

**A REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A YOUTH
DIALOGUE HELD
ON 3RD JULY 2015 AT SEASCALLOP RESTAURANT
ORGANIZED BY PAN AFRICAN CLUB**

**TOPIC: "ARE POLITICAL COALITIONS FEASIBLE
OPTIONS FOR PROMOTING DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA"**

CONTENT OUTLINE:

- Presentation by **Prof Mambutsya Ndebesa** a political historian and senior lecturer of Makerere University
- Presentation by **Maj. Gen Benon Biraaro**, the President of Peace and National Unity (PNU) Political Party and Rtd UPDF officer.
- **Participants contributions**
- **Responses** by Prof Mwambutsya Ndebesa and Maj. Gen Benon Biraaro

PRESENTATION BY PROF MWAMBUTSYA NDEBESA

The Professor began by appreciating the existence of knowledge sharing forums such as the Pan African Club and appealed to participants to utilize that advantage for progressive reasons of our society. He cautioned Pan Africanists against coming to Pan African Club discussions to learn concepts of power for purposes of using them to monopolize power nor use them to abuse ideals of democracy but rather use them to share power and move Africa forward in the best interest of all. He also advised against narrowing Pan Africanism to Uganda and partisan politics but rather maintain neutrality and other ideals of Pan Africanism such as the oneness of Africans adding that when a Ugandan goes to like say America, they ask

him; how are your neighbours Nigerians that because they don't know that Nigeria is a very big distance away from Uganda! This means that Africans are seen by the rest of the world as one and the same yet some Africans want to think that Africans can be alien to other parts of Africa which is not right.

Our Guest also mentioned another think tank called Vision East Africa in which he is the Vice Chairman based in Uganda and that the chairman is based in Tanzania.

Prof. Ndebesa defined key word in the topic as follows:

Political Coalitions: These are temporary alliances of political forces, governments, parties etc and can be before elections, during or after.

Feasible: Means capable of being done or suitable option or capable of being used successfully.

Democracy: It is a rule by the people as opposed to other forms such as rule by one person, monarchy, emperor etc.

The Guest Speaker then tackled characteristics of Democracy quite at length and the following were recorded:

- **Rule of law / Constitutionalism** in which you allow the law to constrain your behavior thus taming individual selfishness and protecting legitimate interests of everyone both individual and public interests.
- **Political equality** whereby citizens are subjected to the law equally.
- **Freedoms** such as freedom of association, assembly, the press, movement among others.
- **Free and fair elections.** The Professor emphasized that having regular elections is one of the characteristics of democracy but not enough, the elections to be credible must be free and fair to all involved.
- **Citizens' participation in their governance:** The Professor ranked this as probably the most cardinal and that the citizens participate in many ways such as through faith based organizations, NGOs, Political Parties,

etc. He underscored the importance of expansion of the participation space for all people to equally participate in their governance from all walks of life such as students, professionals, Civil Society, politicians, among others. He revealed that it is possible that a person is good by like say respecting laws but if he / she is not active then he falls short of being a citizen and is relegated to a subject which is not commendable.

- **Observation of peoples' rights** including the right to protest peacefully.
- **Existence of checks and balances:** He said these can be between various arms of government i.e. Parliament, the Judiciary and the Executive which he termed as horizontal checks and balances. He added that the other one is vertical whereby citizens directly cause accountability from leaders at various levels.
- **Equality of citizens:** Some people should not be more citizens than others and this is reflected in many ways including enjoyment of rights and opportunities among citizens.

Prof Ndebesa mentioned models of democracy as Liberal, Substantive, Electoral among others and suggested that we can have a topic in the near future to discuss these at appropriate length and members highly welcomed this generous suggestion.

The Guest Speaker also took us through various types of coalitions including Electoral coalitions, post-election coalitions, winning coalitions, reform coalitions, protest coalitions, strategic coalitions, tactical coalitions and military coalitions. He said that coalitions are not new in Uganda and reminded participants that the NRM was a result of a coalition between UFM and PRA. He also talked about the UPC – KY Coalition government of the 1960s adding that coalitions are not only in Uganda or Africa but are also global. He gave examples in Africa such as Democratic Alliance in South Africa against apartheid, coalitions in Kenya among others. He cited many examples of coalitions beyond Africa and also revealed that the current government in India is a coalition government.

