

SOME IDEAS FOR A TRULY AFRICAN STATE

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Watching the experiences of our country over the last year some people might believe that democracy has proved a failure. But I believe the lesson to be learned is that while democracy is a good system it must not be unfettered. It is fair for a majority to lead the country, but the majority must be subject to the constraints of a good constitution and proper national laws.

The SPLM cannot be a credible majority unless it is subject to control and scrutiny. We have seen that a quarrel within the party has brought harm to the country and triggered rebellion. A quarrel within the household of the party has engulfed the country in fighting; it has threatened the unity of the Republic and once again the ugly side of tribalism has arisen.

In order to have a credible and modern democracy it may take us 7 - 10 years to rethink how we can best organise our system of government. This should start from the grass roots. The SPLM and other parties should embark on a programme to build our national unity and educate our people of their rights. People need to know that the wealth of the country, all the natural resources, belong to them, not to individual politicians or leaders; because it is for this that people fought, and many of our heroes have fallen.

To protect citizens' rights we must put in strong and independent public services, all of whom seek to serve and protect the rights of the citizens, and are independent of the politicians in Government. Strong and fair law enforcement, based on the rights of citizens, requires an independent judiciary, a police service focussed on putting the rights of people first and an SPLA army, antennal external national security which concentrates on protecting our borders and national security. We also need a strong Parliament of high quality lawmakers who uphold the rights of their citizens.

People in authority should not be benefitting from lucrative business contracts. It is right to emphasise the importance of outlawing corruption and fraud, getting a clear answer from those in authority as to where they got their money from. I think that people should go into politics and the public services to serve the people, not to enrich themselves at the expense of the public.

We need to avoid creating political personalities who are untouchables, putting so-called historical leaders and stakeholders on a pedestal. We must not create a super class of those in authority who think that they are above the constitution and our laws. All of us must be subject to the same constitution and the same laws. It is for this that we fought for decades against the North, when the Southern peoples were treated as second class citizens.

Driving around Juba I see people in important posts travelling in their vehicles. It is easy to recognise them. They are the ones whose drivers ignore the law, exceed speed limits, force other cars into the side of the road, and abuse citizens going about their normal business. It would be a small but clear sign of progress if all this arrogant behaviour were to be stopped by instruction from those in power over them. It would be a sign that those in authority did take citizens' rights seriously.

Speaking of use of the roads, why is the road to the main market in Juba one way, but cars drive both ways on it? What does it say about our ability to run a country if we cannot regulate traffic in our capital city?

At the end of the day our objective is to establish a permanent system of justice and fairness. Our motto is "Justice, Liberty, Prosperity". These are not just words: we need to deliver on all three of these elements. All our education should be composed around them. Politicians should not be afraid to enlighten the people about this; if they do not they will undermine the very aim they have been fighting for. I would rather have citizens who tell me what is wrong with the country than citizens who submit blindly to authority. It's very sad to hear of shooting of Mr Deng Athouai, one of the country civil societies' leader, such criminal acts bring a bad name to our government, and our country. The right to speak is like a Godgiven right to breathe.

We need to educate our people to know how to decide whom to vote for. They should appreciate that they do not need just to vote for an individual on the basis of tribal loyalty, but they should vote for a person on the basis of the good of the country. In other words they should think about voting for a person who is blind to tribal priorities and sees South Sudan as one nation.

Our system at the moment is what I would call an emergency version of democracy, implemented to please western countries who call for the establishment of democracy in Africa. If there is one good thing to be said about the colonial period when we were under British control, it is that the executive directors they set up for each region, district commissioners, understood and acknowledged the role of our tribal chiefs. The tribal chiefs were given powers to solve disputes among our people according to the tradition of the particular tribe. They were also given authority to collect taxes. In recent years we have watered down the role of the tribal chiefs, reducing their powers and diminishing the authority of chiefs not loyal to particular politicians or parties. We have created more chiefs and more counties and payams, dividing peoples further and further. This is wrong at a time when we need unity so badly. It is unwise to speak of creating more federal states and counties when we are not able to pay our Government workers on time.

