

BRIEF REMARKS BY KEY NOTE SPEAKER

The Executive Director,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen

BUILDING PEACE AND JUSTICE LESSONS FROM UGANDA

I have the honour and privilege to bring to you greetings and best wishes from H.E. George Abola, Uganda's High Commissioner in Ottawa, who has been unable to participate in person due to other pressing official duties.

He therefore, requested me to convey his sincere apologies and also express to the Executive Director his appreciation for having extended to him an invitation to this meeting.

For those of you who are not familiar with the African continent, Uganda, with a population of 28million people, is located in the heart of Africa along the Equator and was until October 1962, under the British Colonial rule. Though the country attained her Independence more than forty years ago, the political, economic and cultural distortions, such as land related issues, left behind by the British and being experienced by the country, have roots traceable down in the colonial legacy. For example, in 1962 Constitution, Buganda was given land, which the colonialist had grabbed through the 1900 agreement. This is the land, which Buganda Land Board started having authority over. After Obote 1 regime abolished kingdoms, the central Government handed over this land to the Uganda Land Commission and

gave it authority to manage on its behalf. Therefore, Buganda's land was confiscated twice i.e. by the colonialist and the post-independence governments.

Forty (40) years after independence, the land issue is still thorny in the affairs of the current Buganda King, who has also vowed not to give up Buganda's quest for a federal system of governance. The pressure on the government for the return of land and granting of federalism to Buganda is still going on.

The Odoki and Ssempebwa constitutional commissions that reviewed the 1995 Constitution, Buganda's view on land and federalism has never changed.

The Independence Constitutional Conference in London on September 18, 1961, Buganda (one of the five Kingdoms) had won for herself an autonomous regional status. Buganda's autonomy was reached in the constitutional conference which took place in July 17-24, 1961, between the Governor's team and the Buganda Constitutional Committee, accompanied by two London Queen Counsellors, in which the Buganda Kingdom, was given complete control over most of the services within her area.

This regional status formed the basis for complications in the conference proceedings. The Kingdom's delegation insisted on assurances from the colonial secretary, that Buganda's autonomy would not be endangered, when Britain transferred power to an independent central Government.

The road to the London Conference started with the Government's appointments over the committee to consider and recommend the future constitutional developments of the country. However, the work of the committee was disrupted by a boycott of non-African shops outside the main towns. Buganda unitarily declared independence and refused to have any dealings with the committee.

Perhaps the most intricate problem at the conference was the issue of the lost counties, (land forming the territories) which had been transferred from Bunyoro to Buganda. The issue bogged down the conference until it was postponed to be determined at a referendum to be held two years after independence, after Buganda assumed that it had Uganda Peoples Congress (the ruling UPC party of Obote 1 regime), concurrence that if UPC form the government the referendum will not be held.

As it turned out, the referendum was held in 1964 and Buganda lost the counties. The Kabaka refused to sign the result of the referendum, thereby precipitating a constitutional crisis. Even Buganda's demand for federal status though provided for in the constitution had not been granted. Then Obote (RIP) and his government abrogated the 1962 Federal constitution, and introduced an anew republic constitution in 1967 that gave him full powers to take over state responsibilities and abolished kingdoms. In response, Buganda ordered Obote I UPC government to move its headquarters out of Buganda. All these culminated in attack and struggle for Bulange the palace of the Kabaka. Government forces under the command of Idi Amin were ordered to storm the palace of Mutesa, King of Buganda and capture him. However, the King managed to escape into exile and

eventually died in London in 1969. Ironically Idi Amin who in 1966 commanded the invasion of late King Mutesa's Lubiri Palace on the orders of Obote which led to the king's exile, returned the body of the king in 1972 for a decent Burial at the ancestral Kasubi tombs on the outskirts of Kampala. President Museveni restored the monarchy in 1993 and has since extended significant goodwill gestures through financial assistance and support to the new king in particular and the Baganda in general.

Political tensions forced the government to pass detention laws to detain the increasing numbers of political opponents, especially from Buganda region.

All Cultural institutions namely: Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro, Ankole and Busoga were sensitive and deeply embedded in the cultural norms of the populations of those areas. Several historical sites such as royal tomb, palaces and numerous articles of royal regalia were preserved for generation by those monarchies. Barely 8 years in power, Obote I regime became unpopular and repressive in Kingdom areas. As it were, the inevitable-an independent Uganda handed over to civil strife. Differing political ideologies and variations in political affiliations led to hatred and dislike among the people. Amidst all these Idi Amin as commander of the forces who started off as a soldier and a ^{not} politician, took advantage of the volatile situation and staged a coup d'état against Obote I regime in 1971, eventually declared himself life president and was deposed after 8 years of degenerative years.