He further said that coalitions can be positive or negative depending on their objectives and principles as well as the nature of personalities involved especially in the absence of strong procedures to prevent manipulation, dishonesty and abrogation of agreed positions. He gave the example of the Unholy Alliance of Monarchs in European history who allied against liberal progressive forces. This could be understood as a reactionary coalition which is defined in political terms as attempts to take the clock backwards. He cautioned participants that any ascendance to power by rallying on anti-people motivations is wrong and should be discouraged.

About the feasibility of political coalitions, Prof Ndebesa said that the answer is both Yes and No because coalitions are not necessarily always good. He added that in the case of Mr. Yoweri Museveni and Prof Yusuf Kironde Lule working together during the bush liberation war where the latter was the chairman yet Museveni is a radical and Lule was a conservative, he said he was not sure what would have happened if the liberation war ended with both Museveni and Lule alive.

The Professor added that in Africa, we need national integration and institutionalized rule away from personal rule to be able to provide political certainty and reliable stability. He said that apparently, Uganda is moving in a political fog and is prone to political accident for related reasons. He also appealed for honest wondering why some people tell others to be honest yet themselves are telling lies at that very moment, others ask their opponents to stop commercializing politics yet they are also doing the same and even more!

He said that for democracy to be sustainable there is need for consensus among the elite adding that a democrat suspects that he may be wrong thus allowing others space to give their views to change his attitude. He further said that freedom of assembly is not for political parties alone and that political coalitions can enhance some of the democratic requirements in a given society for as long as their objectives are progressive and well meaning.

The Lecturer reasoned that tolerance of political opponents including the defeated ones is a wise thing to do, adding that he was a UPM member and their candidate in 1980 presidential elections Mr. Yoweri Museveni lost elections and wondered what would have happened if like say he was incarcerated or killed being dismissed as a loser yet he is the President today! He called upon participants to never leave injustices unattended to that because that is only as good as perpetuating them. He added that political coalitions are good because they can create political hope.

Prof Ndebesa explained that if the leadership of coalitions is committed to respect the rules of the game, national interests above personal, family, ethnic and respect the identities of the parties involved then the coalitions can be feasible. He stressed that such coalitions of national interest above any sectarian considerations are very necessary in Uganda that because we are heterogeneous.

He further said that clear definitions of values, procedures, principles and goals must be obtained to avoid being manipulated to pursue other peoples' agenda.

Prof Mwambutsya Ndebesa concluded that political coalitions are feasible given some measures and that they are necessary in Africa because we are heterogeneous societies and that they can enhance inclusive politics. He asserted that political coalitions are good but not necessarily good at all times depending on factors like their goals and values.

PRESENTATION BY MAJ. GEN BENON BIRAARO

Rtd Maj. Gen Biraaro said that before independence, political mobilization in Africa was very difficult and that towards 1962, political parties in Uganda did hurried work to get independence after which we quickly deteriorated into one party rule under UPC led by Dr. Milton Obote and dictatorship. He added that what we are discussing today is like the fall of the Berlin Wall whereby we are rethinking to get a way out to guarantee not only our present but also our future and the future of the not yet born.

He highlighted the challenge of tribalism which is bringing down Africa and gave example of Sudan where Arabs are 32% of the population while the rest are Blacks, that when the struggle of liberation started he hoped that this was an opportunity to re-organize Sudan that alas, tribalism got in the way of the intended re-organization of that country and that this was a big lost opportunity for that part of Africa.

That in 1996, Maj. Gen Biraaro told Museveni that what he was practicing in Uganda was a poor brand of Democracy giving a comparison of two competing football teams whereby there must be a neutral referee, linesmen and that the rules must apply equally to all the players. He further told the president that Democracy in Uganda means trust because we are mult-tribal short of which the processes aiming at delivering democracy may not achieve the goal. He gave an example of recent elections in India where many tribes got together and voted for several weeks but because they trusted the institutions managing the elections, the 800 million Indians finished elections peacefully. That after giving this advice on democracy, Museveni spent five years without talking to him an indicator that Museveni was very annoyed for being told to improve on democracy in Uganda.

