

50% campaign to protect children

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50% campaign “hits the street” ...

Campaign launched at ribbon-cutting ceremony with the Arusha District Commissioner

By Tanja Kisslinger (Mkombozi Communications Coordinator)

The 50% campaign has taken hold in Arusha... Bus shelters across the city now display 50% campaign messages about the need for children's rights in Tanzania with clear and affecting imagery. In fact, with the help of Arusha's District Commissioner, the 50% campaign and the campaign bus shelters were formally launched this past Friday, August 17th, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony near the bustling Kijenge round-about.



Music played loudly, with lyrics about the plight of street children, as local media and the general public gathered around with interest. The 50% campaign organizers – the Arusha Caucus for Children's Rights – were also in attendance, including representatives from each member organization: Action for Children in Conflict, Artzania Group, ANGONET, East Africa Law Society, Hakikazi Catalyst, Legal and Human Rights Center, Mkombozi, and Tanzania Mine Workers Development.

Amani Mustafa of the Arusha Caucus was the first to make a formal speech, addressing the crowd in general and the District Commissioner in particular. Amani reminded everyone that Tanzania is in a unique situation, given that 50% of the population is comprised of children and youth. He stressed that, within this context, the 50% campaign is an urgent effort to create national awareness of the need for children's rights, juvenile justice and legal reform in Tanzania, in order to ensure the country's future development.



Amani's words were brought to life by Philbert Elias, a former street youth who spoke movingly about the reality of Tanzania's street children, abandoned by society and mishandled by police. He urged Tanzania to see street youth for what they are – vulnerable children who have been subjected to hardship and circumstances very often outside of their own control. He also pointed to his own experience as a resident of Mkombozi Centre for Street Children (an Arusha Caucus member) as evidence that street children often require just a bit of care and opportunity in order to turn their lives around. Philbert himself has completed Mkombozi's business training, and is now a fully self-reliant adult.



Finally, the Arusha District Commissioner added his voice to the need to “do more” for Tanzania's children. He noted that Tanzania has invested considerable funds into sectoral improvements in primary education and health care, but that further investment is required. Overall, the Commissioner supported the campaign's potential impact in two key areas: local government support for vulnerable / homeless children; and laws that protect the “best interests” of Tanzania's children.

In a gesture of celebration, the speeches were followed by the District Commissioner's ceremonial cutting of a bright, red ribbon that was carefully dressed across the nearby 50% campaign (Njiro) bus shelter. In fact, the spirit of celebration continued in a dynamic acrobatic performance put on by several street youth who generously agreed to participate in the event – their performance was a fitting showcase of talent and potential.

It is the hope of the Arusha Caucus that this type of awareness-raising activity will generate the public dialogue that is required for a positive shift in attitudes toward children in Tanzania. Notably, 50% campaign radio programs will soon be launched, to prompt awareness and new ideas about the treatment of children in Tanzania.