



Uganda: Is the Timing of Cultural Leaders Bill Political Or Normal Legislative Business?

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column

OFWONO OPONDO - NRM

MAKERERE University professor and NRM critic Joe Oloka Onyango has joined Mengo lawyer/politicians Apollo Makubuya and Charles Peter Mayiga to express populist and opportunistic opposition to the proposed enactment of the traditional or cultural leaders Bill, saying it is "unconstitutional" and "brought in a hurry". As expected, the IPC-opposition band wagon is already on it.

Observers of Uganda's recent policy discussions will recall that this argument is the same as those raised during the Constituent Assembly, Land Act 1998, referendum Acts 2000 and 2005, the Political Organisations Act 2003, and the recently passed Land Amendment Law 2010 where they kicked up so much dust but were defeated. To the NRM campaign agents it is good that this subject is made an election issue and we thoroughly explain the good intentions in it.

As political reactionaries their main objectives have always been to put rear guard actions against NRM policies however well-intentioned using pseudo and often partisan professional analysis hiding behind "expertise" in the futile hope of thwarting revolutionary undertakings.

Onyango, Makubuya, Mayiga and their allies in Parliament posturing as democrats are trying to hijack the legitimate roles of Ugandans and legislative procedures of Parliament by blocking honest and open debate. They must, therefore, be checked before it becomes too late and dangerous to blackmail and intimidate government legislative process.

The framers of Uganda's Constitution established organs of state and elaborate systems through which public policies can be initiated, negotiated and eventually concluded. These include open public discourse by citizens, stakeholders and in committees of parliament. It was never their intention to obstruct public debate merely because some sections of the elite deem it 'unconstitutional' or repulsive.

So the Government's proposal to operationalise article 246 of the Constitution with regard to formation, regulation and facilitation of traditional leaders is perfect, and citizens and Parliament are at liberty to debate and enact controls.

Makubuya has recently argued that the Kabaka (king) of Buganda cannot be regulated by the Ugandan Constitution forgetting the same Constitution indeed created and preserved traditional/cultural institutions. To argue otherwise is complete deception.

Critics of this Bill have also claimed that it is too early, premature, repetitive, redundant, provocative to Mengo or un-necessary to consider it at this time of general election campaigns, an argument that ought to be debunked. There no time in our legislative calendar that is too early or provocative.

Indeed since they claim that this Bill is provocative as it allegedly targets Buganda's Ronald Mutebi and perhaps the Baganda, it should be the more reason NRM and President Yoweri Museveni's opponents should let the law be passed so that he can in their warped view pay for it in terms of being denied votes. This law when passed will apply to the whole Uganda where such institutions present or in future exist.

However, it would appear as in the federal and land debates that the critics know that Museveni has correctly read the national public pulse in favour of controlling Mengo's political opportunism, intransigence and open hostilities to central government and the rest of Ugandans from which NRM could benefits during the general elections.

And this pulse is nowhere more evident that in Buganda where ordinary Baganda don't want at all their Kabaka to engage in partisan politics because it would be destructive.

They innocently love their Kabaka, appreciate its restoration by NRM, and want continued financial facilitation to that institution. Also none of the local governments support ceding political authority and public money to un-elected cultural institutions.

January 17 - President Yoweri Museveni holds rallies in Hoima, Buliisa, Masindi

January 18 - President in Kiryandongo (Kibanda), Masindi (Buruli, Masindi Municipality.)

January 19 - Yoweri Museveni campaigns in Kyankwanzi, Kiboga, Mityana

January 20 - NRM candidate in Mubende (Kasanda North, South), Mityana South

January 21 - President in Mubende (Buwekula), Gomba (Kasambya, Gomba)

WAFULA OGUTTU - FDC

The NRM president, Yoweri Museveni, has boasted several times that as "a seasoned freedom fighter", he loves dealing with chaotic situations and fighting wars. That he performs best under such conditions. On many occasions he has been said to be associated with the origin of certain conflict situations only to turn around and be the one to find the solutions!

I think that the controversial current Cultural Leaders Bill like the closure of the CBS Radio in 2009 is engineered to answer certain deficiencies in NRM election strategy. It is clearly in bad faith which explains why the President urgently wants it passed before the coming elections. Most of what is in the Bill is adequately catered for in Constitution. So the urgency is all to do with getting more votes for NRM.

The Bill in its original form, targets comparatively the powerful kings of two old kingdoms, Buganda and Bunyoro albeit for different reasons. We surely miss the historical perspective if we place these two among the crowd.

The Kabaka of Buganda and the President have for some time now been engaged in a silent war over political space and distribution of national resources. The Kabaka is also called Ssabasajja, a man of men with no other man above him in his kingdom.

On the other hand President Museveni once referred to himself as Sabagabe, the king of kings, the giver and the one who takes away. The Kabaka and indeed most of his subjects want their kingdom to be an autonomous federal state within Uganda. There is a stalemate and big political fallout that has also claimed many innocent lives.

Come the February 18, 2011 general elections, the President is likely to be the loser in Buganda to IPC presidential candidate Dr. Kizza Besigye who supports federal governments. Thus the Bill which the NRM mistakenly thought would galvanize some more votes from them in the east, north and west.

It is clear; they may not be as successful as Obote I in this move; to mobilise the rest of Uganda against Buganda. Ugandans are now more sophisticated.

On the other hand, the power of the Omukama (king) of Bunyoro must be controlled because of the oil in his kingdom. The oil has certainly given Bunyoro a special status in Uganda. In addition to now being a rich kingdom, it has highly nationalistic people and a glorious anti-imperialism history.

The Bill prohibits the Omukama from making political statements on the oil. This is in complete politics stupid. The Banyoro justifiably want a fair share of the black gold that God placed in their kingdom. The NRM government does not agree. As a result many Banyoro have shifted to join opposition ranks. Again, the NRM wanted to use the Bill to galvanise votes against the 'greedy' Banyoro. That too failed.

Therefore, the NRM government was forced to retreat, to disown sections of their own Bill, to quarrel in public and as usual to give the President the engineered opportunity to benevolently offer the solution to the conflict and hope recover some of the lost votes.

January 16 Kizza Besigye campaigns in Kaberamaido

January 18 FDC president in Amolatar, Dokolo

January 19 Besigye addresses rallies in Alebtong, Otuke

January 20 FDC president in Lira

January 8 IPC's Kizza Besigye in Kole, Oyam

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