Maj. Gen Biraaro cited challenges facing Uganda today including lack of professionalization of the army; to him professionalization encompasses many things not just training alone as president Museveni tends to think.

Our Guest said there is a lot of corruption in Uganda and inefficiency at work with an education system not defined by our needs but rather the needs of the colonial state and thus it does not serve us. That Uganda's health care is sick care with the government exhibiting inability to understand that healthcare is comprehensive. Maj. Gen Biraaro said that 92% of the pregnant women check with hospitals but only 36% deliver from hospitals a reason many women die when giving birth. He added that we ought to ask ourselves what these women see in these hospital when they go there for checkup that discourages them from going back to give birth. He also said that security is being talked about by the government in a narrow perspective yet security has been expanded to include food security and other forms of wellbeing for mankind.

He asserted that the three biggest challenges of Uganda as defined by Dr. Milton Obote i.e. poverty, ignorance and disease have since got compounded rather than being solved and gave example that today, we have got armed ignorance citing instances like Muslim killings which he explains are a result of unaddressed ignorance and poverty. He wondered why majority Ugandans are in agriculture but when the government is budgeting, it allocates the least amount of resources in this sector. He posed a question that after defining the problem and say for example it is poverty, what do we do when budgeting to give a solution to the problem? As if that was not enough, the little allocated resources first go to individual pockets before going to the problem and wondered whether Uganda has a future!

He also said that Uganda's economy is doing very badly adding that we are among the heavily indebted countries and that in development hierarchy we are at the bottom end. In comparative terms, he gave the example of Kenya which raises USD 20 billion while Uganda raises only USD 5 billion in taxes. He also said that Uganda is ranked failed state number 22. He suggested that Ugandans must desist the tendency that things must first get bad before getting better and that time is now to wake up and rescue our country from sinking.

Maj. Gen Benon Biraaro also said that President Yoweri Museveni is military in many ways; he uses money as a weapon because he knows the weakness of the opposition, he gave examples of Hon Minister Maria Mutagamba who was a leader of DP but was lured to abandon her own political party to join NRM and consequently got swallowed. He added that parties have been disintegrating with examples like FDC from which UFA and Action for Change emanated, then in DP we have splinter groups like Subbi, SDP, Liberal Party and that tribalism remains a challenge in the parties. He gave an example of DP where sometime back he was invited to a function and that when DP President Norbert Mao started talking, the Lord Mayor Erias Lukwago arrived with his goons and interrupted Mr. Mao's speech. He suspects these goons together with "Omulodi Lukwago" were waiting somewhere nearby to come at a time when the party president is talking and fail him and that you could see naked sectarianism at work between leaders moreover! The reason he said all these challenges in opposition parties was laboring to explain why when he left the NRM found

it difficult to join the existing opposition parties because they behaved in a manner he thought was not good for Uganda.

Then that the FDC was behaving in a manner of an insurrection which is equivalent to declaration of war while the NRM was also vowing to put a blockade which is also equivalent to declaration of war and that given that we are at a brink of a collapsed state, we need to avoid violence at all costs. Again this conduct made him disagree with both NRM and FDC methods of work. He said Museveni's underhand methods of weakening the opposition are not good asserting that when you have a weak opposition; it is the country at a loss because you will lack checks and balances among the political class for accountability and development.

According to Maj. Gen Benon Biraaro, political coalitions can work but individual parties must be careful not to lose their objectives and identity because a coalition is not a merger but rather different groups / parties / organizations coming together to cooperate to achieve a particular goal during a given time. That rules of engagement should be clearly set otherwise some organizations risk being swallowed. He said that in 1986, the biggest problem which happened to the opposition was joining the NRM government giving semblance of a coalition that because the outcome was that the individuals who joined the NRM were swallowed and their original political parties generally collapsed. He added that his political party, the PNU is recruiting members from all political parties and that if he joins the political coalition, the TDA; he will lose them and that his advice instead has been that let all opposition parties go to the 2016 general elections individually and that since each political party has citizens it appeals to then they would be able to deny Museveni an outright win of 50% plus 1 so that in the second round of voting, opposition parties rally behind one candidate but after knowing the strength of each political party basing on the elections outcome. He said the opposition refused to take heed of this advice and that consequently, he refused to join the coalition of TDA.

