

No regrets over NRM defection, says Mayega

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Since his widely publicised defection from Uganda People's Congress (UPC) to National Resistance Movement (NRM) in 2010, Henry Mayega has kept a low profile.

Now an administrator at the college of Engineering, Design, Art and Technology at Makerere University, Mayega told Edris Kiggundu why he has so much confidence in the NRM.

Some of the people who crossed with you to NRM, like Hajji Badru Wegulo, are now senior presidential advisors; did you not cross in vain?

That question has come up quite a number of times. I met someone who told me that I seemed to be on katebe and my reply was simple. Ever since I crossed, there are a number of things that have happened.

One of them is that I participated in the campaigns for the President and to me this was a great thing and my humble contribution to the party I had joined. I have been writing papers not only for the media but also for various events that have been organised by the NRM. I don't think anyone should get worried. The crux of the matter is that things are going well.

What specific role do you play in the NRM?

The role I have as of now is that of special mobiliser for the NRM, and I think I have perfectly performed those duties. There are a number of overt and covert activities I perform for the NRM. I have been trying to do quite a lot for the party.

If President Museveni decided not to appoint you to any position, would you still be contented serving as a special mobiliser?

When I was crossing to the NRM, I remember mentioning it to the President that I had come to serve the NRM. I did not request for a job, I did not request for any favours. I simply said I wanted a strategic deployment. A strategic deployment can mean special mobiliser in the party... it can mean anything.

It's more than a year since you joined NRM. When you look back at recent political developments, do you miss being part of the opposition?

I do not regret the step I took of crossing from UPC to NRM. If you look at what is obtaining in UPC, somebody might think it no longer exists. At the time I crossed, what was left of UPC were relics. UPC was formed at the height of agitation for independence and if you look [around], almost all independence parties in Africa have collapsed. KANU in Kenya is struggling. I have no regrets having crossed from UPC to NRM because it [NRM] is a very vibrant party.

You might call it vibrant but some people believe NRM has limited democratic space. Members are not free to say what they want.

Those who are against NRM are about 31% because Museveni got 69% in the elections. It is these that are saying that NRM is not democratic. Fine, that is an opinion they hold. We all have opinions. This limited space, I do not agree. NRM is a mass party with structures right from the village up to the top. I do not want to agree that the NRM has restricted the democratic space.

Which aspects about the way NRM operates do you think need to change?

What happens with organisations is that they have to go through those hazy moments of growth. The Labour and Conservative parties in the UK, which are over 200 years, have had to follow that path.

The NRM is growing but it has to go through a number of stages. As it grows, it reaches a point where all its policies have to be reviewed. I think this is what NRM is trying to do. I want to submit that NRM is growing and is going to lead this country for a long time.

There is talk on the grapevine that you are one of the people who are being considered for the post of Principal Private Secretary. I have been reading these things in the papers but nobody has approached me over the job.

It's coming to one year since the President took oath. How do you assess his performance so far?

He is doing very well. There are two things that I need to mention in as far as the performance of the President is concerned because I have seen the opposition trying to run down what the government has done ever since we won elections.

In my view, despite the global economy doing badly, we have weathered the storm. For instance, right now load shedding has completely reduced compared to the past. That means the energy sector is doing well. Many roads are undergoing reconstruction in spite of the fact that the global economy has undergone turbulence.

You recently came down hard on the clergy who are calling upon President Museveni not to stand in 2016. Why have

you taken this advice in bad faith?

I came down hard because there is history and I do not want to name names. The Sunday before the [2011] elections, I went to church and the preacher said: ‘Maybe next time we need to sit as a church and nominate a candidate.’ This was very sectarian.

He went ahead and said: “I know people love their parties but some of those people in this very church have switched parties”, and I was the only one. In my view when someone comes to the pulpit or somebody goes to the mosque, that person should try as much as possible to ensure that he does not divide people.

They can talk about bringing people closer to God. In church there are people of all political shades; those who support government and those who do not. That is why I thought it was my obligation to respond to the utterances made by the religious leaders, especially on Easter.

Last word.

Strictly speaking, religious leaders should remain religious leaders because if you are a doctor and you begin doing engineering work, you are making a mistake. A doctor whose job is to diagnose diseases and treat them cannot ably perform the functions of an engineer.

What if Museveni or any other politician went to the pulpit or the mosque and started preaching?

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