



THE EMINENT PERSON'S INTERVENTION



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Following the deadly killings in Bundibugyo District that followed the debacle in declaration of the LC V results that pitted incumbent Jolly Tibamanya against eventual winner Richard Mutegeki, leading to the death of close to 12 people, Kabarole Research and Resource Centre (KRC) and RFPJ teamed up with the committee of Eminent Persons in Rwenzori region chaired by the Rt. Rev. Reuben Kisembo Bishop of the Diocese of Ruwenzori organized a visit to Bundibugyo to meet with key stakeholders in de-escalating the conflict. Other members of the delegation included; Senior Presidential Advisors Prof Edward Rugumayo and Mrs Christine Muhindo, Bishops Masereka Nzerende of Kasese and Hannington Bahemuka of Bundibugyo, Senior Pastor Joseph Maate the Zonal SDA leader for Bundibugyo and Mr. Mwanga Julius the Executive Director of KRC who led the Civil Society fraternity

The initiative followed a pre-visit to the area by a select team comprising KRC and RFPJ staff that had made an assessment of the situation and recommended action. The team had hitherto met a number of stakeholders including the Cultural leader of *Obdudghingiya Bwa Bwamba* His Highness Martin KAMYA, who agreed to meet with the eminent persons and their entourage

The team conducted one-on-one sessions with a number of stakeholders and gathered very critical information from each party about the situation at hand and sought their commitment to fostering peace in the district

At exactly 11.AM the delegation arrived at Mr. Jolly Tibamanya home in Bundibugyo, whose supporters had gone amok, drawing the situation into a crescendo, as soon as it was announced that the first declaration of results which had put him in the lead were annulled in favor of his nemesis Richard Mutegeki, the flag-bearer for the ruling National Resistance Movement

Mr Tibamanya was very welcoming to the team and he said he was humbled that such a high profile delegation would pay him a visit. Bishop Reuben Kisembo, who first requested Bishop Masereka to lead prayers explained to the attentive District Chairman the purpose of the visit. He said the visit was pre-empted by the ugly skirmishes that rocked the district in recent days. He appreciated Mr. Tibamanya for pursuing the path of Peace as opposed to being confrontational- since he had publically called upon his supporters to remain calm

and get back to work for the development of Bundibugyo District.



Mr. Jolly Tibemanya in yellow shirt receiving the Eminent Persons at his residence in Bundibugyo

Professor Rugumayo commended Mr. Tibemanya for the noble gesture of conceding defeat for the sake of peace—despite the contested outcome of the elections

Mr. Julius Mwangi, Executive Director KRC also re-iterated Prof Rugumayo's wise counsel and hailed Tibamanya for retiring from politics and opting for private life.

On his part Mr. Tibemanya revealed that while his radical supporters were bitter with him for taking the peaceful approach, he was committed to working with all stakeholders to bring peace in the district. He however expressed over government's slow response to the conflict, despite getting triggers, that there was bound to be violence- given the way the elections had been badly handled by the Electoral Commission. The loss of lives and property would have been avoided if government had responded fast when the events began to unfold.

Mr. Tibamanya also decried the role of cultural institutions in fueling political conflicts. He appealed to them to remain apolitical

In his end remarks the now retired politician further noted the situation in Bundibugyo had just been a 'time bomb'-only awaiting explosion

"Even during the NRM Primaries some Sub Counties where I had a lot of support were technically left out; three administrative parishes in Bubukwanga were not added to the tally and consequently I lost to Mutegeki. I wanted to quit politics immediately after the primaries but people still encouraged me..." Remarked a rather crest-fallen Chairman, but was quick to add that for the sake of peace and development of Bundibugyo he was going to join other actors in uniting the people in spite of the political, tribal and cultural differences.



The delegation meeting with Mr. Ronald Mutegeki LCV (Middle in a jacket and tie) at-Hotel Vanila, Bundibugyo

While meeting Mr. Mutegeki, the team requested him to unite all the people including those who were throwing bad words on him during and after campaigns. Bishop Masereka informed the Chairman Elect that the region was still recovering from the ugly skirmishes of July 2014 that had led to the loss of lives due to tribal clashes ,thus imploring him to be a uniting factor since he was born of both a Mwamba and Mukonjo.

Professor Rugumayo also appealed to Mr. Mutegeki to be a unitary factor *“you must be a unitary factor to this fragmented society, don’t talk politics and brag but preach peace not politics, you are not only a leader of NRM Members but all the people of Bundibugyo”* Said the Senior Presidential Advisor who also doubles as the Chairperson Tooro Elders Forum while advising the new chairman to serve all the people equally and not favor his NRM Party Members.

Mrs. Christine Muhindo, noted that the region had been in conflict since the 1980s. There was therefore an urgent need to forge unity and move as one united people of the region.