The country had been torn along tribal and religious sentiments, when Idi Amin took over the reigns of government, Amin extended a hand of friendship and reconciliation to the Baganda, the largest single tribe in Uganda, by offering to return the body of their King for a decent burial. However, Idi Amin remained silent about the status of the properties and palaces confiscated under Obote I regime, which government had turned into army garrisons and detention centres.

Idi Amin also released all political detainees and suspended the unpopular Obote I, 1967 constitution and started ruling the country by military decrees. Jubilations among the Baganda were short-lived, as such peace-building gestures he had extended to them were to merely woodwink most Ugandan populations, before he started a phase of brutal killings and expulsion of Ugandan Asians.

With the absence of the rule of law, Idi Amin began to systematically eliminate through the most brutal killings of the members of Acholi and Langi tribes associated and accused of being Obote loyalists. These two tribes suffered most and those who managed to escape into exile latter narrated the ordeals. In the minds of most people in Uganda conjures images of gross human rights violations. Dictator Idi Amin infamy to Uganda by the sheer brutality of his years in power.

His notorious regime is believed to be responsible for the death and disappearances of an estimated 500,000 people ^{who were} were either killed or disappeared without trace, including, the then Chief Justice Ben Kiwanuka. Many more suffered torture at the hands of his security forces.

The Uganda Asians were not spared either. In the colonial days, Asians dominated trade and commerce. As an escape-goat for his unpopularity, Idi Amin accused Asian groups of exploiting the Uganda economy and subsequently expelled them to leave Uganda in 1972 within 90 days. Their bank accounts were blocked and properties confiscated, which were then placed under the control of the Departed Asian Property Custodian Board. The Asians suffered humiliations and were not compensated for their properties and estates.

The expulsion of the Asians left a vacuum in the business arena. Idi Amin and his henchmen proceeded to allocate for themselves and supporters business and estates left behind by the Asians. Once again, there followed short-lived jublations during the free for all (Mafuta-mingi) period. Dictator Idi Amin thereafter declared himself life President and later conqueror of the British Empire, through brutal humiliations of some of the British subjects staying in Uganda. His brutality intensified until he was overthrown in 1979. I believe many of you here present, have seen documentary films such as the Last King of Scotland as evidence of some of the horrible state of affairs in Uganda at that time. Amin's overthrow in 1979, was therefore, greeted with relief by Ugandans by both inside and those in exile.

The collapse of the military regime under Idi Amin was quickly followed by short-lived successive regimes of:

- Prof. Yusuf Lule
- Mr. Godfrey Binaisa
- Mr. Paul Muwanga

- Dr. Milton Obote II regime (5 years)
- General Tito Okello

Of these, the subsequent Obote II regime saw a continuation of war and violence within the country with civilian massacres on a massive scale and widespread torture of ^{alleged} ledged political opponents of the government, leading to total break-down of law and order in many parts of the country. Consequently insurgency groups in the west, east and northern Uganda emerged. It is in the midst of this anarchy that the National Resistance Army under the current President Yoweri Museveni seized power in 1986, to save the situation from further deterioration. He pledged to restore human rights and has since set up an office of the inspector general of government (IGG) which acts as Ombudsman to which the public can bring complaints of human rights abuses and corruptions.

Given what Uganda went through in the previous regimes, President Museveni, took power announcing fundamental changes in the country by first and foremost correcting the past mistakes, left behind by the British colonial masters and the subsequent post-independence regimes. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) under president Museveni had fought for and re-established the rule of law , maintainance of law and order as well as the independent of the Judiciary. While in the struggle in the bush, NRM became bonded with the people because it had Justice. When President Museveni took over power his government could not tolerate the following:-

1. Extra – Judicial killings – government show zero – tolerance and all killings and impunity committed are punished decisively.
2. Rape

3. Defilement
4. Threat to private property
5. Threat to the principle of one-person one vote (democracy).

- He embarked on a long process of writing a new 1995 constitution in which the position of rule of law was enshrined as the supreme law of the country
- Restored the cultural institutions in 1993 after a break of 27 years and returned the confiscated lands and palaces.
- Financial assistance was extended to the cultural institutions to help them rebuild afresh. Tribes such as Teso, Alur and Japadhola and Acholi who previously ^{had} nominal cultural institutions were encouraged, facilitated and assisted to establish such institutions.
- He replaced party politics activities with movement system ~~and~~ in which all eligible Ugandans could stand for any elective office from the grassroots to the highest level on individual merit. This approach solidified national harmony and unity and encouraged people to freely participate in the affairs of the state.
- Expropriated Asian properties and estates confiscated by Idi Amin regime were returned to the original owners, while those who did not wish to return to Uganda were adequately compensated. In fact many Uganda Asians particularly the old generation, are now back to the country and have invested heavily in businesses.

