

The protection of civilians from harm and abuse is a key humanitarian concern. This challenge is compromised by the rising insecurity in Kenya, which is a major source of concern to the government, since most major ethnic groups have ethnic based militia gangs. The government continues to deny the existence of ethnic-based militia gangs and at other times affirms their existence, thereby responding very harshly towards some of them. By so doing, the government acknowledges the existence of the militia and the consequent challenge of dealing with them. Unfortunately, majorities of these groups stay inert and only awakens whenever called upon, especially by politicians to lease terror to opponents during election period.

Ethnic-based groups comprising of "young warriors, have always existed in Africa. The rite of passage that transmits children to adulthood, initiation, demands that, as a proof of manhood, young men form a community's defense force, guarding against cattle rustlers and other perceived "enemies" as well as retaliating when necessary. Custom demands that such young warriors obey community's elders and develop warriors' cohesion among persons of the same age group. This is believed to make it quite easy to mobilize during a call for action. Examples of such groups are the Njama ya aanake (Kikuyu), and the famous morans (Masaai). Observably,

1

these legitimate peer groups would often armed with a variety crude weapons, but rarely firearms.

They are exclusively comprised of male youth whose members' age range between 18 and 30 years. It is this indigenous concept of community defense male youth that has with time undergone a dramatic metamorphosis into ethnic based militia gangs. This paper gives a brief overview of armed militia ethnic-based gangs in Kenya. Its main focus, however, is on the Mungiki. It addresses three questions:

With special emphasis to Mungiki, how have ethnic gangs evolved?

What threat do they pose for national cohesion?

What are the options for resolving the problem of ethnic gangs?