

An African tragedy: the case of Uganda

Paul Ssemogerere, president of the Democratic Party of Uganda, delivered the following speech to the Schiller Institute conference on Dec. 13, 1997, in Bad Schwalbach, Germany.

Madame chairperson, distinguished participants, I have reformulated my thoughts as I listened this morning to the wonderful exposition by Madame Helga LaRouche. I am one of the best beneficiaries of this seminar, because I think now we have some explanation to the African tragedy. I have called these remarks, "African Tragedy," for two reasons. First, our own presence here as Africans in this seminar, and second, the theme that we have received to explain what is going on in Africa as a tragedy.

Begin with my former President of Uganda, Godfrey Binaisa, and going round the room, you have amongst you very capable, well-gifted, well-intentioned Africans who would rather be at home in their own countries helping their countries to develop. As circumstances prevail in Africa, it is well for them not to be there, but to be outside Africa, in exile. You don't need them here; they may be engineers, lawyers, academics, medical doctors; you have enough of your own. But they are here under circumstances prevailing in their own countries. And we are happy that they are here, because then we see them alive.

They are alive politically; they are alive economically, outside their own countries. That is a tragedy.

The Cold War ended, and many of the refugees you had from eastern Europe have since been repatriated. But the Africans are increasing their numbers, and your governments are forced to adopt stringent immigration laws to keep the African out of Europe. This is something you don't like to do, but you have to do it. And I think the explanation is in this seminar. We have to find the solution. And I am happy to find that there are some people—that there is the Schiller Institute, which is concerned about the matter, and which has the courage to arouse international consciousness regarding this crisis.

There is a crisis in Africa; there is a crisis in politics; there is a crisis in the economy. And I suppose I have been asked to make some remarks here, because I come from Uganda, and I shall go back to Uganda, because Uganda is singled out as a "model success story" regarding Structural Adjustment Programs. It has excellent indicators, of GNP growth rate of

5-6%; it has controlled its economy; and all the indicators the IMF and the World Bank called for, are positive in the case of Uganda, and therefore the economy is sound.

The economy of Uganda is not sound

Well, I am here to say, let those indicators be as good as they are given out, but the economy regarding the majority of the people of Uganda is not sound.

When life expectancy of people in Uganda is about the lowest in the world, you can't say the economy is sound.

When we are among the poorest of the poorest countries among the LDCs [lesser developed countries], we can't be in a sound economy.

And when the resources that are in the soil there, the ground, the minerals are being looted every day, are being stolen, we can't say the economy is sound.

And when about one-third of the country is under insurgency, and therefore farmlands are now wastelands, a war zone, you can't say the economy is sound.

And when we have an international debt of something like \$4 billion—from \$1.1 billion in 1986, piled up for 24 years. We got our independence in 1962; for 24 years after, there was an outstanding international debt of \$1.1 billion. But between 1986 and now, barely 11 years, with much debt cancellation having been given, we are in the region of \$4 billion: We can't say the economy is sound. And this money—we cannot pay it. We have met on many occasions, in different fora, at the United Nations, the OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement, bilaterally, the Commonwealth, as foreign ministers, as Presidents and so on, we have always been pleading for debt cancellation. All the African countries. Each one of the African countries cannot pay its international debt. The answer always comes out as "No." And when debt relief is granted, there are conditionalities which are given, which make even more indebted the international community. So, we cannot say the economy is sound.

This seminar does explain that even where we think the economy is good, it is also not good. As we have been told, and I think we now have enough understanding that the theoretical foundations of the Bretton Woods agreement have to be questioned. We now know that we are dealing with bankers, with businessmen, and they want profit, they want their interest. But when you are in Africa, you are given to understand that you are going to be assisted, you are getting your loan to be assisted. Now we know it is not so. Hence, the validity of this exercise, of this kind of forum.

Madame chairperson, the African tragedy can be looked at from the point of view of legitimacy in Africa, legitimacy of leadership. When Africa was colonized, as Godfrey Binaisa said this morning, in the last century, each nation had a way of determining leadership. There was a legitimate way, for the Kikuyus, for the Acholis, for the Luos, for the Buganda, to have a legitimate leader.

When the colonizers came, things were changed all of a sudden. African leaders were now appointed, except in a few cases where you had the old traditions remaining in place, with kings and so on. But otherwise, a new criterion, a civil service criterion was now widely employed in Africa, to establish who the African leaders were to be, and always subservient to their master. And with independence, one expected that the same criteria that you have in your own countries — that is to say, the former colonial powers, Britain, France, whatever — would prevail; that is, democracy. It has been attempted. But it has always been undermined, and many times by our former friends, by our former masters. In many cases, you have just an exercise for the sake of legitimizing whoever comes, but normally there is some understanding as to what kind of person is going to be accepted. In these days, almost every African leader is required to subscribe to certain conditionalities, accept these conditionalities, and if you don't make it, you get out pretty soon.

