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### ***Obed Mitau Interview***

Transcript of video interview with Obed Mitau, Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children (KAAC)

Recorded for KAIROS, September 2019

*My name is Peggy Namadisaka. I am the one who is doing the interview and I am the regional coordinator for Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children in Coast region. So I'll let the young person introduce himself - his name, his age, and his relationship with KAAC.*

Thank you so much. My name is Obed Mitau. I am a KAAC beneficiary first and foremost. Right now I am a Child Rights Ambassador. I have gone through the system. I have been there with CAAK through the empowerment and now I am coming back to give back to the children and also to empower fellow youths so that we can start a program. Right now I am currently 20 years old. I will be turning 21 in December. I am also a mechanical engineering student at the Technical University of Kenya. And it is a pleasure to be here.

*Can you tell us a little bit about who you are - just a little bit more? Who exactly are you and what are you and what are you going to talk about?*

I think, to define that, if you are able to just take everything away from me, the one single thing that I will be left with I think is the voice. I consider myself a voice for the guys who don't have voices, the voiceless that is. Because first of all that is, I really like the empowerment - reaching out to younger people, interacting with children, getting to know what are the issues that are facing them. Because as a child, I can relate - to back then - to the issues that were facing me. We had issues on abuse, physical abuse of children, sexual abuse of children, children who are not able to access education. And all these things are actually happening in my community and some are actually happening to me myself. So, for me actually going back and empowering those children, empowering my fellow youths, that is one thing that has stuck with me and I think will stick with me for the rest of my life.

*Thank you. What does "peace" mean to you?*

Peace. I think peace for me starts from inside, inside one's own self, being accepting [of] who you are as a person, so that you are able to accept others as they are. If you are able to live in a society that is inclusive - that means that each and every one of us is able to accept the other for who they are no matter how different their cultures are, no matter how different the person speaks, no matter how different the colour of the skin of the other person is - I think that for me would be the perfect scenario of peace.

*What about "freedom"? What is freedom to you?*

Freedom is an expression. If I am able to express myself, if I am able to express my culture, if I am able to express my views and speak them out without any fear that I might be stigmatized, that I might be isolated, or maybe rejected by guys - that for me, that is freedom.

*And what does it mean for you to be safe?*

Safe for me is all about being protected - either by the law, secondly, I am a religious person, I also believe in safety from a Higher Power. I also believe in safety from the community - the people that I put around me.

*What do you need for the above to happen? What will it take for you to enjoy that freedom, peace, safety?*

I think, if we will all come together, all the stakeholders. For me the first, the biggest stakeholder is the government, the community, and then the marginalized people - all of us. If we all work together - including the marginalized groups, that is I am also including the children, the youths. Yah. So for me if we were all able to actually come together - common ground - and actually decide that, you know what, we're going to make movements together. And when the government sets policies it sets policies with everyone in consideration with all others, even the non-government organizations.

*You know the type of work that KAAC does. What are some of the kinds of work that KAAC does and who are some of the people that we work with?*

I know that KAAC works with the United Nations, the Social Acts [?] of the African Union, ECPAT recently trying to end child prostitution and human trafficking as well, also work with ECOSOC [United Nations Economic and Social Council]....

[interview interrupted]

Second File

KAAC actually deals mostly with the children and the youth as well. It seeks to empower them. Not just advocate for their rights, but to empower them, to actually be able to advocate for their own rights, advocate for the rights of their own peers, other children as well. So the reason why this work is very important to me is because the issues that they are attacking, especially the advocacy of the child rights actually are very close to home, very close to [my] heart because I actually grew up in the community where actually all this was happening. We had an unsafe environment for children, where children didn't have access to primary education, and even when they did have [education] the environment in the schools did not allow them to actually stay in the schools and to actually get that education they actually thirsted for. So they are actually coming in, step up, fight for the rights of these children, empowering us to even speak out, to tell the government that you are failing in some areas. That for me was a big challenge. I've been working very [hard for that].

*So do you think this is important?*

Very. Very. Because there is still a lot to be done especially for the children in Mombasa County and the children in Kenya as a whole.

