the other cheek while our dignity continues to be auctioned for laughter and applause. Leadership demands the courage to stand up against sexism, even when it is politically inconvenient and silence in the face of misogyny is a betrayal to the women and girls in this country. The normalization of such conduct emboldens further disrespect and perpetuates a political culture that objectifies and undermines women

We demand that all political discourse be defined by dignity, safety and mutual respect. Political platforms should not be used to denigrate women and we demand to see structural changes and consequences. Therefore:

1. Kisumu Women are calling for a public apology
2. We formally urge the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) to investigate the repeated use of demeaning language by politicians and their peers.
3. We call on the Registrar of Political Parties to enforce strict codes of conduct and any candidate who uses sexualized rhetoric must be deemed unfit to hold or run for public office.

**To every woman and girl, - Leadership is defined by competence, not by the ability to endure abuse. Your body is not a political tool and your silence is not consent.**

**Linda Gweno**

*Women United for Our Future*

**Betty Okero**

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