Africa's 'enlightened' leaders

Currently in the Great Lakes region, and that affects Uganda, Burundi, Zaire, Rwanda, it appears to be that the gun is also included and spreading very fast to the rest of Africa. If you count it now, the new leaders in Africa who are called "enlightened," almost every one of them carries an AK-47. And it has been accepted. Leaders will come from the most democratic countries in the West. They will embrace and speak in glorious terms about what is happening because of the Structural Adjustment Program, but also accepting who can be used to advance their geopolitical interests, and this is a tragedy for Africa.

Because the ordinary Africans are always at the losing end; they are always at the receiving end. I do not know what the majority of people from Burundi think when they see the red carpet for [Pierre] Buyoya, in Rwanda for [Paul] Kagame, or in Zaire for [Laurent] Kabila. What do they think when even the United Nations rapporteur will go and report on atrocities, on violations of human rights, on massacres, on genocide, and Kabila will have the audacity to prevent a UN official team to go there and verify that kind of reports published in April of this year? And he has the audacity to keep the United Nations waiting. Saddam Hussein cannot stop the United Nations from examining what they want to examine in Iraq. But Kabila, a former rebel who would have been tried and imprisoned if Mobutu had gotten hold of him before, he can keep the United Nations waiting for two months, and he will be protected. And the reality of the victims—we do not know what they think. And this is a tragedy in Africa.

You get an election; it is a fraudulent election. It is observed by international organizations, they report that it has been free and fair. Two or three or four years afterwards, they come around and say, "Oh no, it wasn't that free and



Ugandan dictator Yoweri Museveni. A myth has been perpetrated in the West, according to which his regime has improved the Ugandan economy; nothing could be further from the case.

fair." But they never care about the feelings of the people who are victims, who spent everything they had on those elections, who really wanted a change, and now they cannot have a change. This is a tragedy.

And this explains why in many countries now in Africa, those who give up, either flee the country, or they also look for AK-47s, and we are in a process of self-destruction.

As I have said, a third of my country is under insurgency. But yet, we are all told, that Uganda is very stable, the economy is sound, the future is bright. We had insurgency under Milton Obote II; it was not of that magnitude, to cover the entire north of Uganda, and now much of the west is covered. It is under insurgency going on every day. And the poor resources that we have are spent on acquiring the most modern weaponry; we are buying helicopter gunships to shoot down and kill our own people. We have brought in mamba from South Africa. Two weeks ago I travelled to northern Uganda. I was shown vehicles which are called Buffalo, that these are more resistant than the mamba. This is new language to me.

All this is happening in Africa. It is happening in Liberia,

in Sierra Leone, it happened in Ethiopia, it happened in Somalia, it is happening in Rwanda, it is happening in Burundi, it is happening in Zaire, it is happening in Congo-Brazzaville. Name it. So we really feel heavily indebted to the Schiller Institute for embarking on a courageous course of action, to try to bring focus to what is wrong in the international community regarding the financial system, because it is used to legitimize African leaders. We have been told, "The economy is first and foremost. Put the economy right, and political rights can come afterwards." And a lot of blood has been shed on that score. We Africans have challenged leadership and we are told, to keep waiting. "Let the economy stabilize. We have got the right person in the country on the economy."

The fighting is encouraged

Three days ago, the American secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, visited my country. I listened to her press conference when I was at the airport waiting to come this way. And yesterday, I was faxed coverage of that press conference; and she is full of praise for what is going on in the country, including *war*. You can imagine that when America called it a day, as far as war is concerned, and they decided to woo the Russians, the Soviet Union, to stop fighting, between themselves, that this was necessary for their economies, necessary for peace and development. Now poor Uganda, one of the poorest countries in the world, is encouraged to continue fighting.

I was a Presidential candidate last year. I travelled extensively in northern Uganda on the border of Sudan. Sometimes I addressed rallies as late as 12 midnight. I proposed to stop fighting. I proposed I would be ready to talk to the rebel leader [Joseph] Kony, once I was in the State House. And the rebels responded, and even Ugandan soldiers also responded. The whole time I was in the north, I did not hear a single bullet, not a single shot fired when I was there.

Now, the situation has been reversed. One of the people who came to receive me when I was there, was Bishop Ochola of Kitgum, who came with his wife at the airport. And they received me in heavy rain. His wife was killed recently, by a landmine. If my voice had been listened to, that lady would be living today. And there are many others, very precious people, very important to our country, who have perished, because the war in the north has been escalated. Because someone wants to score a victory. And we urged to stop the fighting. We urged cease-fire. We urged negotiations. We urged a program for justice, some inquiry. We urged self-determination, self-governance for the people in the north, just like in the rest of Uganda. We urged support for them, for their rehabilitation, and self-governance by them. We do not want the central government to administer everything for them. They are also mature. This is the wish of the majority of the people of the country. Even people in the north have so said. But now, instead of encouraging that peace path, the

secretary of state of the United States says, "We shall encourage war."