- Similarly, President Museveni whose popular resistance army, later National Resistance Army, fought Obote II regime from 1981 –1985, greatly facilitated ~~of~~ the return of his (Obote) body in October 2005 after his death in exile in Zambia. Before his death all reconciliatory gestures were turned down by Obote out of sheer pride. Family properties and estates confiscated by Idi Amin regime were also returned. A national mourning day was declared and flags flew half-mast in honour of the former President Milton Obote. This action restored the dignity of the family and the Political Party he founded and led until his death.
- With multi-party system now in place, Mrs. Miria Obote, wife of the former president took over the reins of her late husband's Party and contested for presidency along with other party contenders including NRM/O of President Museveni in the last Presidential elections, she lost but now members of her party including the defeated FDC, DP, CP and Jemma are in Parliament on the opposition side. Milton Obote's son too, contested in the previous parliamentary elections, won and now is a Member of Parliament representing his hometown of Lira Municipality.
- The High Court was raided when Idi Amin felt that the judiciary was ^{not} meting out justice as was desired, leading to the death in 1972 of the chief Justice Ben Kiwanuka.
- Anglican Archbishop Luwumu, accused for allegedly being a supporter of the deposit Obote I regime, was like the Chief Justice, murdered by Idi Amin. Their sons are now effectively participating in politics and even appointed Ministers at various times in the present Museveni regime.
- Though Idi Amin is remembered as one of world's prominent dictators, Ms. Madina Amin, a widow of the former despot and family, have been

receiving assistance and support from the state since ^{their} the return from self-exile in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

- High profile officials in previous regimes such as Gen. Tito Okello, Brig. Toko, Godfrey Binaisa and others have not been prosecuted, instead the government has had to facilitate and assist them financially. For example, former President Binaisa was facilitated to return home from exile in the USA, granted his retirement benefits and he gets invited to important national events. The same applies to former vice president Gen. Mustafa Adris.
- Alice Lakwena, from Northern Uganda, leader of the defunct Holy Spirit movement, that fought ^{against} ~~with~~ government forces for two years, recently died in exile in Kenya. Many people died during her insurgency. In the spirit of national reconciliation, the government facilitated and assisted her family to bring home her body for a decent burial.

I want you to note that the defeated remnants of Alice Lakwena, regrouped under Joseph Kony to form the brutal Lord Resistance Army (LRA) which has persisted for nearly two decades in parts of Gulu, Pader and Kitgum areas in Northern Uganda. Virtually everyone had their home destroyed and their properties looted. Widespread abductions especially of children and shocking brutality, and killings forced large rural populations to flee from their villages sometimes spending long periods in the bush without shelter and with very little food until they reach urban centres for safety and protection by the Uganda Defence Peoples Forces (UPDF) detach camps. These centres became overcrowded and eventually exploded into Internally Displaced Peoples camps (IDP), where conditions were generality appalling. The once

prosperous parts of northern Uganda that constitute Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Amuru areas have been turned to desolate waste lands because the ~~in~~ inhabitants ^{are in} IDP camps ~~are~~ away from LRA excesses. Overwhelmed with the associated suffering of the populations in these Internally displace peoples camps many of whom had been tortured or even witnessed horrific massacres often involving members of their family. The Government had to appeal for international humanitarian relief assistance, that is how many NGO's sprung out and now operate in the affected areas. Canada also has between 50-60 such NGOs in the area.

- Government response to LRA insurgency was initially in the form of peace engagements, at the level of the then Minister in charge of Northern Uganda Mrs. Betty Bigombe. These efforts flopped as LRA was deceitful and not committed to peace. Since then, war has been raging between the government forces and LRA, both inside and across the common border inside Sudan, where LRA had established bases. As the LRA terrorism became protracted and formidable, the government preferred to advance a flexible approach. A cessation of hostilities agreement with LRA was recently signed in Juba Southern Sudan. Several delegates from cross-section of the Acholi community ~~through~~ from Northern Uganda were facilitated by the government and sent to Joseph Kony hideouts in Sudan and DRC on confidence building missions. These delegations comprised cultural leaders, political and civil society organisation including Joseph Kony's mother Nora Oteng, wives and relatives of Kony and his commander.

