Letters

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Why Uganda needs a Speaker with a popular justice mindset

In the search for a national consensus, Ugandans hoped that the new Constitution was intended to promote a fundamental change in the politics of Uganda and to give the country a fresh start. Uganda's constitutional journey, now over three decades since 1995, was anchored in a promise to build a nation founded on unity, democracy, and social justice.

This vision was incorporated mainly in the preamble and the National objectives and Directive principles of State policy. This reflected a collective hope for a peaceful and inclusive political order.

Yet, the passage of time has revealed persistent tensions between this constitutional ideal and the lived realities of many Ugandans. Today, as calls for reform and national dialogue intensify, the country faces a defining question: how can Uganda secure a peaceful political transition that is both legitimate and enduring?

The answer lies in embracing a framework of "Popular Justice", a form of justice that is participatory, people-centred, and rooted in reconciliation rather than exclusion. Increasingly, voices across the political spectrum have emphasised Uganda's stability depends not merely on formal institutions, but on rebuilding trust between the State and its citizens.

This call reflects a deeper national need: a justice system and political process that resonates with everyday experiences of the people. A peaceful transition is not simply the absence of conflict; it is the presence of legitimacy, inclusion and fairness.

In divided societies, transition imposed from above often deepen grievances. In contrast, transitions grounded in popular justice create space for dialogue, acknowledgement of past injustices and collective ownership of the future.

History offers important lessons. In South Africa, under Nelson Mandela, the transition from apartheid was guided by a commitment to reconciliation. The "Truth and Reconciliation Commission" allowed citizens to confront painful truths in a manner that prioritised healing over vengeance. Similarly, in Rwanda, the Gacaca Courts provided a grassroots mechanism for accountability and reconciliation after the genocide.

Both experiences demonstrate that sustainable peace emerges when justice is inclusive and locally grounded. Uganda stands in need of such an approach, and the office of the Speaker of Parliament is central to this moment. The Speaker is not merely a procedural authority; they're a symbol of national unity and the guardian of democratic dialogue.

In times of transition, the Speaker must rise above partisan interests to ensure Parliament becomes a forum for genuine engagement across political divides. This is where a Speaker with a popular justice mindset emerges as a compelling choice. Uganda needs a Speaker who reflects a deep appreciation of Uganda's complex political fabric.

Unlike leadership styles that prioritise control or confrontation, the next Speaker should have an approach that is anchored in negotiation, inclusivity and the belief that lasting solutions must involve all stakeholders. A Speaker with a popular justice mindset would prioritise listening to diverse voices, including Opposition groups, civil society and marginalised communities.

Such leadership would foster confidence in Parliament as an institution capable of managing political differences peacefully. The Speaker's emphasis on dialogue aligns with the urgent need to restore public trust. Many Ugandans feel excluded from decision-making processes; leading to frustration and disillusionment.

By championing popular justice, the Speaker can transform Parliament into a space where citizens feel represented and heard, which is an essential condition for any peaceful transition. A peaceful transition will not be secured through force or formalism alone, but through legitimacy built on justice, inclusion and dialogue. In that regard, the choice is clear, Uganda needs a Speaker who embodies the principles of Popular Justice, one who can bridge divides, inspire trust and guide the nation toward a stable and inclusive future. The 12th Parliament has the choice to make to have such a Speaker.

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