The role of tribal chiefs remains important. They know very well the mechanisms of how tribes work among those of us who live in the countryside. They are the ones who have kept the peace between different tribal groups over the centuries. We need to use that ancient wisdom of leadership. It is the educated who have brought all the divisions into the tribal setting, leading to the horrible killing that has taken place in Lakes state and other states. We need to find a balanced way of sharing the authority of the Government. We should learn from the tribal system as we also make familiar the modern way of Government, until we arrive at a position where the two systems can be merged to create a true South Sudanese African democracy. We can learn from and take the best from the two worlds, the experience in our African heritage and the modern experience of the Western world. We have so much to teach the West and we are learning from the West. It is global world in which we live. The means of communication are faster and the world is getting smaller.

Giving politicians too much unchecked and unregulated power has weakened our sense of political aspiration and has brought corruption as politicians have started to reward their relatives, clan members and those from their state, with Government positions, to gain popularity in their own constituencies. This has meant excluding those who would be capable of doing those Government jobs

well. This seems unavoidable in a culture that demands allegiance to a person and not necessarily to the country. We need to change that culture.

Many of our able young men and women who return home to make their contribution to the country they love have now gone back to the West disappointed and sad at the way we are treating one another.

I think that in the light of the current debates on how to come out of the December rebellion and to live peacefully again it is important for all of us who are in politics to look back and try to change those practices which are short term solutions and try to think of long term strategies for how to create a modern state. We need systems under which the Government will appoint able people to public posts – people who know where they come from and where they are going, competent to deliver their part of the Government's programme. We must to invite back home again those who are in exile: we need their skills.

The Government needs those competent people to be able to deliver basic services and develop strategic priorities – the elements that make up the modern state. Key aspects include food security, as our people are threatened every year by famine. A nation has a primary obligation to provide good housing and feed its people, and teach them how to feed themselves, by educating them in food production and processing. Then health and social welfare are most important components, in a country that has just come out of war. Education needs to be streamlined to build up teaching institutions to train our people in nursing, teaching, agriculture, administration, computer science, building, construction of roads and bridges, and electric power. If we built these institutions we could be producing an able workforce – and more jobs - within a short period.

But if we continue to employ people because they are our relatives or come from our tribe and not because of their ability and what they can give we will not be able to build up a modern country and solve our current problems.

The Government must focus its citizens on a clear and vigorous programme for regeneration of the country, something for people to direct their efforts towards, and divert their attention from small tribal differences and political issues that are being exaggerated because of lack of hope for the future and trust in their leaders.

I sometimes walk around Juba and into the country and sit under a mango tree for a cup of tea and talk to local people. They despair of everyday life today; but I can see in their eyes the resilience of the South Sudanese and a glimpse of hope in the way that they hold themselves proudly as South Sudanese. A tea lady under a mango tree asked me once: "What is the problem; why are we doing this to ourselves? We have a beautiful country and a good people. I don't understand why we are fighting." Her words gave me hope and determination to continue to serve my country in any way I could.

I think we all have to remember that whatever our circumstances, we are all servants of this country for which we have sacrificed so much, so that we can be what we are today, a nation. It is important that the Government should explain this to the world. There is nothing to be ashamed of. We fought for decades to get our independence and the west should understand that we know ourselves best. It is important for the AU, UN, EU and the US to work alongside us rather than dictating a specific form of democracy that, although good, is difficult for us at this stage to implement. Building democracy takes time rather than being a task to be completed immediately. Our people need to understand what is good and what is bad about it. We all need to understand that we all love our country

and that all of us are stakeholders, simply because all of us have lost loved ones in the process of getting independence.

There is no perfect country but let us endeavour to create that country which will be perfect for us, as we join to solve our day to day problems. We should continue to build a democracy that is suitable for our culture and way of life. Let us stand together and in support of the President and our Government as together we work to bring peace. It would be wrong to be calling for the removal of our very first President – history proves that if we start to remove our leaders by force that will be the means to remove those who come after him. It will be something like a curse. We have seen this in modern times, in Zaire, Egypt, Iraq and Libya.

Zaire has never recovered from the removal and killing of Patrice Lumumba, their first President. Egypt is going through turmoil and has never recovered from the assassination of Anwar Sadat. And so with Iraq after the killing of Saddam Hussein, and Libya after the killing of Gaddafi.

So let us not go down this road. Let us help to advise and direct our leaders to do the right thing in a peaceful manner. Let us turn our backs on violence for we have had enough of it. I ask Dr Riek and those supporting him to drop all their personal demands and join us on the path of reconciliation and dialogue.

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