

The Federation is not a dream

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Q&A INTERVIEW OF THE WEEK

COL. AMANYA MUSHEGA

The former Secretary General of the East African Community, **Col. Amany Mushega** now practises law in Kampala and follows Uganda 's politics with keen interest. **Cyprian Musoke and David Mukholi interviewed him based on questions sent by *Sunday Vision* readers.**

Q....

If each community in Uganda wants district status, what harmony do you envisage in the East African federation?

A....

I do not support the splitting of Uganda . The country is unviable so splitting it into smaller units doesn't make sense. That's what we call okugumbaaza – diverting people from the real issues. I think the creation of new districts is being encouraged, rather than demanded. But even if they were demanded, it does not mean they should be granted. People demand lots of things. Buganda wants federo. Some Banyankore are pressing for a kingdom. The people of Rwenzururu are calling for recognition of their king. It doesn't mean that what is demanded, even when it is unreasonable, must be given. Districts are being used to create jobs for political hangers-on who become RDCs, deputy RDCs, LC5 chairpersons and others. Some of these new districts are just counties. So you have the above officers, plus the MP, woman MP and county chief more or less looking after the same county. Does it make economic sense? However, these seemingly idle officers can be handy for some candidates at election time. I will discuss this issue further in an article I am preparing.

It is a contradiction to say Uganda is too small to be alone, and then argue that a small ethnic group is too large that it needs its own district. So to me the reasons for creating districts cannot be discussed in this interview. You cannot talk about East African federation and then balkanise Uganda .

Q....

You used a curious term okugumbaaza. Was it part of the Movement ideology?

A....

No. It simply means to divert. In negative terms it implies drawing people's attention to something seemingly useful which is actually not so.

Q....

So who is doing it (okugumbaaza)?

A....

Those creating districts are diverting people's attention to trivial matters. Fundamental matters are not being given adequate attention and resources.

Q....

With the political incompatibilities among member states, don't you think an East African political federation is just a dream?

A....

The federation is not a dream because it is in the East African Community Treaty. By virtue of the office I held as Secretary General of the East African Community until recently, there are things I came to know, within the organs of the community, including the Summit of Heads of State, which I can't divulge. But suffice to say, the federation will be a good thing for East Africans, whether it comes immediately or later. Obviously, it would be much better if our politics, economic and education policies were synchronised in the process. For example, we need to pay attention to the issue of developing competent and highly skilled work force.

Q....

Tanzanians have expressed reservations and reluctance to join Ugandans and Kenyans because they perceive them as tricksters.

A....

I don't know. I have not heard of that. If that is information you have as a journalist, use it, don't use me.

Q....

Maybe the Tanzanians fear their land will be grabbed after hearing of land bonanza stories in Uganda . They may also fear Kenya 's advanced industries moving in to take over their economy, denying Tanzanians jobs.

A....

There are actual fears and perceived fears. We have the same problem in Uganda . Our brothers and sisters in the north fear the southerners are going to grab their land. Within the south, some Baganda fear that their land is being grabbed. But in the proposed federation, land can be handled as a state and not a federal issue.

Q....

So do you see EAC succeeding?

A....

It is succeeding so far...

Q....

Is the political union attainable?

A....

I think it will come. But the main question is: will it be good for all East Africans? Although there will be problems here and there, overall, the answer is, it is good for all of us and attainable.

Q....

You have held juicy jobs during the Movement era, but you seem to be disgruntled and opposed to the Movement. What happened?

A....

In 1963, when I was in S1 we had an autocratic prefect in my dormitory, Oxford . Consequently we formed the Oxford Liberty Party and engineered his removal. Now, were we disgruntled or unhappy with what was going on?

In 1976, a group of us, including some members of the current Uganda leadership, then in exile, differed with the late Mzee Obote, because he said only he could lead the liberation of Uganda as it was his UPC government that had been overthrown. We insisted that all Ugandans work together and return the country to sanity. After the toppling of Amin, had I sang the UPC song, I probably would have earned a juicy job. But I abandoned my job at Makerere and went to the bush because we were unhappy with the politics of the day. So when we differed with some Ugandans on changing the Constitution, I was EAC Secretary General. I had a job. Was I disgruntled or was I opposed to some issues on grounds of principle? It seems to some Ugandans, when one doesn't agree with you, one is disgruntled. You cease to see the reasons for the disagreement. If I were to sing the Movement party song today, I think I would score higher than some of those doing it, because nobody would doubt me. But I don't know how to live a lie. And at this late stage I cannot sacrifice my principles at the altar of goodies. So I am not disgruntled at all, because I stood my ground. It was a mistake for us to tamper with a provision of the Constitution that had not been tested. So I think you should separate disagreements on principle, and agreements based on opportunism.

Q....

Which provision are you specifically referring to?

A....

The removal of term limits that are applicable all over Africa . That is not the only reason by the way, but it is the crux of the matter.

Q....

You said if you were to sing the Movement song you would sound more credible than those singing it now. Does this suggest those singing are not credible?

A....

They are credible, but I would be more than some of them. But probably some people would laugh at me also.

Q....

Is it President Museveni or the Movement that you are disgruntled with?

A....