PARTICIPANTS CONTRIBUTIONS

Prof Edward Kakonge said that the youth were being hijacked into many schemes without their own agenda / input and have often ended up dying for nothing. He added that the youth worldwide are the biggest victims of conflicts dying and sacrificing for nothing having been recruited in what they don't know.

He concurred with Maj. Gen Benon Biraaro that there is chaos in our education system adding that in most Europe except Germany, education was not designed to empower people but to create classes and that unfortunately that is what we copied and worse still, ours was for serving colonialism not the interests of the locals and we seem to have maintained the same education system to date despite having so called Pan Africanists in power!

He reiterated that parties have agendas well thought through and shouldn't just be swallowed in a coalition. He called upon the youth to get organized and then systematically build up to transform their country.

Muzeyi Peter Wankulu who is also an OAU Veteran advised the Pan African Club to widen its reach and begin holding public rallies in various parts of the country to sensitize Ugandans about Pan Africanism. He offered to always be present to give lectures whenever those public rallies are held. He also commended the Pan African Club for the lectures we have been organizing in schools and urged that the same be continued and he should always be invited to address the young people in the schools.

Mr. Achilles Byaruhanga, the Executive Director of Nature Uganda added on the ingredients of a would be successful political coalition that whoever joins must agree to cooperate and recognize that each of the participating entities has value to bring on table and that even the weaknesses thereof should be recognized and together work out the best strategy and tactics to succeed on a stated and well-articulated mission.

Mr. Byaruhanga added that the coalescing parties should agree on a common agenda rather than remaining stuck to individual objectives which in effect would imply that they have remained apart and different.

He also said that there must be mutual benefit for all participating entities and that the coalition should be rallied on certain principles, values and ideology and not mere opportunism for survival.

Mr. Brian Funzi quoted Nelson Mandela that it is always the will of the leader to determine how the politics of that society will be played. He added that our mis-definition of our problems began in 1962 when our leaders were not discussing pertinent issues of the state like security of the country and how this could sustainably be attained but were rather discussing peripheral issues like the role of Buganda in post-independence Uganda!

Comrade Funzi blamed the NRM for allowing Mr. Museveni Yoweri in 1986 to monopolize all key positions in Uganda when he personally became the President of Uganda, Minister of Defence, Speaker of the National Legislative Assembly, Chairman of the NRM, to mention but a few occupying both positions at a go! That Museveni took this advantage to entrench himself which is not good for the country.

Mr. Kasozi Mulindwa said that political opposition alliance is an opportunity for change in Uganda. He said that the alliance is hinged on three pillars i.e. objectives, pragmatism and compromise. He explained that the major objective is to break the dominance of power by Mr. Museveni Yoweri as president of Uganda. That pragmatism is in recognition that the Museveni they are dealing with is a rebel and that to manage such a person you put things in place first and formalize later. In regard to compromise, this is about the objectives of individual parties whereby they have to give in for the common objectives of the coalition and act as one body for now.

Mr. Nyakubaho Zephania argued that democracy without quality education, health, peace and security is nothing. He also said that he is a UPDF veteran who also served in AMISOM in Somalia that but his due benefits were embezzled by UPDF officers and that the army spokesman Lt. Col Paddy Ankunda is threatening him to shut up! He declared he now

wishes to work with Gen Benon Biraaro and support his presidential bid and change national leadership to ensure justice in the country.

Mr. Mujesi Martin said that democracy is a myth adding that even in first world countries, there is no democracy; he questioned how come the UN Security Council is composed of few countries if there is democracy in the world! He said that Western countries quite often use some African leaders for neocolonial exploitation against the wishes of the African people.

Mr. Julius Opondo said that the UPC-KY Alliance was for Uganda to manage own affairs against imperialism.

Mr. Arthur Nuwagaba said that Maj. Gen Biraaro's party is not at the grass root and thus cannot make much impact on the national political scene. He also questioned the feasibility of political coalitions in Uganda and wondered if they ally to win, thereafter what happens! He gave an example that the UNLF alliance to remove Amin did not provide lasting stability and that in fact soon after, the liberators started fighting among themselves because they had not adequately planned what to do in post Amin era.

