



MUNIINI K MULERA > LETTER TO A KAMPALA FRIEND

Memories of the beautiful Equator crossing point on Masaka Highway

Dear Tingasiga; in my youth, one of the highlights of a journey along the Kampala-Kabaale highway was a stop at The Equator. Located 70km southwest of Kampala, the Equator crossing point was a venerable spot surrounded by verdant bush and forest and a silence that was only broken by the engines of passing motor vehicles.

Two clearly labelled white concrete circles and the patch of tarmacked road were humanity's only visible fingerprints.

A walk to one of the concrete circles, then a photo taken with one foot in the North and the other in the South, followed by a moment of reflection, then a walk back to the car, was a routine that one never tired of repeating. I felt that I owned the Equator, a shareholder along with fellow citizens and other travellers.

Well, that was until greed and foolishness desecrated that spot. Painfully ugly buildings sprouted on the venerable grounds. An uglier brick wall went up on the south side of the road. Then more little buildings and shacks were erected, and soon it was your usual roadside pile of ugliness that threatened to suffocate the Equator.

It was an eyesore that promptly ended my ritual stops at the Equator, save a couple of times when my younger travelling companions' bladders could not hold on until the next stop.

Since then, the place has become "worse and worse", with ugly little buildings strewn

"anyhowly", a harbinger of a slum that will swallow the Equator unless God shifts his Earth's zero latitude away from the madness.

The Equator now passes through a building, making it impossible for me to feel that it is mine. It is as though I am intruding or, at best, a consumer of a product that is owned by the merchants in that building.

We stopped there on Christmas eve because our driver needed a well-deserved cup of coffee. Just as well, for I used the opportunity to walk and look around after many years of pretending that the place no longer existed.

I confirmed that the place was indeed uglier than I had thought. My wife and I took photos of each other, standing on the Equator and in both hemispheres. I felt nothing. Nothing at all except a lump in my throat and a transient urge to yell: "No! Please stop!"

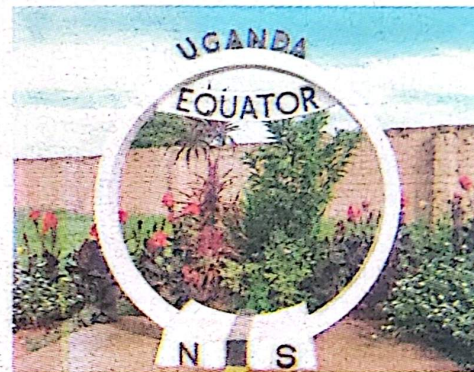
I took the photos with an enthusiasm that was akin to the feeling I get when shooting pictures in a cemetery. Not kidding.

Why do we keep destroying God's gifts to us? Do we hate beauty or is it that greed disables us from appreciating what we have? I look around for the wonderful green spaces that made my Kampala a pleasant place to be, and all I see is concrete and fewer trees than they used to be.

The greens paces, including the great forest at Namanve, have been sold off to destructive "investors." Kampala, the Garden City, has become a concrete jungle.

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Strange but true. I visited Constitution Square (City Square) the other day and found tents of armed policemen with no sense of humour. I hear that I am not allowed to hang out in that place. Constitution Square! The place where we often met with friends to solve the world's problems – or to dream about love. But that is another topic.



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problems – or to dream about love. But that is another topic.

Is it too late to hope that someone in authority will insist that the merchants at the Equator be moved about 300 metres down the road, housed in pleasant looking buildings, complete with adequate parking and clean bathrooms?

The current "Equator Town" should be razed to the ground, and replaced with a beautiful public park that features various species of Uganda's best flowers and other plants and trees. Let people walk to a green Equator. It belongs to all of us.

Mercifully, my memories of the unspoiled Equator are frozen on film and photos that I captured (or had other people take of me) before the greedy folks had a chance *kugikwat-ako* (to get their hands on it.) I will continue to treasure them as relics of a beautiful past that younger generations have been denied.

I hear a great old song in my heart as I write, one penned by Folliot S Pierpoint in the mid-19th Century, that acknowledges God's marvelous handiwork. The first two stanzas read:

For the beauty of the earth, /for the glory of the skies, /for the love which from our birth over and around us lies; /Lord of all, to thee we raise / this our hymn of grateful praise. For the beauty of each hour, /of the day and of the night, /hill and vale, and tree and flower, / sun and moon, and stars of light; /Lord of all, to thee we raise / this our hymn of grateful praise.

We must find it within ourselves to raise genuine grateful praise to our Lord, the Creator of Uganda, by restoring His handiwork and giving the most tender and loving care to the small part of the planet that is under our very temporary custody.

May 2018 be a year in which respectful restoration and conservation of our part of Earth becomes a high priority engagement for all of us.

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