



Ekaale Epakan

My journey with the AUH Protective Fellowship was more than a professional opportunity, it was a pilgrimage of the mind and spirit. Traveling from Kenya to South Africa took me not only across borders, but also deep into the landscapes of memory, justice, and belonging. I came seeking knowledge and renewal, but what I found was healing, solidarity, and a rediscovery of purpose.

Visiting the Iziko Museum, a place where the world gathers to remember those who were. As I opened the visitors' book and saw signatures from every corner of the globe, I was struck by how universal our desire is to understand the past. The exhibits from ancient fossils to human tools were not just artifacts of history; they were reminders that curiosity is the thread that binds us all. Walking through those halls ignited something in me. I realized that memory is not passive, it moves us to act. Museums like Iziko are more than repositories of history; they are catalysts for preservation and storytelling. I left with a renewed sense of duty to document, honour, and protect the living history of Africa and my own community.

Standing in District Six, where vibrant communities were forcibly torn apart, was heart-breaking. You could almost feel the echoes of lost homes and shattered lives in the ghost of a community. Yet, as I stood there, I felt the echoes of my own people in Turkana, facing threats to their land and way of life. This pain felt terrifyingly familiar. It reminded me of what might soon happen in my home, Turkana, with the upcoming land registration process scheduled to start anytime soon. My heart aches for our pastoralist communities. Their traditional way of life, moving freely with their animals, faces an uncertain future. I wonder what will happen to them once formal registration begins, as it may threaten their traditional ways of life.

Robben Island, once a maximum-security prison, held political prisoners during apartheid. Walking the same corridors as Nelson Mandela and other freedom fighters was humbling. It's a place that speaks of immense suffering, but also of unbreakable hope.

It was a stark reminder of the price paid for justice, equality, and human dignity. It stirred a personal memory of my own brief detention in Kenya, when I protested the high cost of living. Friends half-jokingly called me “our Mandela,” but it wasn’t until I stood on that island that I truly grasped the weight of such a name. This visit taught me that the spirit of resistance is universal and that even small acts of defiance carry great meaning.

I have been closely following updates from Mzalendo in Kenya and its role in shaping Kenyan democracy. A Kenyan beacon, connecting citizens to parliament and fighting for accountability. In South Africa, PMG monitors parliamentary committees and provides detailed reports and audio recordings of proceedings - something Mzalendo currently lacks. Imagine the power if these two forces joined! They could create a central hub for activists across Africa, making our fight for people's rights stronger and more informed. That is my dream of collaboration.

Equal Education Law Centre showed me how law and community action can dismantle educational inequality, especially in marginalized communities. While at home, Turkana faces deep challenges, where parents often value livestock over a mistrusted school system. I see hope advancing like that in South Africa. “We Are Reclaiming Kenya”: The brave cry of Kenya’s youth gives me faith. Soon, I believe my community will also recognize their rights and join this new generation in the fight for our common good.

This fellowship gave me something I had forgotten - peace. I watched films, read inspiring books recommended by my mentors and coaches, and finally had time to just be.

I reconnected with family and friends, mending relationships strained by my activist path. Honest conversations brought back understanding. This was a time of deep self-reflection. I made tough decisions, shedding an old version of myself and evolving into someone new and stronger. The AUH team played an instrumental role throughout this journey, offering guidance and direction helped me navigate moments of doubt and reaffirmed my purpose.

The Summer School was the heartbeat of this journey. Meeting fellow defenders from 15 African countries expanded my world. Together, we shared our stories, our fears, and our victories. In those spaces of honesty, we found kinship.

Arise reminded us that “rest is not laziness” — it is a revolutionary act. Fidelis’s words echoed in my mind: “Mental health is a major weakness if ignored.” I learned that to sustain our work, we must nurture the body, mind, and spirit. Activism without rest is self-destruction; healing is resistance.

Throughout my time in South Africa, I was reminded that none of us stands alone. The solidarity I felt from the AUH community and my peers reaffirmed my belief that connection is both protection and power. The opportunity to visit places like Khayelitsha where I made friends, going to the mall like Canal Walk, attending Prof Fiona’s inaugural lecture and meeting other activists was truly refreshing.

A Family, Not Just a Network. The AUH team has become more than mentors; they are family. We've promised to stay connected, and this is not the end of our work—it's a new beginning. I return home with renewed energy, but the source of my strength remains the same - the echoes of my people's cries in Turkana. Their struggle is my struggle.

My Pledge: Every breath I take, every step I make, and every voice I raise is a pledge to alleviate their suffering. I carry with me an unwavering belief that change is on the horizon.

About Ekaale Epakan

Ekaale Epakan is an Indigenous **human rights and climate justice activist** from Turkana County, Northern **Kenya**, with over ten years of experience empowering youth to become agents of change. He leads initiatives like “Operasheni Ng'oa Majangili” and “ID to Power” that encourage youth civic participation, and has founded grassroots organisations including the Turkana Human Rights Network and Youth Vote Movement to amplify local voices and foster dialogue. Recognised as Kenya's Human Rights Defender of the Year in 2023, Ekapan promotes climate change awareness, advocates for eco-friendly livelihoods, and addressed climate-induced displacement at COP28 in Dubai. His peace-building work combines traditional networks with modern advocacy to reduce conflicts and promote education over violence through campaigns like “Change a Gun with a Pen,” addressing resource-based conflicts worsened by environmental stressors.

