

New MPs and personal lifestyle audit

After looking at how blatant election fraudsters harm service delivery standards and devotion to the constituency and national transformational agenda, today, we look at how the new Members of Parliament (MPs) must closely monitor their lifestyle choices when they get to Kampala.

Every election cycle, there have been Ugandans who have "struck gold", rising from obscurity to the high seat of people's legislator. Immediately, they are thrown into a frenzy, unsure how to absorb and fit into their new status. Some are to live in Kampala for the first time. They have no secure financial base to start with after gruelling costly campaigns. Others are upstarts that have ridden on "waves" and sympathy to emerge and without sufficient grounding to anchor them as Very Important People (VIP). Such a crop of mediocre leaders adversely affects the pace of national transformation and achievement of national and international development goals.

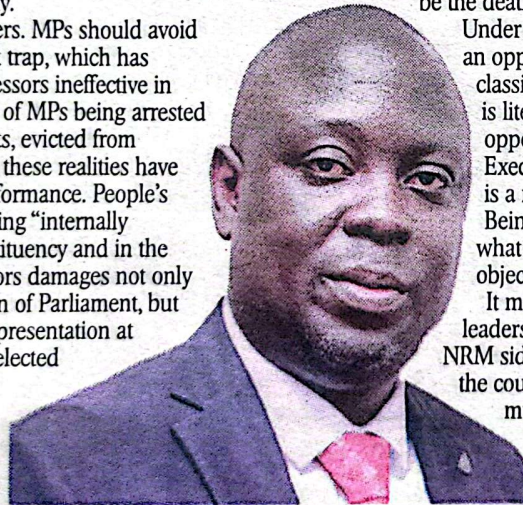
In 2011, during the induction of new MPs in Kampala, there were MPs who said they did not know how to use cutlery. They had to be trained because dining etiquette could easily expose their naivety locally and internationally. Others had never driven, let alone owned a car. Others had no suit and had to be taken through wardrobe modification drills. A lot of other lifestyle deficiency issues came up. Each new House hosts newly elected leaders in need of psychosocial support and financial literacy to come up to standard and Parliament will arrange training and induction to address these details.

But while personal etiquette may not be core to the needs of a legislator, lack

HAJI FARUK KIRUNDA

of it likely points to other deficiencies that directly affect one's ability to do a good job as a people's representative. From the outside, as a stakeholder who is a leader, a voter and mobiliser, I wish to affirm that the Legislative arm of the state is very relevant to this country and should be wholeheartedly supported to perform. I don't foresee a time when we shall not need Parliament, but what kind of Parliament and calibre of members are there? Parliament's performance reflects on the work of the Executive fundamentally and the involvement of individual legislators cumulatively contributes to that work. It matters a lot that the legislator exercises personal preparation to execute his or her duties excellently.

How one starts matters. MPs should avoid falling prey to the debt trap, which has rendered their predecessors ineffective in some instances. Cases of MPs being arrested and jailed for bad debts, evicted from houses and disgraced, these realities have a direct impact on performance. People's representatives becoming "internally displaced" in the constituency and in the House to evade creditors damages not only damages the reputation of Parliament, but also affects effective representation at large. When an MP is elected to serve a five-year term, it is all of the 1,830 days, not less, except for unforeseen circumstances. It is a



full-time service contract with the people and the other arms that complete the state structure.

Parliament is the engine of the state. It passes enabling laws for the management of society lawfully, appropriates resources through budgeting (which processes funds operations of the government in serving the population); performs oversight roles of following up resources and how they are utilised and generally represents issues of national importance from the constituency for consideration by the House. Without these functions attained, the rest of the arms cannot run, and the country would grind to a halt.

President Museveni has always tipped the country that there is more power in Parliament than even in State House for the same reasons highlighted above. As Head-of-State, his own powers are subservient to the functions of Parliament. He goes on to urge voters to choose their legislators carefully so that they effectively complement his efforts in transforming people's lives. An antagonistic or apathetic Parliament can be the death of a nation.

Under a democracy, Parliament has an opposition bench. Unfortunately, classification as "opposition" is literally interpreted to mean opposing everything fronted by the Executive or government side. This is a misconception to be resolved. Being opposition means questioning what is not correct and proposing objectively correct substitutes.

It means being partners in leadership, not inconveniencing the NRM side, mandated popularly to lead the country. Here, Opposition MPs must stop thinking of themselves as more powerful than the Government and acting aloof to the issues contained

in the winning National Resistance Movement (NRM) manifesto, which must be implemented accordingly.

Queerly, some opposition MPs don't seem to realise that when government doesn't perform efficiently, voters cannot tell the difference between the Opposition bench and the NRM side. When they get angry, they vote out all. Voters have constantly weeded out non-performers each election cycle while voting back President Museveni because he has never lost his original plan for Uganda.

He is only let down by a detractor opposition and an NRM side that contended with "small gains" when the President insists that much more could be achieved.

Incoming MPs are weaving into a challenge left by those departing; can they make a noticeable difference? Personal preparation is of the essence, by way of avoiding tying themselves down with unrealistic financial commitments that will render them "survivors" in Kampala, with no time to settle and internalise policy papers or read the mood in the country.

It takes a personal lifestyle audit to survive this trap. Lessons can be picked from veteran legislators whose time in Parliament wasn't spent chasing flamboyance and deals, but deepening understanding of how legislative democracy isn't about how many points of order one raises, but how much time one invests in identifying people's challenges, solving them and giving them hope that those challenges will be solved as a matter of urgency.

The writer is a Special Assistant to His Excellency the President of Uganda - press and mobilisation/ Deputy Press Secretary
faruk.kirunda@statehouse.go.ug
0776980486/0783990861