

Citation for Hon. Betty Oyella Bigombe's Award of Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa* of Makerere University

I. Overview

Hon. Betty Oyella Bigombe is a lady of outstanding achievements. She has made great contribution to Uganda, the Eastern Africa region and the international community with respect to conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction. Her contribution facilitated reduction of state fragility, political violence, and also contributed to social-economic growth and development.

II. Biography

Hon. Betty Oyella Bigombe was born on 21st October 1954 in Acholi land, Northern Uganda (Amuru District today). She is one of eleven children in her family. Her education is as follows: Gayaza High School; O-level which she completed in 1968; Trinity College Nabbingo, A-level, 1970. Makerere University, Bachelor of Arts in Social Sciences 1974.; the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (U.S.A) Master of Public Administration. Her rise to prominence is largely attributed to her upbringing, educational background and performance.

III. Career

Earlier in her career, Hon. Betty Bigombe served as a Company Secretary to the Uganda Mining Corporation (1981-1984) and later as Project Manager with the African Development Bank (1984-1986). She became a Member of the Parliament of Uganda representing Kilak County, Gulu district from 1986 to 1996. In 1988 she was appointed State Minister for Northern Uganda in the Office of the Prime Minister, and spearheaded efforts aimed at the pacification of north and northeastern Uganda. From 1997 to 2006, Hon. Bigombe worked as a Senior Social Development Specialist and Social Scientist with the World Bank Group, and was a Senior Fellow at the Institute of Peace in Washington D.C (2006-2008). Hon. Bigombe later returned to Uganda, serving as the Woman Member of Parliament for Amuru District and State Minister for Water Resources (2011-2014). In 2021, she was appointed Uganda's Ambassador to Malaysia. She is a member of the Women Mediators across the Commonwealth, a network of women with interest and expertise in mediation.

IV. Contribution to Peace and Post-Conflict Settlement in Uganda

As Member of Parliament, Hon. Bigombe established relationships which facilitated delivery of humanitarian assistance in the camps.

She initiated programs for educating youths on the dangers of war, supported former child soldiers' reintegration after combat, and formed social support groups in northern Uganda. As the Minister of State for Pacification in Northern Uganda, Hon. Bigombe initiated contact with Joseph Kony in 1993. Her efforts led to face-to-face negotiations between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) leaders, and Ugandan government officials, known as the "Bigombe talks," which garnered global interest. Her diplomatic skills and commitment to peace resulted in the ratification of an amnesty law which encouraged ten thousand rebels to participate in the negotiations between government and the LRA. Hon. Bigombe was honored as Uganda's Woman of the Year in 1994.

The initial peace talks between the LRA leader and the government collapsed. However, in 2004 in the wake of the brutal Barlonyo massacre, Hon. Bigombe felt compelled to leave the World Bank, to return to Uganda to, initiate a second wave of LRA peace negotiations, where she was the chief mediator. Her efforts laid a foundation upon which the Juba Peace Talks mediated by the Government of Southern Sudan were successfully conducted, except for the final moment of signing the Peace Agreement which the LRA leader refused to honor.

Despite hiccups, Hon. Bigombe's efforts contributed to silencing of the guns, return of Internally Displaced peoples home to rebuild their lives and communities. Considering the intensity of the armed conflict in northern Uganda, Hon. Betty Bigombe courageously faced serious risks to her life. Her efforts were recognized by the community in northern Uganda who endearingly call her "Atuku" in Acholi (for beautiful/precious woman).

V. Contribution to Peace and Post-conflict reconstruction in the Great Lakes Region

Hon. Betty Bigombe has spear headed conflict resolution within the region and emphasized the significant role of women and community members in peacebuilding. She contributed to fostering peace between the government of Uganda and Sudan through the work of the Carter Center in the years 1999 and 2000.

Following the signing of the Revitalised Peace Agreement, Hon. Bigombe mediated the unification of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army as well as conducting back door negotiations with some stake holders in order to ensure that the Revitalised Peace Agreement of 2018 is implemented in an inclusive manner.

Currently, Hon. Bigombe serves as Special Envoy for the President of Uganda to the Parties to the Revitalized Agreement of Resolution of the Conflict on South Sudan. She played a crucial role in bringing President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar together, to resolve pending issues necessary for moving forward and firming the peace process in South Sudan.

VI. Contribution to Peace and Post-conflict reconstruction at the Global level

Hon. Betty Bigombe served as a Commissioner for the Women's Refugee Commission (2008-2014), led election observer missions in Zimbabwe and Rwanda, and continues to serve as a member of the Commission's Leadership Program Advisory Board.

She also worked on peace-building efforts in Sri Lanka, as part of a team of mediators involved in negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil Tigers rebel group in the early 2000s. Even though the peace talks ultimately did not succeed, Hon. Bigombe's efforts were recognized as instrumental in bringing the two sides together. She was a visiting scholar at John Hopkins, School of Advanced International Studies, Washington DC (2008-2009), where she shared her vast experience on mediation. As the Senior Director for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence at the World Bank (2014-2017), she steered the World Bank Group's agenda in ensuring country strategies, projects, and programs are consistent with and complementary to organizational goals of reducing poverty and promoting shared prosperity.

VII. Conclusion

Hon. Betty Oyella Bigombe is outstanding and has demonstrated resilience with an unwavering commitment to peace and diplomacy in Uganda, the Great Lakes region and the world. Makerere University is proud and honored to award Hon. Betty Oyella Bigombe the Doctor of Laws, *Honoris Causa* of Makerere University, and all the rights, duties and privileges pertaining thereto.