



GUILD PRESIDENTS' FORUM ON GOVERNANCE (GPFOG)

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STATEMENT BY YOUTH LEADERS AGAINST LIFTING OF THE PRESIDENTIAL AGE LIMIT

INTRODUCTION

On August 1, 2017, we, members of the Guild Presidents' Forum on Oil Governance (GPFOG), a youth-led association comprising of current and former Guild Presidents, Guild Ministers and all youth leaders in institutions of higher learning across Uganda, met in Kampala and deliberated on government plans articulated by its officials including Mr. David Mafabi, the Political Assistant in the President's Office and MPs such as Ibrahim Abiriga, Simeo Nsubuga, James Kakooza and others to amend Article 102(b) of the 1995 Uganda Constitution to lift the presidential age limit.

As youth who form the majority of Uganda's population (78%) and continue to suffer high unemployment rates, high maternal mortality rates, unacceptably high school dropout rates, poor education characterised by low numeracy and literacy skills among other ills, we think that it is unfortunate and selfish of some government officials to make plans to lift the presidential age limit because this will make worse the situation in which citizens especially the youth, women and children in Uganda today live.

We are therefore resolved to do everything to stop the opportunistic plans seeking to remove the only safeguard that would guarantee peaceful transfer of power from one president to another for the first time. We will not allow any amendments to Article 102 (b) and are ready to mobilise other youth to defend the Constitution as is every citizens' role per Article 3(4a) of the 1995 Uganda Constitution.

This is especially so because since amendment of Article 105 of the Uganda Constitution in 2005 to remove presidential term limits, our country has and continues to experience the highest levels of mis-governance in the form of institutionalised corruption, weakening of public institutions and political patronage.

In a country where we have a rate of 83 percent youth unemployment, where over 6.9 to 7 million pupils drop out of school before joining high school, where government has failed to provide a radiotherapy cancer machine for over a year and four months now and where government has failed to pay decent salaries to her workers including teachers, medical officers, judicial officers, and lecturers who are always on strike, we have a patronage system of over 80 ministers, over 400 MPs, over 100 Presidential Advisors and over 100 RDCs.

Uganda also has 117 districts several constituencies and many other things that do not create and increase opportunities for the citizens. Instead, they consume the little resources that are available, resources that escape the “thieves” in government. Political patronage, which is a necessity for leaders with dreams of having extended or lifelong presidencies made possible by constitutional amendments, is responsible for the ills youth and other citizens suffer.

As youth therefore, we cannot and will not allow Article 102 (b) to be amended because it is bad for our motherland Uganda, bad for the citizens and bad for especially women, the youth, children and other vulnerable groups.

In the discussion that we had in our meeting, we show why we take the above stand.

DISCUSSION

- a) The meeting started off with deliberations on the preamble to the Uganda Constitution which reminds citizens about decades of troubled times Ugandan citizens have gone through and how through the Constituent Assembly, the country came together and promulgated the 1995 Constitution. To prevent a return to the troubled times of political and constitutional instability, tyranny, oppression and exploitation, Article 3(4a) empowers citizens to defend the Constitution using all legal means. The youth noted that they were ready to perform their duty as mandated by Article 3(4a).
- b) This call, the meeting noted, was especially important for the youth, women and other Ugandans whose situation of an unemployment rate of 83 percent (for the youth), a failing education system, a deteriorating health system that sees 16 mothers die per day as they give birth, an alarming public debt, low access to clean energy with over 79 percent of Ugandans lacking access to electricity and a degraded environment that can no longer provide food would be worsened by lifting of the presidential age limit.
- c) Moreover, the meeting observed, in 2005, government manipulated Parliament to amend Article 105 to lift presidential term limits. The amendment meant that one of the constitutional safeguards which would have enabled peaceful change from one president to another was removed. Ugandans today and especially women, youth and children are paying a high price because of the amendment with high maternal and child mortality rates, poor education, poor health services, constrained access to food such that by

November 2016, over 1.3 million Ugandans needed food aid and little access to clean energy despite the fact that Uganda is blessed to host the longest river in Africa –River Nile- being seen. Amendment of Article 102 (b) would worsen the above situation, the youth reiterated.

- d) They further noted that there is evidence that in Uganda, seating Presidents have no will to organise free and fair elections. This is why President Yoweri Museveni and others went to the bush in 1981. In addition, in the 2001 and 2006 presidential petitions, the Supreme Court – the highest court in the land- confirmed that the 2001 and 2006 elections were not free and fair. In the 2016 elections, election observers declared that there was no fair play in the elections. The meeting therefore observed that it is necessary to retain Article 102(b) to ensure that a time comes when a seating President can organise an election in which he or she is not a participant to ensure peaceful transition of power.
- e) While participants did not condone violence in any way, the youth noted that they are aware that removal of the presidential age limit will result in violence by the many citizens who are suffering across the country and have hope that Article 102 (b) will bring new leaders with new ideas which may address their challenges. They recalled the July 31, 2017 assault of the Kassanda South MP, Hon. Simeo Nsubuga, by a citizen Mr. William Ntege, alias Kyuma kya Yesu in addition to the reported assault of Hon. Abiriga at parliament.
- f) The youth observed that the above violence and more that would ensue would harm investor confidence and consequently employment opportunities yet today, there is lukewarm interest in key sectors such as that of oil. For instance, since 2012, government has struggled to find an investor for Uganda’s proposed oil refinery to be located in Kabaale-Buseruka, Hoima district. Three consortiums including RT Global Resources, SK Engineering and a Chinese consortium have collapsed or pulled out of deals to develop the refinery.
- g) Moreover, the youth said, removal of the presidential age limit would further political patronage which would see more political offices, districts and constituencies being created at the expense of institutions as the president rewards those who enabled him to stay in power. At a time when our foreign and domestic debt are at their highest, the president will have to rely on hefty cash handouts to manipulate everybody in the country at the expense of building durable institutions of governance, the youth noted.

- h) The meeting further observed that lifting of the presidential age limit is harmful because it will give Uganda's presidents absolute power. With no term and age limits, the presidents who will be assured of lifelong presidencies will not be compelled to serve citizens.
- i) In particular, the youth noted, as the country commences the processes of building oil pipelines and refineries, power dams, and other developments without good governance characterised by transparency and accountability in addition to a strong parliament to check on the powers of a life presidency, Ugandans shall regret why they discovered oil. Youth recalled that oil-rich countries such as Nigeria, Angola, the DR Congo and others have suffered the oil curse because of bad governance spearheaded by presidents who exercise absolute powers.

RESOLUTIONS

In view of the above, we, the youth, have resolved and are calling for the following:

- (i) We will defend and protect Article 102 (b) in order to guard against Uganda's past of political and institutional instabilities, tyranny, oppression and exploitation, and as our duty to promote good governance for the common good.
- (ii) To do the above, we will mobilise fellow youth across the country to support and work with all those who are ready to defend and protect our Constitution and the little progress made.
- (iii) We call upon all political and other persons including ministers, MPs and others to put a stop to any plans to amend the Constitution and lift the presidential age limit for the common good.
- (iv) Finally, we call upon President Museveni and his government to clearly state that Article 102 (b) will not be amended and to say no to all those plotting to derail our country back into turmoil.

For God and our country.

The Guild Presidents' Forum on Oil Governance (GPFOG)