



HE President Yoweri Museveni's statement at the Commonwealth Local Government Conference

Wednesday 15th May 2013

H.E President Yoweri Museveni's statement at the 2013 Commonwealth Local Government Conference, Munyonyo,

Your Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Republic of Sri Lanka;

Your Excellency Teima Onorio, Vice President of the Republic of Kiribati;

Your Excellencies Heads of delegations;

UNDP Administrator;

Secretary General of EAC;

Honourable Ministers;

Distinguished delegates;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Provided the Local Governments are elected, monitored by the electorate and the electorate is educated enough to know their rights or is sensitized enough to do so, local governments can be good medicine against bad governance, corruption, and ensuring efficient service delivery.

Local Governments, just like the central Governments must be ideologically patriotic and progressive. They must be against sectarianism of religion or ethnicity and must expunge chauvinism against women and insensitivity to children rights and other marginalised groups.

If the Local Governments do not conform to what I have just described above, then, they can be more oppressive than the Central Governments. Suppose, for instance, the Local Governments are dominated by leaders with a sectarian ideology in a Local Government area with a diverse population, what then happens to the rights of minorities? Local antagonism tends to be more bitter than differences among people who don't live near each other.

In one of our dialects there is a proverb which says "*akasyo kabaga efura, nokukurana*" meaning you understand the weaknesses of a person when you live near each other. Therefore, patriotism is paramount if Local Governments are to be useful. Otherwise, they can be instruments for oppression and, eventually, conflict, even more than the Central Governments because of the proximity to one another by the different groups in a Local Government area.

The other crucial principle among those pointed out above is the education or sensitisation of the electorate to know their rights and press the Local Government or the National Government to observe those rights.

Without an educated or sensitised electorate and without an ideologically empowered local leadership, the local Government institutions will not work for the people. They will not follow up tax-payers' money, the allocation from Central Government, contracts for roads or health units. They will simply democratise corruption and non-performance.

Corruption and poor service delivery in colonial and immediate post-colonial Uganda were the factors that led me to support and evolve ideas about decentralisation of power to the local level. When we got chance at leadership we did not dismantle the post-colonial Government structure of appointing administrators: the Muluka (parish) Chief, the Gombolola (subcounty) Chief, the Saza (county) chief and the District Commissioners (the DCs) at district level. Why, then, did we initiate a parallel but elected structure of LC I, LC II, LC III and LC V? It was because we believed that the elected leaders were more likely to defend the interests of the people than the appointed ones.

However, I have since discovered two factors: on account of lack of education, the majority of the electorate are not able to follow very well the goings-on in service delivery; and secondly, the local elite can bamboozle the people in order to serve their selfish interests in land matters, in education, distribution of drugs etc. These are, however, temporary problems confronting our decentralisation policy. With our Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE) and more university education enrollment, the population will get empowered and will be in a position to, with knowledge, monitor what their elected leaders, national and local are doing. Of course, education can also be mis-education where the educated elite imbibe false, mainly, foreign values and are guided by them. In that case they may not be able to distill their interests accurately. The saying in one of our local dialects captures the truth: "*Omugg'oguli kumuliraano tegugoba Ngo*" - literally translated as the stick in the neighbour's house cannot chase the leopard away (or cannot defend you against the leopard). The nearer power is to the people, the better.

However, a very serious distortion was beginning to emerge in our decentralisation process - of demanding for too small districts and lower administrative units without any logic other than wanting to create political jobs eg positions for LC V Chairman, Woman MP etc. Three principles guided the rationale for the creation of districts: the need for ending group marginalisation (e.g ethnic, etc), too large administrative areas and difficult geography (mountains, islands, trans-Nile districts etc). For example, Islands of Lake Victoria had been annexed to Masaka. We gave the islands district status. Where those three factors are absent, the case for new districts weakens greatly.

We, accordingly, put down some criteria for district creation. Our criteria are as follows: group identity that needs to be protected against marginalization; difficult geography, and too large an administrative area. If these three factors are absent, then, we should not have a district that is smaller than 20 miles radius, nor sub-county that is less than 3.5 miles radius, etc. Otherwise, decentralisation is the best policy provided these bottlenecks are removed.

With these few words, I declare the Commonwealth Local Government Conference 2013 open.

I thank you very much.