Mr. Mwesige Joram said that the TDA (The Democratic Alliance) recently formed in Uganda is built on principle and well thought out objectives. He explained that coalitions are dynamic and situational and that there are things you must forego such as party and individual interests in favour of the common good for all the coalescing entities.

Mr. Kitonsa Allan asserted that no force can succeed without the mass of the youths and advised political leaders to ensure they have the youths on board.

Mr. Ashaba Arnold said that political coalitions are good and feasible that because they enable you get wider resource base and support. He reasoned that coalitions must find a common ground and that this requires the parties to compromise on their objectives. He advised fellow youths to always have an idea they stand for.

Mr. Abigaba Gracious said that some African leaders have learnt to use coalitions to keep themselves in power. He gave an example of Do Santos, the president of Angola that he has a coalition with the Portuguese media to make propaganda for him to keep in power.

A new member whose name was not picked (and we apologize for that) said that we need democracy and powerful institutions in order to address our national challenges that however as of now, the strong man mentality is interfering with our development and that if we do not overcome the problem of powerful individuals who muzzle institutions, we are headed to a crash.

Mr. Owori Moses said that individual parties have failed to remove Museveni from power and the alternative now is alliance and that however stands in the way of this is against Uganda's national interest of good governance, democracy and development. He added that The Democratic Alliance stands for reforms in Uganda and that it was occasioned by consultations in the whole country and that therefore it reflects the aspirations of Ugandans.

He said that since Maj. Gen Biraaro is castigating other opposition parties, he is now eager to look at his party objectives and principles and compare with other parties in the country.

Mr. Muganga Katosi asked Maj. Gen Biraaro whether there are no any positives he sees in opposition political parties in Uganda since he had talked only negative things about them. He also said that unity is strength and thus commends political coalitions to effect change especially in Uganda.

Mr. Ivan Nshabire said that coalitions are good for winning and that the political parties have good ideas for which they aspire to win so that they implement them when in power.

Mr. Waswa Salim asks for Maj. Gen Biraaro's party objectives, he also said that we need action to realize the change we want. He asked Maj. Gen Biraaro to put his ideas in writing for easy sharing. He also doubted whether political coalitions can work in Uganda given our past experience

such as in 2011 when we had the IPC but still we had more than five presidential candidates.

Ms. Kisa Sharifah asked Maj Gen Benob Biraaro to tell us the ideology of his political party, the PNU. She also asked him that why did the NRM come up with legal notice number one of 1986 that led to the deleting of article 169 which provided for multi-party politics of the 1967 Republican Constitution that was made by Dr. Milton Obote?

Mr. Turyahebwa Wycliff said that politicians who are refusing to unite with others are selfish that because when you look at their party objectives, they are the same and wonders why they can't unite to work together.

Mr. Patrick Mulindwa expressed displeasure at our political parties in Uganda that they are tribal and partisan. He said that our parties are unlike the ANC in South Africa which stood for peace for Blacks.

RESPONSES BY PROF MWAMBUTSYA NDEBESA

He said that in history, we have had some coalitions that are relevant for certain tasks for a certain time e.g. decolonizing Africa. In the same line, the ANC in South Africa was achieved through coalitions. He added that during military dictatorships, coalitions came in and in Uganda's case, the UNLF coalition came in to remove Idi Amin from power. Then we also had coated dictatorships and authoritarian leaders such as President Daniel Arap Moi in Kenya and though he had stepped down, his party KANU was defeated by a coalition. Many coalitions succeeded to change governments in various countries in Africa and that some of the shining examples were in Benin and Malawi.

Prof Mwambutsya further said that the new coalition in Uganda the TDA IS for political, constitutional and electoral reforms and has not emphasized post-election governance and that therefore the allying parties have convergence / uniformity along those issues and thus their coalition is feasible. That in this coalition there are also non-political parties, the NGOs which are not aspiring for political power.

He advised participants who say that democracy is not necessary to change their thinking explaining that democracy is good for all of us because it is about peoples' rights and it guarantees political stability and development. He discouraged those who are suppressing the democratic rights of others.

