



# **CREATING A FUTURE OF PROMISE AND PROSPERITY IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY**

**A 2015 New Year Message from Civil Society**

**January 2015**

## A INTRODUCTION

1. Fellow Ugandans, the leadership of civil society congratulates each one of you upon completing the year 2014. We take this opportunity to wish all citizens a prosperous year ahead. As always, we take this opportunity to reflect on the past year, recommit ourselves to work towards building an inclusive and just economy, a strong democracy, a peaceful and secure country in which every Uganda lives in dignity.
2. The year 2014 had its positive development that we all need to celebrate as a people. But we also need to pay particular attention to major fault-lines that could limit and hinder our progress to a future of promise and prosperity. Ultimately, securing a better future for ourselves and our children is our individual and collective responsibility where each one of us individually and collectively must make a contribution. We therefore hope that 2015 is a year where we will take our citizenship seriously, commit to make our contribution in building a better future but also to demand more responsibility and accountability from those to whom we have delegated power and authority to lead our country.

## B POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS IN 2014

3. **Momentum and Consensus on the need for Free and Fair Elections:** The year 2014 saw one of the most formidable citizens' efforts towards building the momentum to advocate for free and fair elections in Uganda. In 14 regions of Uganda, over 3,200 local leaders from political parties, religious organizations, cultural institutions, the academia, business community, persons with disabilities, young people, women leaders, professional associations and civil society leaders came together to discuss the constitutional and electoral reforms they would like to have. This extensive process culminated in a National Consultative Conference that brought together 1,400 participants from all over Uganda who deliberated and agreed on a National Citizen Compact on Free and Fair Elections. This is perhaps the first time in many years that leaders from different political persuasions were able to deliberate together about the future of Uganda. We salute all the Gallant Ugandans who were part of this process.
4. **Sustaining the Campaign against Theft of public Resources:** The corruption scourge in Uganda remains a key development injustice in the country. Corruption robs the future from us and especially from the young people that constitute the majority of us. Building on work from the past year, in 2014, the Black Monday Movement sustained the campaign against theft of public resources. The overall objective of the Black Monday Movement is to mobilize citizens to mount a sustained assault against the injustice of corruption. Looking back we know that the Black Monday Movement's flagship newsletter has gone far and wide and mobilization of citizens through popular music and other types of popular forms of communication represents an unrelenting effort that is keeping the fight against corruption a major issue in the development terrain.
5. **Uganda's Presidency of the United Nations General Assembly and the Development Opportunity of the Post-2015 Agenda:** In 2014, Uganda assumed the Presidency of the UN General Assembly. This is an achievement that should be celebrated by all Ugandans and more so because it puts our country in a driving seat to shape the post-2015 global development agenda. The opposition to our candidate assuming that position teaches us that our individual consequences have consequences and that living a life of honesty and integrity has value for us as individuals but also for our country. But we must also remind ourselves that occupying an important position like the presidency of the UNGA is meaningless unless we are capable of translating it into tangible gains for our people including a better quality education for each of our school going children, better health outcomes for our mothers or a rewarding job opportunity for our youth.
6. **More determined Citizen Actions to shape the political and economic future of our country:** The year 2014 saw signs that several citizen groups were expressing concerns and taking action on issues that they deemed unjust. Young people across the country expressed concerns about the fact that many of them were unemployed and they demanded that the government listens and takes actions. Different groups across the country engaged their local leaders, demanding accountability for public funds. Within civil society, there was also the recognition that it is no longer tenable to expect politicians to be the only ones to continue defining the future of Uganda. The Citizen Manifesto, the Youth Roadmap to 2016, the Women's Agenda 2016 and several other initiatives must thus be celebrated and encouraged for heightened engagement of citizens as the true expression of the resolve and commitment by each one of us to build a better Uganda.

## C MAJOR FAULT-LINES

As we celebrate the positive developments of 2014, our eyes must remain firmly focused on the emerging fault lines that have the potential to undermine our progress or increase the costs of securing a future of promise, stability and opportunity for ourselves and our children. From our vantage point, we wish to highlight some of the major fault lines

that we should pay attention to in 2015 and beyond and commit to work together to address them or mitigate their impact on our progress.

- **7. Crisis of Institutions:** Uganda in 2014 saw a further slide back in key institutional performance. For a second year running, we saw the Judiciary straddle without a substantive Chief Justice - a major indictment on the President as the appointing authority and the Parliament as the guarantor of the constitution. The Parliament consistently failed to raise quorum but also passed some of the most anti-civil liberties legislation. The infighting within the major political and generally the absence of internal democracy among our political parties clearly undermine their emergence as important pillars of our democracy. And without a doubt, the deployment of all the military assets of the country: the special forces, the regular forces, all the elements of the Uganda police force, and the RDCs to secure the delegates conference of the ruling party and the associated cost on the Ugandan taxpayer raises fundamental questions as to the character of the ruling party and its apparent fusion with the state.
- **8. Continued Wanton Theft of Public Resources:** The Office of the Auditor General and other accountability agencies have tried to lead the fight against the theft from the taxpaying public. However, the apparent deliberate weakening of the judiciary by depriving it of essential appointments, the failure to accept or take political responsibility for major political scandals such as the OPM scandal, Mukono-Katosi Road or the Standard Gauge Railway is clear evidence of lack of political will on the part of the executive to confront the cancer of corruption that is robbing the current youth of their opportunity and stealing the future of our children. Beyond these large scale scandals, through the anti-corruption caravan civil society has unearthed debilitating effects of corruption in the judiciary, health sector with chilling effects on ordinary citizens. Corruption remains a key fault-line in development and in large part explains the poor state of service delivery across the country.
- **9. Assault on Freedom of Association and Expression:** A true democracy is accommodative of divergent voices, opinions and respects freedoms of association and expression, including of dissent. The year 2014 followed in the tradition of previous ones in which there were sustained assaults on the fundamental freedoms of thought and expression, including within the ruling party. Disagreements within parties and other institutions were met with threats and isolation and intolerance was evident. The break-up of some meetings especially up country convened by political parties especially in the opposition reminded us of the dark times in Uganda's history.
- **10. Youth Unemployment:** one of the most direct consequences of our failure to confront the challenge of corruption is our inability to grow the economy in a manner that creates jobs in both the public and the private sector. The attempts by the Government epitomized in cash handouts and other patronage programmes can only provide short-term solutions and postpone the problem. Given the rapid growth of the Ugandan population, we know that three quarters of the population are below the age of 30 years. This translates in millions of young people who are not gainfully employed. Job growth for this very young Ugandan population is an issue that should concern us more as a country.
- **11. Increasing militarization of society:** No matter the justifications by Government, the increasing militarization of every aspect of our public life is a major fault line that will impact significantly on our future as a country. Over the last three years, we have seen the military take over the command of the Uganda Police Force and the delivery of agricultural extension services; the Constitution Square has become a no go area for the public, while the Kololo ceremonial grounds have been nearly turned into a military garrison. The clear diversion of our security forces from the basic constitutional mandate is a troubling development.