No. Nobody. I have no problem with Gen. Museveni as a person. In fact it is because we care about him and the country that we insisted on term limits. I was unhappy with what was going on and I said so.

Q....

You opposed the third term for President Museveni, but he is performing well. Any comments?

A....

We were not opposed to the third term because President Museveni and his government were doing badly. In 1999, while in Soviet Union, my guide responded to my positive impression of developments in Moscow sarcastically. "We are able to achieve all this in spite of communism," she said. With a heavy heart, I borrow those words today. We are able to achieve quite a lot in spite of Museveni's continued stay in power. Had he respected the Constitution, allowed a democratically elected successor and continued to play a role of adviser like Mzee Mandela is doing and what Mwalimu Nyerere did, I have no doubt the situation would be much better. Term limits were not put in place for the incompetent and failures. It was in full realisation of the problems of leaders in Africa in general and Uganda in particular. It was to stop tempting leaders from, among other things, developing an insatiable appetite for power and state resources. This has happened in some countries. What is sad is that when such leaders eventually leave power, their 'powerful parties' collapse. In some cases the very 'shining example' countries they led collapsed except that state funeral arrangements are never made for states.

Q....

In spite of all of this, are you still in the Movement?

A....

I am not.

Q....

Where are you?

A....

You asked whether I am in the Movement. I said I am not a member of the Movement party.

Q....

Are you contemplating joining another party?

A....

Yeah, if I choose to go into politics I will consider what party to associate with openly.

Q....

Which party?

A....

You don't go into politics as a business or for the sake of it. You must have a purpose beyond self and the will and ability to make a meaningful contribution to that goal. We should take time and reflect. Everything has its time.

Q....

One party is claiming that you are its member?

A....

No problem.

Q....

So are you?

A....

You said it is claiming and I said: "No problem".

Q....

But are you its member?

A....

I said, no problem.

Q....

Does any of the present parties hold attributes you cherish?

A....

Yes. I am not saying the Movement does not hold any attributes that I cherish. It has some aspects I agree with and FDC has aspects I share. When I choose to go into politics, again, I will give my reasons why I

prefer a certain party to the others.

Q....

In 2000, you said some of you historicals didn't agree with President Museveni's wish to retire at 55 years. Don't you think you (historicals) are responsible for his prolonged stay in power?

A....

I think he used to say that he wanted to retire at 55 to go and look after his cows. Some of us asked whether it was necessary for him to continue saying this. When we took power we were young and 55 looked very far. But I don't think we are responsible for his continued stay in power. To choose to continue to be in power, to choose to influence the changing of the Constitution was entirely his choice. Nobody would have taken him to prison for stepping down. So I cannot be responsible for it at all.

Q....

Not you as Col. Amanywa Mushega , but historicals.

A....

I am saying to continue to run for office and stay in power is an individual's decision. So to choose to remain in power whether you are persuaded by the people is a personal choice. I am reliably informed that some Tanzanian leaders told the late Nyerere not to retire because the country still needed him. And he replied that when he chose to join politics no one decided for him and it was his personal choice to leave office.

Q....

Would we be right to say historicals urged President Museveni to stay on?

A....

I don't know. But at the time of the Constitution making we agreed while discussing the Odoki report and during the Constitution making process that overstaying in power was one of the main problems of Africa . I wish some of the people who later fought tooth and nail to remove term limits had been honest enough to oppose them in the Constituent Assembly.

Q....

Government critics say that the level of corruption in Uganda today is unprecedented. Any comments?

A....

Definitely, it's high. And some of it is beyond corruption. We need to invent a new word to describe people who appropriate state resources for personal use with impunity as if saying: "What can you do?" That is menace-with-arrogance corruption. There are two types of corruption we

are used to. There are some people who are corrupt out of need so they try to twist things here and there for a living. This is curable with increased income. But there are the greedy ones. They will take sh10m, and next they want sh50m after that they crave for a billion and more. But also while some of the journalists are exposing and fighting corruption, others are encouraging it and glorifying the corrupt. There is another aspect to corruption. As Prof. Sam Karugire put it during his inaugural lecture at Makerere University in 1986 because you want to stay in power you tolerate some corruption and break some laws. And because you have tolerated some corruption you have to urge people to stay in power not to account.

Q....

Uganda hosts CHOGM next month. Is this an event to be excited about and worth the colossal amount of money being spent on it?

A....

I am not the Auditor General. But CHOGM is an honour to Uganda just like the visit of former US President Bill Clinton was. It will not bring lots of money or a flood of investors. That lies elsewhere. But I think we have blown it out of proportion. The majority of delegates are from countries at the same economic level with Uganda . Most of them do not have lots of money to throw around. It is good to use the opportunity to improve our infrastructure, not just for CHOGM, but for our own good and the future. For example, if you are a bureaucrat or journalist from outside Uganda what are you likely to have heard about Uganda ? Lake Victoria, River Nile, Makerere (which you access through Wandegaya) and the Uganda martyrs or Serena, Sheraton, Kampala Road and Shoprite? I think places like Makerere, Nakasero Market, nice nyama choma eateries and medium sized hotels are likely to attract more visitors and their owners need not to know anybody on the CHOGM committee