

## Opening Remarks at the 1<sup>st</sup> Reunion Meeting of Past and Present Students, Practitioners and Associates of Political Science and Public Administration, Makerere University

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*Rt. Hon. Prof. Apolo R. Nsibambi*

*Former Prime Minister of Uganda*

*Chief Guest*

The Hon. Ministers, Hon. MPs, The Vice Chancellor, The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Administration) The Registrar, Professors, Alumni, Principals and Deans, Lecturers, All our Distinguished Awardees, Ladies and gentlemen.

Allow me to greet you on this day of the 1<sup>st</sup> reunion meeting of past and present-day students, practitioners and associates of the discipline of Political Science and Public Administration. It is indeed a pleasure for me to be back to my disciplinary home – the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. The Department and Makerere University more generally played a critical role in shaping my academic credentials and my professional values. The norms that define my professional and personal values – such as keeping time with mathematical precision; selfless public service and a positive attitude toward life – were all nurtured during my life as a Budonian and a *Makererean*.

Today, as I walk through the Great Gates of Makerere, I observe a hybridization of continuity and change in this great University. Continuity is clear in Makerere's singular pursuit of excellence in research and innovation; in human capital development and knowledge production; and in the continued struggle to shape national, regional and global agendas that impact humanity. This zeal for excellence has seen Makerere rise to become the third best University in Africa, and indeed, the best-rated University in Africa outside South Africa. Bravo to the leadership and students of Makerere.

Alongside continuity at Makerere, however, is a clear sense of change. I see the change in the growing number of students and staff. Makerere had a humble beginning as vocational training institute in 1922 with only 14 students. The number of students has since grown consistently, as the University extends its reach nationally, regionally and globally. When I was an undergraduate student in the 1950s, Makerere had less than 3,000 students. Today, the number has grown to over 40,000.

But change is not just taking place in the number of students. The buildings and office spaces have tremendously expanded. The technologies of research, teaching and learning have also changed dramatically from the P.O Box generation to the *WhatsApp*, *tweeting*, and *facebooking* technologies. When I was Head of Department, we had only one type writer. PhD research and book publication were all done using type writers. Most Professors and junior academic colleagues could hardly type their own letters. Letters dismissing a Secretary had to be typed by the Secretary herself. Today, all these have changed, thanks to the ICT revolutions and the determined efforts of our staff and students to continuously improve their competitive advantages.

The Discipline of Political Science and Public Administration, which is the main focus of our conversation today, has itself grown in leaps and bounds. Across the world, the discipline had humble beginnings as a branch of philosophy (viz political philosophy). It has since metamorphosed into the study and practice of political institutions; political behavior (viz elections, whether procedural or substantive); constitutional governance; comparative politics; political economy analysis; public management and administration; public policy; and international relations.

A major objective of our reunion, then, is to remind ourselves and our associates that our discipline is neither parochial nor simplistic. It is broad in scope, and rich in depth. We prepare our learners to serve in active politics – for example as Heads of State and MPs. We also prepare human resources to serve as professional civil servants; local government technocrats; career diplomats; NGO officials; senior researchers cum academics; and public affairs managers of private companies.

In addition to carrying out research on issues of political significance to the country, the staff of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration have been involved in various activities, which have been instrumental in fostering the political development of Uganda.

Beginning in the late 1960s, Professor Yash Tandon and Professor Gingyera-Pinyawa, played a key role in crafting the Common Man's Charter. In 1986, Professor Mamdani, Mahmood chaired a Commission of Inquiry into the Local Government System, the basis for the restructuring of Uganda's local government system. Another member, Dr. Kiyaga Nsubuga, was the CEO of the Decentralization Secretariat that nurtured Uganda's Decentralization policy as it is today. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Professor Byarugaba, was a member of the Public Service Reform Commission. During the Constitutional-making process, the late Professor Mudoola was its vice



chairperson. I and another member of the Department, Professor Elijah Mushemeza were members of the Constituency Assembly where we used our political science knowledge to guide the constitution making process. In 2003, Professor Byarugaba, was a member of the Constitutional Review Commission, which made significant changes to the 1995 Constitution. Three Member of the Department, late associate professor Ochaya-Lakidi, Professor Elijah Mushemeza and Associate professor Philip Kasaija participated in the Defense Review Process that has led to the professionalization of the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF) whilst another member of the Department was part of the team that developed the Defense Doctrine for the UPDF. Currently, the Department is collaborating with the Senior Command and Staff College-Kimaka, in training leading to the award of a Master's Degree in Defense and Security Studies. The current Head of Department Dr. Nansozi K Muwanga was recently invited to sit on the Control Board of the College. In addition, Dr. Muwanga and Associate Professor Philip Kasaija were instrumental in the restructuring process at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the development of Uganda's Foreign Policy. These are just a few examples of the active involvement of staff in the department in national and regional development.

When I was Head of the Department of Political science and Public Administration, I allowed Professor M. Mamdani, a Marxist to join the Department. I believed in the Capitalist ideology. The two schools of thought contended and bloomed. Many lectures were given in the main building and they attracted the staff and students of the University and people from outside the University. The late Professor Ali Mazrui who was Head of the Department nationalized and globalized it by giving public lectures on topical issues in Uganda and abroad. He was an orator. He was answered by the late Professor Mujaju and others. Many students took political science courses because they were animated by the public lectures.

The Department's rich background and active involvement in the practice of politics and diplomacy nationally and regionally raises an important question about its future role. As Uganda grapples with significant national, regional and international changes, can the Department contribute to the vision 20/20 and if so in what ways can it do this? There is a demonstrable evidence that the Department has the capacity in terms of the academic rigour of its members, a dedication to serve national development agenda as well as the raw talent of its students. Without going too deeply into the vision 20/20 suffice to note that promise of reaching middle income status must be firmly based on a human resource base that is skilled and committed to that vision. Second, it goes without saying that national, regional and international events and challenges related to security, both human and military, as well as environmental

concerns call for concerted interdisciplinary efforts and an ability to work collaboratively. Furthermore, these challenges call for strengthening the content of the courses taught, the level of analysis that must now be coupled with practical skills and avenues through which to communicate research analysis and findings to government and other responsible agencies. Alumni – you all have a responsibility to support, work with and stimulate the teaching and learning in your *alma mater*.

This 1<sup>st</sup> Alumni Meeting at this particular time in the country's development is a significant and important opportunity. I am therefore appealing to all employers in the public sector, the private sector and civil society to appreciate the relevance and importance of our discipline to their functionality. For example, the oil companies that interface with the state, society and the economy of Uganda on a daily basis will benefit by hiring political scientists. The central Bank, development banks and commercial banks will all benefit. Big private sector companies will reap big, while small companies will be enabled by political science professionals to navigate the stormy waters of politics to grow their businesses and attain profitability.

I thank you all for sparing the time to be here and to pledge through your presence today to be part of and actively support the Department of political science to play its role in shaping the democratic governance and development of Uganda.

I declare this function open.

For God and my Country.

**Rt. Hon. Prof. Apolo Nsibambi**