

inspections
ance and
enalties for
tory designs,
ld prioritise
ith adequate
exits, and al-
anent bur-
do not block

one in
to process,
at an
sess
nsuring
uld not
but an
ity. It
mitment
and
ess
before
ss.
carries
sons. The
er we
se gaps
are not
cident;
for it.
ughts
es
ldren
ces. No
ss, but
nsure
not left

endurance, but about a deeper misunder-

country that at last matches their potential.

Whose sovereignty are you protecting?

It is not out of fear of outsiders that the government muzzles its population. It is out of fear of the very people it purports to lead.

This is the same government that has systematically dismantled the foundations of civil society, managed electoral processes, and stifled Opposition, yet now suddenly stands before us as the custodian of Uganda's sovereignty.

We need only pose one simple query: whose sovereignty? Certainly not that of the Ugandan citizenry that has seen its own government devour itself from within to maintain control.

In spite of its supposed anticolonialism, government is intricately involved in the very systems it purportedly resists. Uganda continues to depend on the foreign institutions to help formulate its budgets and policies, despite allegations that some of these institutions' structural adjustment programmes have for years systematically stripped away the very basic public services and worsened conditions throughout Africa.

The proof can be seen everywhere: hospitals that lack medicine; schools that lack books; communities that must pay for the public services their governments are supposed to provide. And yet, instead of facing down the forces that have created this situation, the government is using its power against its own citizens.

Sovereignty! But for whom? The fears of foreign influence in Uganda are very justi-

Sovereignty is found in the people, in their ability to organize, to speak, and to demand accountability.



Rebecca Kabejja
Civic space



fied in light of the history of colonisation and economic control by Western powers. But once more than 40 percent of the budget of a country comes from foreign sources, then the issue of sovereignty becomes irrelevant.

You cannot argue that you are protecting the sovereign interests of a nation when your finance department is dependent on the West to pay your way.

But what really shows the true colours of this proposed Sovereignty Bill 2026 is its selective nature: Foreigners come into Uganda, extract the minerals and there is no problem; foreign institutions dictate the terms of expenditure in Uganda, and no problem; but the local women's rights group which uses foreign money for setting up a shelter house? That's a problem for national sovereignty. Not that this Bill is an-

ti-imperialist. Far from it!

This legislation fundamentally criminalises the notion of politics. Vague and non-existent crimes such as "economic sabotage" and "foreign influence" do not have a basis in law; they are blank cheques made out to whomever is in power.

The crisis in Uganda was not created by Non-government Organisations or civil society groups; instead, it was a response to this crisis. NGOs established health clinics in poorly served regions, offered legal assistance to those who had been forsaken, and taught children when the government had abandoned its duty to provide an education. To categorise these individuals as threats to national security is cruel on purpose.

The biggest burden is borne by women and young girls who are forced out of schools, into marriages, and to take on the care work that the State no longer provides. In the same stroke, the Bill goes after those very organisations which have been at the forefront of securing their rights. As they shut down, the safe houses close and women in need of support have no place to go.

Sovereignty is found in the people, in their ability to organise, to speak, and to demand accountability. Without these things, what you have left is not a nation but a managed population.

Ms Rebecca Kabejja, Pan-African feminist lawyer and feminist political economy analyst

© 2024 Nation Media

in public space

Preference will be given to insightful articles rather than generalised polemic observations. Attach a portrait and send to editorial@ug.nationmedia.com