

Speech

By

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President of the Republic of Uganda

At the Opening of
The African Union Summit

*Theme: Maternal, Infant and Child Health and
Development in Africa*

Commonwealth Resort, Munyonyo, Kampala
25th July 2010

Your Excellency Dr. Bingu Wa Mutharika, President of the Republic of Malawi and Chairman of the African Union;

Your Excellency Jean Ping, Chairman of the African Union Commission (AUC);

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government;

Other Leaders of Delegations;

Invited Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen.

The people of Uganda welcome you to your second home, Uganda. Your decision to hold our Summit in Uganda, this July 2010, was an honour to the people of Uganda.

The theme of the Summit is: “**Maternal, Infant and Child Health and Development in Africa**”. When I saw the theme, my

immediate response was: ‘How can we discuss “**Maternal, Infant and Child Health and Development in Africa**” without discussing the foundation issues of job-creation, Human Resource Development and infrastructure development?’

In order to sustainably support maternal health, you need money to buy drugs, medical equipment, fund health units, etc. Our countries will not have the necessary money without adequate tax collections by our Governments. Our Governments will not collect enough taxes unless our economies grow. Our economies will not grow unless we apply the right strategic stimuli to them. Some of the Asian societies have been able to transition from “Third to First World economies” in the last 50 years. Many of the African economies are endowed with more natural resources than the Asian economies. Yet they have not been able to transition while the Asians have. Why was this so? It was so because, as I have already said, some strategic stimuli necessary to spur the economy to mutation have been missing. I do not want to put out the full list of the necessary strategic stimuli that are needed to cause the

transition of our economies. I had done this when we met for the G-8 at Sea Island (in 2004).

All I need to say for this occasion is that we shall not be able to achieve socio-economic transformation if we do not address all of these strategic bottlenecks. I will just take one example – electricity. How can an economy become modern if it does not have access to adequate and reliable electricity? There is a unit of measurement known as kilowatt hour (kWh) per capita – the amount of electricity consumed by each person in a country per annum. The kWh per capita of the USA is about 14,124. Some of the African countries have as low as 9!! High cost and shortage of electricity, poor roads, inadequate human skills, etc. – all translate into high costs of doing business in a given country. This, in turn, means that such an economy is not an attractive business destination. No or little investment will, therefore, take place with all the consequences already stated above.

Owing to my forty-five years of student activism, liberation struggle and running a non-developed economy, I have now

crystallized the issues. One cause of failure to develop infrastructure in Uganda was depending on foreign borrowing or grants. The foreign lending Agencies either do not know or do not care to find out the magnitude of needs Africa has. It takes 15 years to negotiate for one power dam (its funding). During the time I have been in Government, I have discovered that depending on external funding for infrastructure development (grants and loans) is very dangerous. In one of our dialects we say: “*kewelimide akira mbegelaako*” – the one who has grown his own crops is better than the one that begs for food from neighbours. The money begged for or borrowed from outside is too little, very unreliable and too slow in coming to be able to help us in dealing with infrastructure.

In the last few years, therefore, given the growth of our economy and our improved tax collection, we have set up our own Energy and Road Funds solely funded by the Government of Uganda. We are, at least, able to move fast on many infrastructure projects: hydro-power dams, electricity transmission lines, roads and even the railway. Given that our economy has been growing at the

average annual rate of 7.0% per annum over the last 24 years, one can imagine what will happen when we have solved the problems of electricity as well as road and railway transport.

This does not mean that we do not appreciate external support. We say in one of our dialects that: “*etajugirwe nyoko, ku obona ekirengye oti nariire*” – a cow which is not your mother’s bride price, even if you are given a hoof when it is slaughtered, you should be grateful. We are, therefore, sure that Uganda will become a middle-income country by 2015 and, by that time, our electricity generation capacity will be about 3,800 mgws. Our electricity generation capacity was only 60 mgws in 1986 when we took over Government. It will soon be about 1,000 mgws after the completion of the new dam (Bujagali). In the next 20 years i.e. 2030 our electricity generation capacity will stand at about 17,000 mgws and, by that time, Uganda will be an upper middle-income country. The building up of power generation capacity has not been as fast as we would have wanted precisely because of relying on external funding. This will no longer be the case given our improved financial capacity. In the past, we had no choice.

Coming to the question of “**Maternal, Infant and Child Health and Development in Africa**”, the situation in Uganda is currently as follows: maternal mortality ratio is now $^{435}/_{100,000}$ while infant mortality rate is $^{76}/_{1,000}$.

In terms of infrastructure, we have extended health units up to the Sub-county level. There are 1,116 Sub-counties in the whole of Uganda. The radius for many of the Sub-counties is 4 miles. This is far much better than what we used to have in the colonial times. A health unit would cover an area of 15 miles or more. In some cases we have gone to lower levels – to the Parish. This would give us a radius of only 2 miles or less. The problems are now only two: adequate funding for the consumables: drugs, gloves, etc; and corruption among medical workers who steal and sell Government drugs and other supplies. There is always pressure to pay public servants more so as to ‘cure’ corruption. Yes, we are beginning to improve the salaries of medical workers as well as other science graduates and technicians. However, we have vigorously rejected the strategy of only paying public servants and

forgetting to fund roads, power dams, the railway and the peasants. Additionally, we are intensifying monitoring of health services, embossing drugs of the Government and other medical equipment. In the roadmap for accelerated reduction of maternal, neo-natal mortality and morbidity, we aim at reducing the maternal mortality ratio from $^{527}/_{100,000}$ in 1990 to $^{131}/_{100,000}$ by 2015. Regarding infant mortality reduction, Uganda aims at reducing the ratio from $^{122}/_{1,000}$ in 1990 to $^{41}/_{1,000}$ by 2015.

Finally, I thank Your Excellencies for your moral support following the terrorist attack on merry-makers who were watching World Cup football on screens in a restaurant and in an open field. 76 innocent young people were killed. I am glad to inform Your Excellencies that many of these organizers have been arrested. Their interrogation is yielding very good information. Meanwhile, in Somalia, on the 4th and the 21st of July, 2010, those terrorists attacked the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the African Union (AU) positions. They got the punishment they deserved. TFG and the AU Forces defeated the attacks. I, however, recommend that the AU members do not accept this

arrogance. Who are these people who dare to attack AU Flag? Whose interests are they serving? These terrorists can be and should be defeated. As you may know, I have quite long experience with fighting. I, however, have great contempt for the authors of terrorism – using violence indiscriminately, attacking non-combatants, manipulating children to be used as cannon fodder. I am glad the whole of Africa have condemned these cowards. Let us now act in concert and sweep them out of Africa. Let them go back to Asia and the Middle East where I understand many of them come from. As for some of the local Somali people that allow themselves to be used in this shameful way, our Somali brothers and sisters have the answer. I personally, reject this new form of colonialism – through terrorism.

Thank you very much.

25th July 2010 - Commonwealth Resort, Munyonyo, Kampala.