



Harold Acemah The Might of Ideas

In four days time, Ugandans go to the polls to elect a president and 458 Members of Parliament. The house of representatives which is the parliament of the mighty United States of America with a population of more than 300 million has only 435 members. Why on earth should Uganda with a population of only 35 million have a bigger Parliament? It is absurd, irresponsible and unacceptable!

Let me state upfront my predictions for the outcome of what many political commentators argue is the most critical election in the history of Uganda. I predict that none of the eight presidential candidates will win 50 per cent of the vote on February 18. There will hence be a run off in March between the two leading candidates.

I further predict that the second round of the presidential election will be between the FDC and NRM candidate; the FDC candidate will also be the flag bearer of The Democratic Alliance (TDA). The die is cast for the mother of elections and the outcome is a challenge Ugandans must prepare to face.

The social and political milieu in which our elections are taking place resembles the situation prophet Habakkuk confronted during the reign of an ungodly King Jehoiakim of Judah. The prophet complained bitterly to God about the tragedy which befell the kingdom.

"How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, 'Violence!'

but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralysed and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted." Habakkuk 1:2-4 (NIV)

The Lord answered: "Look at the nations and watch - and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told." Habakkuk 1:5 (NIV). The core of Habakkuk's book states that, "the righteous will live by his faith" (2:4) and that is what keeps me and many Ugandans going!

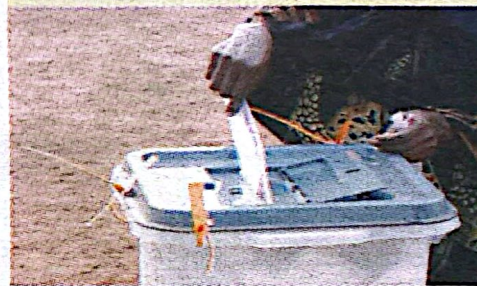
Uganda's coming elections reminds me of a request Jesus made in a prayer for himself which is recorded in the gospel according to John chapter 17.

The hour which eternity had been waiting for was only moments away and Jesus prayed: "Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee" (RSV). During that difficult hour (Good Friday) the Son of God would be humiliated, tortured, spit upon and crucified by evil men for our sins. Yet in his mercy and inestimable love, the suffering Jesus endured on the cross glorified him in the sight of God.

In the case of Uganda, the hour *wananchi* have been anxiously yearning and waiting for has come; the time for peaceful change has come and despite numerous threats, intimidation,

Reflections on endgame and day of reckoning

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humiliation, suffering and billions of shillings squandered to buy votes, the freely expressed will of the people for change is inevitable. Nobody and nothing can stop the will of God from happening.

February 18 is more than the climax of a political struggle; it is a battle in a spiritual war being waged in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa for the minds and souls of Ugandans and Africans. It is a struggle between good and evil.

Legacy of the NRM regime

One of the enduring legacies of the NRM regime is the restructuring of Uganda into a so-

ciety of haves and have-nots under its watch. As presidential candidate Maureen Kyalya observed during the January 15 presidential debate, the eastern and northern regions are marginalised to the extent that Uganda is no longer united and free for liberty, as our national anthem proclaims, but a tale of a country divided into tens of tiny and economically unviable districts, chiefdoms and kingdoms kept together by the grace of God.

Uganda has in many respects come full cycle within a generation. In 1981, some Ugandans launched a bloody guerrilla war in Luweero because of alleged rigging of the December 1980 elections. After five years of bitter fighting, the guerrillas captured Kampala on January 25, 1986, and their leader triumphantly announced a fundamental change on January 29, 1986.

Since then, rigging of elections in Uganda has gone from worse to worst! Rigging of elections is now taken for granted in Uganda and is practised shamelessly at party elections and especially at national elections! It is a classic irony of history and a national tragedy of monumental proportions!

Is this the fundamental change Ugandans were promised in January 1986? Is this what thousands of Ugandans suffered and died for in Luweero and other parts of the country? Must Ugandans tolerate and put up with such despicable state of affairs indefinitely?

The challenge which Ugandans face on the eve of the February 18 elections is to halt and reverse the downward spiral. We have the means and the will to bring about change of government peacefully this week. Since power belongs to the people, as our Constitution stipulates, *wananchi* must exercise their power and constitutional right to usher peaceful change of government in Uganda. *Aluta continua!*

May the Lord have mercy!

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