## **D ASPIRATIONS AND COMMITMENTS FOR 2015**

- **12. Re-affirm that the Citizen is Central:** As we pointed out in 2014, citizens in Uganda have for long faced situations of civic deficiency. These are situations rooted in Uganda's history of conflict, citizen disempowerment and lack of a culture of constitutionalism. This is manifest in the collapse of values, rule of law and community cohesion as well as the ethos of hard work. Civic deficiency creates a sense of despondency, despair and helplessness. Civic deficiency is what makes citizens avoid or dodge paying taxes. It creates the environment in which drugs can be stolen from the hospitals and rotten seeds get procured in the name of boosting agricultural production. Civic deficiency is also what creates a culture of violence and allows ills such as child sacrifice, human trafficking and complete collapse of productivity in the villages of Uganda to thrive acceptably. In 2015, citizens must:
  - Reject a corrupt, inefficient, ineffective and wasteful governance culture through our collective country-wide Black Monday Campaign, amongst others.
  - Promote and pay taxes and hold leaders accountable for the responsible stewardship of public funds and public assets.
  - Promote and or be part of citizen savings and investment clubs that are linked to growers cooperatives for value addition and marketing of produce with women smallholder farmers particularly targeted
  - Partner with all players in the cooperative movement in Uganda and beyond towards a vibrant citizen-initiated, owned and citizen controlled cooperative movement in all sectors of the economy

■ **13. Taking forward the Citizens Compact on Free and Fair Elections:** The final outcome of the National Consultative Forum on Free and Free Elections - the Citizens' Compact - sets out specific rules, actions and proposed timelines for implementing those reforms. The compact has been presented to Parliament of Uganda as a Petition and shared with all the relevant Government agencies. As part of the process of implementing the Compact the following actions will be undertaken:

- Promoting countrywide awareness campaigns of the necessary electoral reforms and citizen participation in demanding that the reforms are effected.
- Advocating for Parliament to adopt the reforms and consider them in the discussion of election management legislation.
- Implementing all actions as stipulated in the National Compact Document

■ **14. Engaging with the Question of Transition:** Uganda is one of the countries in Africa that have never witnessed a peaceful transfer of power from one president to another or from one political party to another. With the NRM and President Museveni being in power for over 28 years and still counting, the levels of anxiety about transition seem to be rising. Ugandans need to start discussing the question of a transition. This should be a discussion that focuses on the principles that should guide transition in Uganda and touch on all aspects of the transition from unjust status quo to a more just one, transition in generational leadership and transition in political leadership and institutional preparedness for transition. This process of transition should be one that is orderly, peaceful and well managed. This is a proposal that we are offering to Ugandans for debate and build on to develop a model that takes the country forward.

- Civil society will in the course of 2015 be releasing a 'Discussion Paper on Transition in Uganda' to help structure the debate on transition and galvanize national efforts towards this important reality that we should be prepared for and not just wait for it to happen.

■ **15. Reclaiming the Integrity of Institutions:** As already pointed out, we are faced with a major institutional crisis. Strong, credible and accountable state institutions are a fundamental building block for a prosperous and just society. But strong civic, religious and private sector institutions are also important pillars for sustaining that prosperity, expanding economic opportunity and providing the necessary checks and balances. In 2015, we invite all Ugandans to be unyielding in our efforts to reclaim the integrity of our institutions by, among other things:

- Advocating for the separation of powers and the institutional independence of the three arms of government, namely: Parliament, Judiciary and the Executive. In this regard, it is important that a new Chief Justice is appointed and confirmed in the first quarter of 2015.
- Expanding efforts to monitor the performance of public institutions mobilizing citizens to put pressure on all actors to ensure the effective performance of all institutions.
- Committing to keep the focus on good corporate governance within civil society and in all citizen and other institutions including political parties where the issue of internal party democracy and cohesion remains a daunting one for most parties.
- Finally, we shall remain unyielding in our defense of the integrity of Constitution of Uganda. We shall work with other like-minded agencies to strengthen constitutionalism and protect our Constitution from retrogressive amendments.

■ **16.** Fellow citizens, in solidarity lies our full strength as a people, we must fight together to uphold the dignity of every citizen and invest in creating opportunities for every Ugandan no matter their political ideology, ethnic or religious affiliation, gender or other forms of diversity. We shall therefore work with all democracy-seeking stakeholders with unyielding commitment to defend our Constitution and ensure that we build an inclusive economy, a strong democracy and a secure country.

## FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

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