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No Sacred Cows

The allegations that have been brought forth regarding sexual harassment at Ushahidi deserve more than a 140 character response...so here goes.

I resigned from my position as Ushahidi Executive Director and member of the Board in 2010, however, my role as a co-founder and my journey as a woman in the technology space means that I remain inextricably linked to Ushahidi, for better or worse. There is a lot that can be said as far as the ongoing conversations that have ensued, but I will focus my comments on the case at hand and what has so far been an unacceptable response from the Ushahidi Board and management team.

While “investigations are still underway” months after the allegations of this specific case came to light, and as we await the outcome of that process, we as a tech community must examine the series of events that led us to a point where an organisation and community that is well placed to do better has failed. This includes, on my part, reflection on the role that I could have or should have played, even though I was no longer a part of Ushahidi.

Ushahidi — *Witness, Respond, Act*. Ten years ago, those were the principles we abided by. Those same principles need to be swiftly and fully applied in this situation by the management and Board. In addition, more clarity on steps that have been taken so far and the relevant timelines should be shared and those found culpable either by their action or inaction should resign.

In the interim the community, under the leadership of several long-term members of the tech space, is taking several steps in response. First, by creating an environment where victims of harassment *across* the sector can speak in a safe space and can quickly receive whatever support they require. More broadly planning for a forum is underway where

the community will have discussions on what constitutes sexual harassment, how to identify it, and how to respond quickly and appropriately when it happens. With a follow-up code of conduct that organisations and individuals will commit to. Small steps, but a beginning.

The idea that either individuals or organisations are ‘too big to fail’ or that the tech and start-up sector is somehow different is wrong. If we want to protect those working in these areas, or anywhere else, we need to protect the values of respect, equality and openness, not specific organisations or people. The start-up eco-system in Kenya is no longer nascent, it can and must handle the hard work and tough conversations that will happen in the coming weeks and months.

There is no otherwise.

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