

clude on pipelines and refineries with neighbouring countries like Kenya and

Museveni must be saluted for encouraging investment in Uganda

for investors and even the... created a unit under State House to

The participation of President Brahim Ghali of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) at the inauguration ceremony of President Yoweri Museveni held on May 12 at Kololo Independence Grounds has drawn notable attention.

Museveni is a towering figure in regional and continental affairs, widely respected as a statesman, mediator and pan-African leader who has shaped East African stability for decades. He currently serves as chairperson of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), is former chairperson of the African Union (AU), and holder of key roles in Intergovernmental Authority on Development and the East African Community.

Ghali's presence reflected Uganda's long-standing commitment to the principles of self-determination under Museveni's leadership and underscored the continued engagement of influential African nations with the Western Sahara question. Ghali's attendance was prominently featured in Ugandan and Sahrawi media, with coverage showing him participating alongside several African heads of state, including presidents from South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and the DR Congo. Uganda's warm reception reaffirms its decades-long diplomatic relations with the SADR and its consistent support for the peaceful resolution of outstanding African decolonisation matters.

CONTEXT OF THE WESTERN SAHARA QUESTION

Western Sahara remains one of Africa's most protracted territorial disputes. The SADR was proclaimed by the Polisario Front in 1976. While Morocco exercises administrative control over much of the territory (80%) and advances an autonomy proposal, the 1991 ceasefire agreement, supported by the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, envisaged a self-

Ghali at Museveni swearing-in: Affirmation of Sahrawi nationhood

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determination process that has yet to be realised.

The AU continues to recognise SADR as a full member state, consistent with the position of its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

Morocco withdrew from the OAU in 1984 before rejoining the AU in 2017. Since then, it has actively promoted its initiative across the continent, with several countries adjusting their positions in recent years amid evolving diplomatic and economic considerations. No immediate formal reaction from Moroccan authorities has been reported following the Ugandan ceremony.

SIGNIFICANCE

The invitation extended to Ghali and his visible role at this important regional occasion, hosted by a leader of Museveni's stature, affirmed the continued relevance of the self-determination principle in African

diplomacy. Museveni's influence as a respected elder statesman, mediator and current NAM chairperson lends particular value to such gestures, reinforcing Uganda's tradition of principled engagement on decolonisation and African unity. These high-level engagements help maintain the visibility of the Western Sahara issue on the continental agenda and demonstrate solidarity with a people whose legitimate aspirations persist. Such fora provide valuable opportunities for constructive dialogue and remind all stakeholders of the need for a just and lasting resolution that genuinely respects the will of the Sahrawi people.

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

Ghali's participation in Museveni's swearing-in ceremony carries lasting diplomatic resonance. For the SADR and the Polisario Front, it offered a valued platform that reaffirmed support among AU members for the principles of self-determination and decolonisation. For Morocco, the event underscored the importance of continued outreach to build wider consensus on its proposals. African inaugurations hosted by influential leaders such as Museveni serve as meaningful venues for diplomatic engagement and highlight the value of inclusive processes in addressing long-standing issues.

The ceremony also draws renewed attention to the

United Nations-led political process and the need for fresh momentum in negotiations. As observed in my previous article, *Resolutions on Western Sahara Must Reflect Law Not Just Leverage*, "Recent United Nations resolutions seek to reinvigorate diplomacy, but increasingly reflect political leverage and geopolitical alignments rather than the legal principles of the UN Charter."

Far from being viewed merely as refugees in camps in Algeria or dispersed communities elsewhere in the world, the Sahrawi people constitute a nation with a distinct identity, rich history, and a legitimate aspiration for self-determination. Ghali's presence in Kampala serves as a timely reminder that this nation continues to await full recognition and the meaningful exercise of its inalienable rights.

In this context, the exclusion of a figure of Museveni's stature as NAM chairperson from meaningful participation in Western Sahara-related negotiations appears questionable. This reinforces the call for the international community to prioritise the rule of law over geopolitical leverage in pursuit of a just and durable solution for regional stability and African unity.

The writer is an independent analyst & scholar with advanced expertise in governance, international relations, political processes, and conflict resolution.

