OUR HISTORY

MUSEVENI'S FIRST DAYS IN POWER

In 1986, Museveni captured power after a five-year bush war, promising democracy, national unity, security.



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In July 1986, an American journalist working for the *New York Times*, Edward Gargan, travelled to Uganda to compile a feature article about President Yoweri Museveni.

He then wrote: "The man, who brought peace, Yoweri Museveni, is still largely unknown to most Ugandans. Where he wants to take the country and how he hopes to do it, continue to be subjects of speculation in newspapers, in the offices of longtime civil servants and on the street corners."

He added that when he asked the then head of the department of political science at Makerere, Prof. Apolo Nsibambi to describe Museveni, he answered: "I would describe Museveni not as a Marxist. I would describe him as a nationalist, someone who wants to make people have the country at heart regardless of their tribal, ethnic or religious backgrounds."

At the time, Nsibambi was interviewed by the aforementioned American journalist, Museveni had been President for only six months. He became President after commanding a five-year armed struggle he launched on February 6, 1981, when he was 37 years old. The struggle began at the time Dr Milton Obote was the president. Museveni's fighting group was first named Popular Resistance Army, but when it merged with Uganda Freedom Fighters of Prof. Yusuf Lule in June, it was renamed National Resistance Army (NRA).

On July 27, 1985, when the NRA struggle was four years, five months and 21 days old, Obote's government was overthrown by his military officers at the urging of the northern brigade commander, Brig. Bazilio Okello. They installed Obote's former chief of defence forces, Gen. Tito Lutwa, as the new head of state.

FUTILE PEACE DEAL

With Lutwa as the head of state, his ruling Military Council engaged in peace talks with Museveni's political group, National Resistance Movement (NRM), starting on August 26. The talks took place in Nairobi, Kenya under the auspices of Kenya's president Daniel arap Moi. Later on December 17, Lutwa and Museveni signed a peace agreement.

Article three of the agreement stipulated that Lutwa would remain head of state/chairman of Military Council, while Museveni would become the vice-chairman of Military Council. However, Museveni did not take up the position.

In the meantime, Museveni's NRA resumed fighting, accusing Lutwa's government forces (Uganda National Liberation Army) of violating Article One of the agreement which stipulated: "No soldier or any other personnel under the command or control of any of the combat forces shall engage in any criminal acts or other acts that violate human rights."

In January 1986, when NRA artillery experts like Kasirye Ggwanga intensified barrages on Kampala, Museveni camped at Nabbingo on Masaka Road, where he had a meeting with the leader of the Democratic Party, Dr Paul Ssemogerere. He was taken to Museveni's camp by Frank Kaka Bagyenda (colonel) and Winnie Byanyima.

On January 24, Lutwa and Bazilio escaped from Kampala into exile. Moments later, Museveni shifted from Nabbingo and resided in a modest house opposite Bulange building in Mengo. Then on January 26, it was formally announced that the NRA/NRM had captured power. Thereafter, Museveni addressed a press conference while he was seated under a huge oak in Mengo.

He told the press: "I am an intellectual, not a soldier." He elaborated that he was forced by Uganda's culture of violence into becoming a soldier.

He pledged to prioritise democracy and security of individuals and their property. He described democracy as "the right of the people of Africa."

US RECOGNITION

Before he was sworn in as president, Museveni had a meeting with envoys that included US ambassador Robert Houdek.

Hours after the aforesaid meeting, president Ronald Reagan of US, through the assistant secretary of state for public affairs, Bernard Kalb, recognised the NRM Government, stating: "We are encouraged by the fact that the NRA appears to be disciplined and has restored order to those areas of Uganda that it has controlled. We also believe it has followed a policy of reconciliation and has reduced human rights abuses in those areas. There is no reason not to have friendly and amicable relations with a Museveni-led government."



President Yoweri Museveni (left) swearing-in at Parliament in 1986

Also before his swearing-in, Museveni met the Army Council, and Historical High Command. The Historical High Command as at January 26, 1986 were Museveni, Elly Tumwine, Salim Saleh, David Tinyefuza (now Sejusa), Eriya Kategaya, Fred Rwigyema, Matayo Kyaligonza and Tadeo Kanyakore.

THE SWEARING-IN

On January 29, Museveni arrived at Parliament Building for his inauguration as president. He was dressed in jungle-green military fatigues. He arrived in a black Mercedes Benz and was received by Edward Ochwo, former cabinet secretary during Lutwa's rule.

The presidential oath was administered to Museveni by chief justice Allen Andrew, in the presence of court registrar, Anthony Ochwo.

In his address, Museveni said: "When I was in the bush, I had a lot of pressure from people who said that we should assassinate people like Obote, Muwanga [Paulo] and Bazilio. I disagreed because I argued that when you assassinate people like that, you turn them into martyrs and heroes. What you need is to develop enough strength to enable you to sweep that kind of garbage to where it belongs; on the dung heap of history."

HIS FIRST CABINET

On February 2, Museveni presided over the inauguration of his first cabinet, comprising Dr Samson Kisekka (prime minister), Ssemogerere (internal affairs), Mayanja Nkangi (education), Prof. Shem Masaba (veterinary), Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda (health), Ponsiano Mulema (finance), Robert Kitariko (agriculture), Bidandi Ssali (labour), Prof. Edward Kakonge (local government), Dr Andrew Kayiira (energy), David Lwanga (environment), Sebaana Kizito (regional co-operation), Ibrahim Mukiibi (foreign affairs) and Israel Kayonde (commerce), among others.

PARDONS LUTWA

On February 14, Museveni's office issued a statement offering unconditional amnesty to Lutwa, who was reportedly in southern Sudan. Museveni pledged to accord him amenities such as free house, medical care, a car and military guards. However, Lutwa did not take up the amnesty offer.

Museveni also appealed to Uganda National Liberation Army soldiers to surrender, promising that any of them with a clean record would be rehabilitated and integrated in NRA. To those who would not surrender, Museveni vowed: "We have got the means to crush this criminal gang forever."



Interviewee: Nsibambi

About three months later, the NRA overran Gulu district after three hours of fighting with UNLA fighters. Prior to that, NRA had overrun Mbale in February and Jinja in January.

UK RECOGNITION

Meanwhile, Museveni had diplomatic talks with Libya under Col Muammar Gadaffi, UK under Margaret Thatcher, Cuba under Fidel Castro, among other countries.

In the case of UK, Museveni hosted its minister of state for Europe, Lynda Chalker, on February 12. Then on April 22, UK minister of state for foreign and commonwealth affairs, Mary Young, briefed the House of Lords about UK government ties with Museveni's new government.

She said: "My Lords, there are many ties of friendship between UK and Uganda. We wish Uganda well under its new government after so many years of suffering. We particularly welcome President Museveni's commitment to a stable and united Uganda with full respect for human rights."

A few weeks after Chalker's visit to Uganda, a UK police adviser visited Uganda to report on the need for further training of Uganda Police, a programme which had stalled following the fall of Obote's government in July 1985.

Also in regard to ties between Museveni's new government and UK, on May 1986, Chalker briefed the House of Commons that British military advisory and training team of about 30 personnel would begin training NRA instructors, starting in June 1986.

The writer's book, *President Idi Amin: A Narrative of his Rule (1971-1979)*, is on sale at sh100,000 at Uganda Bookshop, Kampala