MR. Mutegeki appreciated the role of the eminent persons in supporting peace building initiatives –after a would be peaceful election turned into a conundrum and led to loss of lives

In a rather no-holds barred approach, the youthful leader condemned the role played by Obudingiya Bwa Bwamba cultural institution (OBB) in the electioneering period. He blamed them for the violent clashes due to the divisive messages they sent out to the people. To lend credence to his claims,he noted that since the conflicts started the leader of the cultural institution had never come out to call for calm and or condemn the acts.

He equally condemned UBC Radio-Bundibugyo, which he says was out-rightly giving out biased information and promoting the tribal tensions. For instance he claimed to have been denied usage of the radio through-out the campaign

Mutegeki also had no kind words for the Electoral Commission office in Bundibugyo which he blamed for the multiple and varying declarations of the results. The EC had earlier announced Mr. Tibamanaya as the winner but later gave in to massive pressure from Mr.

Mutegeki's supporters to do a re-tallying –which exercise returned Mutegeki as the winner of the poll.

Mutegeki also noted that the issues of poverty , mainly to do with equitable distribution of resources given that Bwamba County, which is predominantly Bamba/Babwise, is in low land with better services, Bughendera County,which comprise mainly Bakonzo is mountainous, with limited government services, were equally key in the conflict. He pointed that while one of the ethnic tribes (Bakonzo) was hardworking and had invested a lot another ethnic group (Bamba) was jealousy and aimed at destroying their property.

He strongly urged the eminent persons to reach out to the cultural institution to come and openly talk to the people using all available platforms. Mr. Mutegeki gave his commitment to peace and unity in Bundibugyo District.

The team also met the two MP elects for Bughendera and Woman MP. On his part Prince Kibanzanga dismissed allegations that he had come in from Kasese District to destabilize OBB since his brother Wesly Mumbere Iremangoma is the King of Onusinga Bwa Rwenzuru alleged that the intrusion of Kibanzanga has been a major threat to the Kingdom. He however blamed the security agencies for their laxity in apprehending the situation yet they had all the information. He advised government to summon all the cultural leaders and ask them to preach peace and carry the flag of peace and reconciliation.

Prince Kibanzanga who has been part of the peace processes in the region-mainly after the July 14th 2014 attacks, strongly condemned the recruitment, training and at times arming of youth militia groups in the name of royal guards. He said these will unleash terror in the near future. Hon Kibanzanga Challenged the team of eminent persons to go out there and tell the government, cultural institutions and leaders of Bundibugyo nothing but the truth about the causes of unrest in the district

However the meeting with the Omudingiya proved futile as he was unable to meet the delegation. He claimed to be fatigued and unable to hold a meeting. This was in contrast to his acceptance to meet the team-a commitment he had made two days earlier

Before leaving Bundibugyo, the team met with the RDC to seek his views as the central government representative. He was flanked by the DPC with whom they manage the district security. During the discussion the two officials appreciated the team for coming to the district amidst the confusion and the violence that was going on in the district. On behalf of the team, Bishop Reuben Kisembo informed the RDC that there were allegations of laxity of security agencies in addressing the situation, which could have led to the escalation of the violence

The government officials however denied the allegations and instead commended their teams for arresting dozens of suspected ring leaders in the clashes. They said over that security was active and beefed up with UPDF. That a number of arrests were made and close to 80 people were put in cells.

However the DPC confessed that the allegations that some of the 'men in uniform' could have taken sides, was true but was quick to blame it on crime preventers, who openly took political sides and supported some candidates. It must be noted that crime preventers are a voluntary civilian force drawn from the local community-susceptible to having own tribal and ethnical inclinations. It is common knowledge that most of them sided with fellow tribesmen(both Bankonzo and Bamba/Babwisi). However, the DPC revealed that they would be de-mobilised within 14 days since their work was temporary. The security team also assured the delegation that the situation had normalized and even people who had sought refuge in camps had started to go back to their homes.

The delegation also made a set of recommendations which they want stakeholders to implement –in order to have meaningful peace and co-existence in the region

Recommendations

- The electoral commission in Bundibugyo needs to be instigated and if found culpable punished for having sparked off the violence
- The King His Highness the Omudingiya should come out openly and speak to his people, call for calmness, console the deceased families and congratulate those who went through to prove his neutrality as a cultural leader.

- There is need to have a thorough investigation on the irreversible tribal sentiments in Bundibugyo
- The committee of eminent persons strongly condemns the act of the King who declined to meet them yet they had made a very clear appointment with him. The committee had 2 presidential advisors three Bishops and other peace builders. Above all it had a member of the national reconciliation Committee set by the president.
- We strongly recommend that the Kingdom (Obudhingiya) should distance itself from politics-just like other institutions
- Government should make a comprehensive Policy to cater for the operations of Cultural Institutions. The current Legal Regime under which kingdoms/Cultural Institutions operate has some gaps