[Ugandan dictator Yoweri] Museveni admits the U.S. helps against Sudan. And also [against] the internal insurgency. He was asking for assistance, for more radios, publicly, for the material support, to continue fighting. And for this, he is legitimized. He is considered the right person in the country for the time being. And you have this in other capitals. You have this in Bujumbura, you have this in Kigali, you have this in Kinshasa, and elsewhere in Africa.

You don't have this in Europe. At the end of the Second World War, in western Europe, you called it a day for fighting. You said no, enough, enough. You organized yourselves into a Council of Europe, with three criteria—human rights, democracy, and rule of law. War is no longer on the agenda. But in Africa, war is on the agenda. Why do we spend so much money on preparations for war? And why are we so encouraged? These countries, Germany, Japan, after the Second World War, said, we stop investing in war. You have got your dividends. Why are we not encouraged to do that? Why, when we visit the capitals in western Europe, are we encouraged to purchase the most modern weaponry, and we are heavily indebted? We are encouraged to do that. The flow of arms to the Great Lakes region is considerable. I think the Great Lakes region has more guns per capita than any other region in Africa.

These are concerns which I think should be taken up by an audience like yours. I can see from what has been said so far, that you are a rare species—you are concerned about principles, about morality, and we thank you. That is why I addressed you along these lines, that maybe there is somebody who is listening and who can raise the issue. We need friends like you. We have many other friends, many people come home there in the name of investors, but they merely come to grab and take away. But you are men and women of concern. That is why I have addressed you in this way.

We have a tragedy in Africa. We have this culture which is invading us. The father and the mother are sleeping. The children are watching TV. The violence they acquire there and the pornography that they see there, and all the tricks for thieving, for cheating, are all there. And we have no capacity to stop it. Certainly we can't. The TV is now in fashion. You can raise your voices, as Mr. Binaisa was saying this morning. You have access to members of parliament, to the press, to the church leaders. Something new must come out of Europe. And if only this comes out of Europe, then Africa is left to the dogs.

We have had several encounters with the Western world. We had the encounter when we had slavery. I see some friends from Yoruba. I am told that the Yorubas were considered the fittest to be slaves in the West Indies, in America. They were the strongest, they were very productive. When I was in Senegal recently, and I was told that of all the tribes of western Africa, the Yorubas were considered the fittest. And when the

slave ship arrived in Boston, they would say, "How many Yorubas were on the ship?"

IMF policies have made things worse

That was the first encounter, when we lost millions of Africans to slavery. Then colonialism. And now, SAP has come, and we are told that where it is properly implemented, as in Uganda, things are all right. Things are not all right in Uganda. The indicators they are talking about might cater to about 5-10% of the population of Uganda—the big businessmen, and the privileged among the Africans who are high up in government circles. Those benefit. Those who are benefitting from privatization and who are buying off our national assets at a pittance, they are benefitting. Somebody buys a hotel, a bank, a post office, very cheap. Industry, they get it cheap. South Africa, which is mining gold in Karamoja; they are not paying any royalties there—of course, they say the economy is sound. Expatriates come and get a salary ten times greater than their African counterparts, of course they say the economy is sound. But the African civil servant who doesn't have a living wage, to this day, he can't say the economy is sound. He cannot make ends meet. He goes home, he has to find other ways to get enough food at home, of taking his children to school, of paying for medicine. This is the reality in Uganda.

I keep inviting people to go to the villages themselves and to compare the life in a village now with what it was 20 years ago. It is a shame for me to say that even under Idi Amin, people managed to fend for themselves more easily than now. I am not praising Amin, but I am just talking about the reality of the economy for the masses of the people. We have an economy that is catering for an elite-class, a small group. They are filthy rich. You see the construction in Kampala, life is quite deceptive. But, you go down to the ordinary people: ask the right questions. Go to the rural schools, the rural medical centers, go to the taxi drivers, to the fishermen, there you see the reality. You go to the university and find out who is making it there. What kind of students can now go to university: Those who have been able to pay extra money for coaching from kindergarten to high school. This is not the ordinary family. We are now catering for an elite class in Africa.

I say this because Uganda is not a good example for the rest of Africa. This cannot be the economy for the future, And if we are going to have that kind of economy, then we will have more explosions; we will have more refugees. You will find you won't be able to stop them from coming here; they will find another way of getting into your countries. And this is a tragedy, the African tragedy. We hope and pray we can all address this together, and I think the Schiller Institute is giving us the lead.

Videotapes Available from FDR-PAC

Africa: Looting Ground for 'Bush, Inc.' or Breadbasket for the World? Part 1, Jan. 11, 1997: 1 hour, \$20 [FDP 97-002]; or, 2 hours, \$35. [FDP 97-005]; (dubbed for Spanish: 1/2 hour, \$20 [FDP 97-007]).

Africa: Looting Ground for "Bush, Inc." or Breadbasket for the World? Part 2, Jan. 25, 1997: 1 hour, \$20. [FDP 97-004]

Never Again! London's Genocide Against Africans, June 18, 1997: 1 hour, \$20 [FDP-97-012]; or 90 minutes, \$30 [FDP-97-013].

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