*Children/youth are supposed to have freedom to play, to choose their own friends and to express themselves. Does that always happen and if it doesn't, why not?*

Well we come from a community that actually puts the children as the lower most people amongst us. Everywhere you go, especially in Mombasa County, it is the child that is not allowed to actually sit down and express their views - it is normally the adults who do that. It is basically because of the old notion that children actually do not know what they want. When in a real sense they actually know what they want. So, for me, we have been told that we have that right to express ourselves, but actually we are not given that platform, to actually express ourselves. So, for me, we are not able, simply because the

community doesn't want to view us as people who can actually address our own issues, express our issues, express our problems. So, it has been a real big...hard for us, but I am glad that institutions are actually jumping in, KAAC is jumping in, to empower us, to actually tell the community that these young guys can actually teach something to you. They can actually tell you what is actually affecting them, instead of you actually just assuming [...]

*What do you think can be done to ensure that you have that freedom of expression or you have that freedom to play?...to have your voice heard? ...to choose your own friends? What do you think?*

Awareness. One: awareness. Actually getting down to the interior parts -to actually speak there, because there are children who have never heard of their rights. I know it is very hard to imagine but there are, actually there. They don't know that they have the right to a conducive environment. They don't know that they have the right to participate even in the making of policies by the county government and even at the national level. There are children who do not know that they have a right to education. That protects them from early marriages. There are still small, very remote cases of FGM [female genital mutilation] which is currently happening. Children that don't know that they have a right to protection. So for all this to happen, I think awareness is a very key thing.

Number two: we need more support systems, a bigger framework, because sometimes even the children who have been empowered as they grow they get to eighteen and then there are not so many programs for them to actually continue. So, they are actually left out. So updating what is next.

*Tell me, what...why is it - I know you alluded to it, but maybe I want you to get a little further. Why is it that children do not get that opportunity to play? Can you talk about the main reasons for children not playing?*

We have so many cases. It is a very sad thing, but we have so many cases of land grabbing. They allocated playgrounds, because I remember the playgrounds that I played on as a child, right and now they are not there - because we have had construction and nobody is actually jumping in to say that "Hay, stop constructing, stop this on these places." As much as development is a key thing for the community, but we should actually have spaces - playgrounds for the kids to come and play on. The fields are also in a very terrible state because we still need to [mature?] the natural talents of children because it is not only about education in the classroom but also education outside their classroom.

*Earlier when I asked you concerning partners for KAAC you talked about the partners KAAC has internationally. Does KAAC work at the national level, the community level? Are there any partners that we work with at the community level or the national level? Who do we work with?*

KAAC is actually a merger of 259 agencies so the kind of work we do, they don't necessarily have to be there in the nation so with the 250 arms that they have made they are able to reach even the interior parts that would have been really hard for them to get to if they decide to go to them, but with the amalgamation of 250 agencies KAAC has been able to impact Kenya as a whole. I am also glad to say that it has also gone international wide. We have the United Nations, the United Church of Canada, we have ECOSOC, we have the African Union, so all these international partners actually make KAAC have an impact, even internationally.

*Can you talk about the networks?*

In Kenya?

*Yah, that KAAC works with?*

We have Child Rights Clubs, most especially in the primary schools. That is the first plan. KAAC also works in conjunction with other NGOs. We have The Plan, SOS, so all of them are actually able to come together and advocate for the rights of children, especially the Child Rights Clubs we normally have. We also have the County Assembly which KAAC actually has a liaison with each and every county we have a Children's Assembly and even at the national level we have a Kenyan Children's Assembly.

7:20 Ok. to basically come back to the county. We have the county Child Rights Assemblies. So basically what they do is they incorporate the children in the county Children Assemblies especially the CRC's, that's the Children's Rights Clubs in different primary schools and even the secondary schools from different counties and then bring them all together to have the County Children's Assembly. And then in conjunction, all of them, they come up and make the national Children's Assembly.

Q: Ok. That's interesting. Now, what message can you give to the Canadian children?

What message?

Q: What can you tell the children in Canada? Basically what is your message to them?

8:13 Have no fear. Keep going. Just "keep going," those two words. That means a lot. No matter what ever it is they might face, that I can assure them that if they just keep going they will get to where they actually want to because looking back to where I have come from to where I am right now I am really proud to say that those two words have been a real big motivation. And it is still just about the people who are around you, it may seem that sometimes that there is not that much of a support system but if you are able to actually empower yourself from inside and actually feel that you are a *somebody* not just growing up to be a somebody but that you are actually a somebody, you will actually get to where you want to. If it is the creation of a conducive environment, you'll get to it - but it all takes time - but just keep going!

Q: This is out of the questions - besides the questions that I have set aside to ask you - Recently as a youth you travelled to Canada and you were going to have an interesting program. Maybe you can talk about the experience you had in Canada and the experience you've had with the youth here. How do you mark that? How do you use what you learned there? What can you give the youth back from the experience that you've had recently?