He also advised the youth to stop complaining that they are not being brought in key political participation but rather they should bring in themselves reminding them that those who liberated this country were young people like them. He said that instead the youths of today are wasting a lot of time in social events which are not very useful such as dance halls, 'ekigunda kyomwaka', gambling and Facebook for greetings. He explained that European soccer is taking a lot of interest and time of the youth and has consequently become the opium of the youths in Uganda instead of discussing public matters.

He said that some leaders are ethnically sectarian but are quick to criticize and dismiss others as the ones being sectarian and wondered that if you marginalize others because of their tribal identity; what is wrong with them organizing as a tribe as well to defend themselves for their survival!

He said that the problem of militarization of politics started in Uganda in 1964 by President Obote and that indeed Obote used to challenge his rival Dr. Kawanga Ssemwogere to show him his Generals! He said that this militarization of political competition has now been entrenched by the NRM and challenged Maj. Gen Benon Biraaro to tell the audience how he is going to deal with this problem which he has been part in entrenching and yet now that he is contesting for president he is going to face setbacks from the same.

RESPONSES BY MAJ. GEN BENON BIRAARO

He said that when he left the NRM, he wanted to join the opposition but he was discouraged by the divisions within the parties. He said that when he was still in the UPDF, he came up with what he called the Lift Uganda Project and that the government of Trinidad & Tobago accepted to fund this project which was meant to fight poverty in Uganda but asked him to get a letter of recommendation from the government but President Yoweri Museveni refused which to him indicated that the president is not interested in fighting poverty in Uganda. He added that even the

government of South Korea offered to fund this project but again because of lack of good will from the government, this did not happen. That for this matter, when he left the army; he came to oppose the NRM and that this was consistency on his part and gave reference from the Bible quoting Paul that: "Fight a good fight, finish the race and keep your faith".

He also said that he adapted a four phased approach strategy to build his political party, the PNU and these are:

1. Consultation and introduction of the party to Ugandans through announcing. He said he has traversed the country and discovered that the talk of parties is only in towns and they are unknown in the countryside;
2. Having agents;
3. Getting people to stand as flag bearers of the party;
4. Managing campaigns.

Maj. Gen Benon Biraaro said that the youth matter in our politics but have quite a number of shortcomings such as; they have not articulated their requirements and they are migratory i.e. shift from party to party without principles. This was in agreement with Prof Mwambutsya's view that the youth have made themselves very unserious people by selling their loyalty to politicians and gave example of the youth who keep shifting between Rt. Hon Amama Mbabazi and President Yoweri Museveni and that clearly you see that it is all about money. Maj. Gen Biraaro said that his political party's ideology is Right of Center.

He appealed for principled and systematic well thought out solutions to address Africa's problems. He appreciated the former president of Kenya president Jomo Kenyatta on addressing land issues in Kenya that he asked the British government to give him money to buy land from the whites in Kenya to distribute it to the Kenyans and that this worked unlike President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe who thought he would simply grab land from the whites.

He called for seriousness in fighting poverty in Uganda explaining that a district should be an economic entity before becoming a political entity in order to remove inefficiency and benefit the people. He also reasoned that the opposite of poverty is creating wealth.

About leaders coming from one region – western Uganda he advised that leadership is a calling and not tribal and that people should weigh a person not in view of where he comes from but what he has to offer in leadership.

He further said that one of the UPC mistakes is not to apologize and say we are sorry for what happened but now we are new and able to setoff that because unless the old generation all dies away who saw the mischiefs of UPC government, that people today say at least we can bury the dead without the youth wingers of UPC looking at you.

He also told participants that the challenge of leadership is to provide solutions to problems in a systematic way rather than haphazard populism and gave example of Greece that the activists are shouting but can't give solutions to the debt crisis; it is the leaders to provide solutions. He said that the FDC has taken the route of activism at the expense of leadership which is not very good.

He added that leadership stands on ground to take hard decisions, he gave the example of Nelson Mandela who said: "I will not bow to Black domination nor White domination" and that after his death, we saw bankrupt characters of Blacks killing Blacks because of leadership gap.

The Guest Speaker said that having military men in leadership is not the problem in Uganda because it happens across the world and the results are quite impressive in countries where leaders are serious about development. He gave example of America that in a period of hundreds of years, all presidents have been army men except Bill Clinton and Barack Obama but America is developed.

Compiled by:

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