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The Independent (Kampala)

East Africa: Is Uganda at 50 a Failed State?

BY JULIUS ODEKE, 7 OCTOBER 2012

Prof. Jjuuko of Makerere University thinks it is but others differ

Makerere University professor Frederick Jjuuko recently stirred up debate when in a keynote address he said Uganda is a "failed state". He said the government's failure to provide social services, the militarisation of everyday life, failure of democracy, suppression of individual rights and freedom, and general economic failure are indicators of Uganda as a failed state.

"Ugandans are at the mercy of regime security whose interests are to ensure their long stay in power but not to serve the interests of her citizenry," he said.

Jjuuko was on Sept.18 speaking at the National Dialogue on Freedom of Expression and Information organised by Human Rights Network for Journalists at the Kampala Serena International Conference Centre.

He said when state security operatives criminalise journalists, assaulting them, and smashing their tools of work, it implies that Uganda has a regime security other than state security that would be solely interested in protection of people.

Prof Jjuuko noted the political indicators of a failed state as being; leaders and their associates subverting the prevailing democratic norms, coercing the legislatures and bureaucracies into subservience, and strangling judicial independence.

"You may remember what happened to our courts of law in 2006 when the Supreme Court was besieged by a paramilitary group known as Black Mamba," he said.

Not so bad

Former Education minister Simon Mayende, who is now a director of information in the Office of the Prime Minister, immediately took on Prof. Jjuuko.

He said "Uganda has not gone that far."

He said, for example, the government closes some media houses and bans some programmes because it wants the media to educate the masses rather than cause chaos in the country by telling lies.

But later, in an interview in his office at Makerere University, Jjuuko told The Independent that when one looks critically at the way Uganda as a country is being run today, it depicts a failed state.

"Yes, in reality, we may have not reached to that position where Somalia has reached but we have slid and we are considerably going that way.

"Right now, there is no nation in Uganda, but what we only have is a regime state but not a nation state," he said, "Ugandans have concretely tried to have a nation state that caters for the interests of the public, but we have failed drastically."

Militarisation

He said the advent of militarism and state violence that has kept on increasing.



Uganda celebrates 50 years. (Resource: Uganda Celebrates Golden Jubilee

"Look at the multiplicity of security forces that have taken the centre place in our country. That alone speaks volumes of words for one to know where our country is at the moment," he said.

He said the state has created many paramilitary groups in the guise of protecting votes both from the ruling party and the opposition with the infamous one being the Kiboko Squad, Kalangala Action Plan which came to limelight in the 2001 presidential elections is headed by the presidential advisor, Maj. Roland Kakooza Mutale.

"Even the concept of green parks like; Centenary Park have been raided while City Square has been occupied by the military and this means there are no environmental standards in our country that we can follow. And now there is no freedom for Ugandans to enjoy the nice aroma that they used to have in the City Square just because the place is now full of the military," he said.

He says the prominence President Yoweri Museveni has given to the Ministry of Defense is an indicator of a failed state.

"You hear that parliament has failed to pass the budget not until a subsidiary budget of over Shs39billion is allocated to the ministry of health. And the president seems not to be agreeing with them, which show to you the level at which our president runs this country.

"Even simple situations, he wants to come and intervene," Jjuko said.

"When these groups have been formed in the guise of manning security during elections, and yet the sole aim is to inflict the locals with fear, intimidate and harass them so that they should not critique the operations of this government and these paramilitary groups, then that means our country is now a failed state, " said Prof Jjuko.

Jjuko says security is supposed to be for the interests of the people but not only for the regime.

"The leadership of this country should practice what they always speak that they are patriotic otherwise a bigger percentage of people are not happy seeing their country being led into a wrong direction," he said.

He said it is a common occurrence to see buildings and offices being guarding with security personnel armed with assault rifles.

"Why should a country that Europeans handed over to the natives peacefully behave in such a manner? Our police have become highly militarised and this has damaged their reputation," he says.

He says the militarization of everything in the country has made security to be repressive and that is why, "even mere books have been seized".

Patronage

He said leaders and their associates have blocked civil society and gained control over the security and defense forces.

"They usually patronise an ethnic group, clan, class, or kin. Other groups feel excluded or discriminated against," he said, "Ugandans have complained about the distribution of national cake, State House scholarships as was the case in Somalia and Sierra Leone in the 1970s and 1980s; government that once appeared to operate for the benefit of all the nation's citizens is perceived to have become partisan."

He said the government has failed to provide public services such as good road network, health care, education, and many others.

"Yes, we may be having a resemblance of those infrastructures in our country but look at the roads it's only in the city here where the road network is somehow better but with many potholes, and while in the upcountry roads are persistently cut-off by floods," he said.

Prof Jjuko says under the government's privatization policy, all parastatals, banks, education institutions, and almost everything else has into private hands.

"When one looks at our agricultural industry, there are no extension services, farmers no longer have storage facilities for their harvest and this has resulted into abject poverty among our people because they just sell their produce moments after harvest.

"There are no regulatory roles that are followed. Our government cannot regulate the goods that they import, and that is why we are awash with counterfeit and sub-standard goods flooding our market.

"We need to take fundamental steps to redeem our country as Ugandans," he said.

The British Department for International Development broadly defines a failed state as one whose governments "cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor."

It adds: "The most important functions of the state for poverty reduction are territorial control, safety and security, capacity to manage public resources, delivery of basic services, and the ability to protect and support the ways in which the poorest people sustain themselves."

The US-based NGO, Fund for Peace, conducts an annual global Failed States Index. The 2012 index switched Uganda lower from states in the "danger" to the "critical" stage.

The country slid from the 21st position it occupied in the previous two years to the 20th in 2011. Uganda, however, fared better than Kenya, which is in position 16 and Burundi at 18.

He listed other failed states in Africa as Somalia that was sucked in by its president Mohammed Siad Barre from 1969 to 1991 and has not had a central government since then, and the DR Congo which as Zaire under then-president Mobutu Sese Seko's three-plus decades of kleptocratic rule sucked dry until he was deposed in 1997.

To date in DR Congo, specifically in the eastern parts of the country where people are ever on a run over violence, the leadership has failed to provide effective security and left local people at the mercy of gun-wielding men.

Globally, failed states include Afghanistan, North Korea, Zimbabwe, Iraq, Sierra Leone, DR Congo, Somalia, Zimbabwe, and Somalia. In the words of political scientist Stephen Walt, failed states are feared as "breeding grounds of instability, mass migration, and murder" as well as reservoirs and exporters of terror.

The existence of these kinds of countries, and the instability that they harbor, not only threatens the lives and livelihoods of their own peoples but endangers world peace.

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