9:40 First and foremost the experience in Canada was awesome. The kids are awesome. We had so much interactive sessions where there were children and then the youth. Because we had the youth welcome. We also had the Go Project, where we go to interact with different children of different age groups, we also got to interact with youth and we actually saw the youth programs. And they were so much alike with what we have here because they also have workshops with the children and the youth and they also actually had youth facilitators in the children's camps. So that was very amazing to see because they were actually trying to give the children a global vision, a global purpose where by it is not just about the problems that they are facing or the issues that they are facing but the children are actually learning to know what it is like *outside*. And I also think that that is what is also happening in Kenya because youths and children are actually - they don't just want to be national level cause we also want a global level, yah, to actually be able to solve issues and actually sit down. So the message I can (10:40) to the Kenyan youth from my experience back in Canada is that we all need to be one collective body, just one huge body. If we can all come together and put all our experiences together actually, we can actually be able to have more of us and actually if I am able just to touch 2 or 3 lives and those lives touch another 2 or 3, with time, I might not be able to get to everyone at once, but with time, the network that I will build will be actually able to get to the areas that I want to and the issues that we are all facing - we'll actually be able to advocate for them better.

Q: Did you go alone?

No

Q: Is there maybe...why I am asking this is because this is going to be shared with other youth, so are there other youth you were able to learn with or you are connected with here or to be able to advance or to push for issues of collective freedom and peace in this country. Or are you working alone?

11:55 No. I am not working alone. It is very hard. They say that if you are to go fast walk alone, but if you are to go far walk with someone else. I am glad that I have youths around me and children around me that actually share the same vision that I do. So in Mombasa we have so many, not to mention [ other locations, the Fialti, Asle, we have Beti] [??] On a national scale we have so many others that we relate to. Unfortunately we only went 6 of us. I think we could have got thousand, even millions to come with us, but it was not possible to put that many on a plane. So we had guys like Emmanuel , Julian - guys that actually come from Kisumu like Julian, others came from Nairobi, like Marlena, others came from the eastern part like Moses, and they actually all had different experiences from my own and when I sat down with them I went "Ooh, so that is what you are advocating for" and I was actually able to share my experiences with them and with time I was able to learn so much from the guys from the different parts of Kenya because I didn't know that there were issues like that happening in the different parts and they were also able to learn from us - I and Heisel especially from the coastal part. So it was a really nice experience for me to actually first of all learn from my own home country, my own fellow citizens, my colleagues and then actually to be able to go and learn from colleagues on the international scale in Canada.

Q: Thank you very much, Obed, for your time. We are grateful.

Thank you. Thank so much.

### Third File

0:00 For me the work of KAAC is actually very important because it provides a platform where young people and children are able to actually give out a voice. Because when actually KAAC comes down to the local community meetings it actually comes down through the Child Rights Clubs in primary schools, it comes down through youth group in the communities that we have, and actually is able to empower all of us. So what normally happens is that we are able to express our views, not only at the local level whereby where we all get to say the issues that are affecting us in our communities, we are actually able to get to represent it even on a national scale. The best example I can give on the national scale is that at one point in time one of us, that is Moses, was able to actually lobby a Bill to the Parliamentary Committee that put a ban on the advertisement of alcohol before 9pm. I think that was one of the biggest milestones that we made as Kenyan children from the local level to the national level and even to the international level whereby I was actually privileged to represent the African children, the African youth to actually voice out in the third and fourth Secretary [Security? Secondary?] Report of Kenya to the UNCRC in Geneva in 2015 whereby I was actually able to express our view and our challenges especially on the issues of radicalization and environmental pollution that actually begin to affect so much of us, especially in Mombasa County and even in Kenya because it is setting up with industries yet they didn't actually factor in the communities that they were actually setting them around/in. And even continuing back to see that KAAC even in the national level and even in the community level it is actually able to bring in different NGOs, different CSOs and different county Child Rights Clubs and organizations to actually be able to lobby. So with that much network and that much support needed we are actually

able to voice the issues of fellow youths, of fellow children. Right from the time I was 13 years old, that is when I actually started in 2015, up to this point I am glad to say that KAAC has given me a platform not only just to voice out the issues that are affecting me, not only the issues that are affecting the children in Mombasa County, but also the issues that have been affecting the Kenyan child as well.

Q: Thank you. (2:29)