Peace talks and confidence- building missions intensified at all levels to convince the rebels abandon their insurgency. Government has

however, rejected most of the LRA political demands but remain flexible in the peace process. This approach restored the confidence and subsequently led the stability of the country ⁱⁿ ~~for~~ the North-Central areas where the government has been fighting the Khartoum Government using proxies such as ADF, LRA and Karamoja. However, the government forces (UPDF) has now finally brought these areas under control.

As a major in-put to support the peace process President Museveni undertook a weekend trip to the venue of the peace talks between the government delegation and LRA in Juba South Sudan.

This gesture, in which the President managed a few minutes hand shakes with the LRA delegation was the most eloquent testimony of the commitment to peace talks process in Juba.

- Food was delivered in agreed LRA rebel assembly centres at Owiny-Kibul and Ri-Kwagba. But LRA refused to assemble their troops in those two-designated areas, claiming that the centres had been besieged by the Uganda government forces.
- Uganda government troops withdrew from areas inside southern Sudan near the designated assembly points. The government reiterated the offer of amnesty extended to Joseph Kony and his commanders, if they responded positively to the peace talks and abandon the insurgency.
- Indicted by the ICC last October 2006, Kony and five of his commanders were to be arrested on sight. But the government had argued that the amnesty offer was extended, when UN which set up ICC failed to arrest Kony, inspite of the rebel leaders well publicized

- hideout in Garamba National Park north-eastern Congo, an area not far from the UN Peace Keeping forces.
- In search for better way to resolve the conflict, the government approved as an alternative, inclusion in the negotiations, the traditional Acholi cleansing ritual “Mat Oput” where LRA commanders have to ask for forgiveness from the Acholi community through elders, who on behalf of the aggrieved populations, would cleanse them of the wrongs, pardon and allow them to come back home. This was viewed by a Gulu Anglican Bishop as being similar to the Christian reconciliation practice. Other option being proposed is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission along the lines of that of South Africa and Rwanda.
 - The most recent three-day Juba consultative meeting funded by Canada and Denmark, organized by the paramount Chief (King) David Onen Achana, is discussing ways of reviving the stalled talks. Key players from Northern Uganda representing political, cultural, religious and civil society organisations from Gulu, Pader Kitgum and Amuru are in attendance, with the knowledge and consent from the government.

In the area of Justice, the government has strengthened institutions such as the Judiciary, police, IGG and Uganda Human Rights Commissions including Amnesty Commission as well as grassroots Local Council Courts to address at various levels concerns arising from the grievances of the population. The Amnesty Commission works towards peace and reconciliation as well as to help former rebels to return to civilian life. In

northern Uganda, the region most affected by the LRA the Amnesty Commission has so far registered 4860 reporters in the Gulu region and 5156 reporters in the Kitgum Area. In the Acholi sub-region comprised of those ~~of these~~ two areas, 4902 reporters have by now received settlement packages

In closing, amidst expectation from the populations, the government peace building initiatives have been demonstrated through:-

- Former leaders to mention but a few who had fled into exile namely; Otema Alimadi Prime Minister in Obote II regime and President Binaisa were wooed and assisted to return back home and settle down. Their retirement benefits were also given to them.
- Various peace agreements ^{with} ~~in~~ former rebels fighting forces such as UPDA ~~and~~ under Otema Alimadi and the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) of General Bamuze were concluded and some of the combatants retired and provided with resettlement packages while others ^{who} were still fit to serve were re-absorbed in the National army.
- Terrorism of LRA has essentially been defeated and the talks in Juba-southern Sudan are about providing a soft landing for the LRA leaders.
- Civilian courts have also done their part in dispensing justice to the murders and other criminals.
- Condemned inmates have access to appeals for the prerogative of mercy for criminals that have been condemned ~~for~~ ^{to} death by the court system. To cite a few examples here, former Minister ^{of} security in Obote II regime Chris Rwakasisi, former Commission of police under

Idi Amin Kassim Obura, former Governor of central province under Idi Amin Lt. Col. Nassur Abdul^q and many others have had their appeals handled appropriately by the president who has the final ~~system~~^{say} in such cases ^{and often} has extended mercy to many condemned persons.

- Integrity surveys carried out by the office of the Inspectorate Government (IGG) have exposed and ~~signed~~^{signed} out most corrupt individuals, recommending investigations and possible prosecutions.

In a nutshell, peace building and justice in Uganda continues to be ~~also~~^{a steady} but steady process.

Thank you very much for listening.

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