

Mr and Ms Kibera Turns 20: Where Fashion Meets Protest in Nairobi's Slum

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Mr and Ms Kibera Pageant Turns 20: Beauty, Protest and Resilience on Nairobi's Stage

Nairobi, Kenya – Just a stone's throw from Kenya's largest informal settlement, a young woman walked the catwalk in a white dress, splattered with fake blood and tape across her lips reading: *"Stop, silence, gender-based violence."* It was a powerful reminder that the **annual Mr and Ms Kibera pageant** is far more than a beauty contest — it is a platform for protest, expression, and resilience.

Now in its **20th year**, the pageant drew hundreds of spectators eager to see contestants balance glamour with activism. Participants spoke out against **gender-based violence**, police brutality, and youth marginalisation, turning the runway into a stage for social justice.

Contestants' bold statements — from tank tops reading *"Stop killing us"* to speeches on freedom of expression — reflected the frustrations of Kenya's young generation. The event comes after a wave of anti-government protests in June and July, which left 65 people dead, and amid growing concerns from activists who have labelled gender-based violence in Kenya as a **"femicide crisis."**

Founded by **Ben Ooko** in 2004, the pageant has become a lifeline for youth in Kibera, where poverty, crime, and lack of basic services remain daily challenges. Ooko says the contest teaches self-expression, confidence, and leadership:

"We are looking at young people who can stand up and speak for the challenges of other young people."

The pageant has transformed lives. **Kepha Ngito**, crowned the first Mr Kibera two decades ago, went on to become a development consultant. **Pauline Akiniyi**, a 2016 contestant, later founded a women's shelter in the settlement.

This year's crown went to **21-year-old nursing student Rozelda Kim**, who called the victory *"a microphone to speak louder."* She hopes to use her new platform to change perceptions of Kibera and inspire her community.

As Ngito reflects, the contest is about redefining beauty:

"We want to show the world that we have our own definition of beauty — and that definition is resilience."