

# Isaazi Ly' Abantu Bakuru Ba Tooro

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Date: 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2017

## TOORO ELDERS FORUM (ISAAZI) POSITION FOR TOLERANCE, PATRIOTISM AND PEACE

Isaazi Ly'Abantu Bakuru Ba Tooro - Toro Elders Forum (TEF) - is composed of women and men of integrity, experience and with knowledge of what Uganda has gone through since Independence. TEF takes upon itself to provide guidance and valuable reflections that impact on responsible citizenship. To this goal, TEF while maintaining its neutral stance, listens to views of people from all walks of life, and is keen at educating as well as shaping its young people to become responsible citizens who are equipped with skills to position themselves as servant leaders for the Uganda of tomorrow.

We have observed with concern the happenings of the past few weeks sparked off by a proposal to amend the constitution and remove the requirement of an age limit for a president of Uganda. The mayhem it caused especially in our parliament is as if it is a DO or DIE matter for some people. We were saddened by these events.

We are conscious of our history which is characterized by violence originating from constitution related matters, and we are pondering the passion which has so far been invested in the matter at the cost of sidelining more important issues such as poverty, disease, famine, unemployment, illiteracy and many others.

We appreciate the fact that Uganda is a young democracy with very fragile institutions. Consequently we entertain founded fears of, and anxiety about what we are about to witness; a decline of patriotism, a tenet that ushered in the NRM era, and a fall into the trap of political populism and patronage. Young democracies are delicate, but can be secured by selfless and accountable leaders who adhere to constitutionalism, the respect of democratic institutions, and allowing the growth of credible civil society with a strong voice and an open space for free expression of ideas/views even when those views are not palatable.

We realize that our democracy has started showing signs of “illness”. Unless something is done NOW and not TOMORROW we risk these signs turning into full blown symptoms. In the past weeks these signs have been evidenced when sections of the Ugandan population reacted angrily towards the proposal to amend the constitution to 1) allow government to forcefully possess land, 2) remove the age limit requirement for a president of Uganda.

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We wish to call for utmost tolerance towards people whose voices might be different from others', irrespective of their numbers or might. The right to be heard is a human right which should not be denied anyone.

We therefore call upon fellow Ugandans to desist from any action that is likely to trigger violence. We call upon political actors, on whichever side you are, to exercise maximum restraint and engage in peaceful debates and meaningful dialogue, mindful of the factors that have brought unrest in Uganda in the past, as well as those that have caused resistance and war in other African countries.

We do note with concern that there are some provisions in the Constitution which were to be reviewed within a specified time, but have now been delayed. A case in point; is the provisions for election of political leaders under "affirmative action". Instead, we have chosen to go for the most politically sensitive, seemingly controversial and to some people unpopular amendments before giving the Constitution sufficient time to be tested and seasoned.

Whether the allegations of coercion, bribery, threats and so on are true or not, whether some people are acting in good faith and out of willingness and conviction, " Recalling our history, which has been characterized by political and constitutional instability.....", guided by the voices of our religious leaders and a good number of young and middle aged people in this region, we urge the proponents of these motions to drop them.

We call upon our elected leaders from Tooro to speak for the people represent and not for themselves. We further call upon them to focus their energies on issues that most touch on our livelihood and nation building: reconciliation and peace building, improvement of health services, better and meaningful education, attracting genuine investments, creating employment, finding markets for our products, sustainable and non-discriminating security for all Ugandans etc.

We join other peace-loving Ugandans to condemn the brutal force with which our armed forces who are expected to protect us are handling citizens who are expressing their displeasure with the removal of the age limit provision from the Constitution. In the same vein we condemn acts of lawlessness that have been exhibited by those opposed, as well as the arrogant utterances and

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is a loss supporting the people with the experience and wisdom that we have acquired through the years. It is not just the people of the Southwest and Midwest who are affected, but the disinterested persons will all be affected. This we note with concern when there are sentiments that certain areas of Uganda have benefitted more than others, pitying us from the Southwest and Midwest against the rest of Uganda.

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At this moment removing the age limit is a luxurious issue that could be debated in future but is not a priority for Ugandans. Moreover the sensitivity attached to it renders it untimely. We therefore recommend that it be immediately dropped.

FOR GOD AND OUR COUNTRY

Signed by:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Edward B. Rugumayo', written over a horizontal line.

Professor Edward B. Rugumayo

For and on behalf of,

ISAAZI LY'ABANTU BAKURU BA TOORO/ TOORO ELDERS FORUM