OPPOSITION RESPONSE
TO THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS 2016
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BY
HON. KIIZA WINFRED (MP)
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION IN PARLIAMENT

AUGUST 2016
The Right Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Members,

Allow me to convey my heartfelt congratulations to you, Rt. Hon. Speaker, and to all of you my colleagues, Honourable Members of Parliament, on having successfully made it to the 10th Parliament. I also congratulate those who have been elected or appointed to various important offices in this Parliament. At this moment in our Nation's history, I need not emphasize the great responsibility that we have to make our country a better place for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren.

Hon. Members, I bring with me warm greetings from the people of Kasese, who once again gave me the opportunity to serve my country as their woman representative in this 10th Parliament.

I would like to thank the leadership of my party, the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), for having placed their trust in me to lead the Opposition in Parliament. In a special way, I want to thank the FDC President and former Army Commander, Maj. Gen. Gregory Mugisha Muntu.

I cannot underscore the significance of my appointment as the first woman Leader of the Opposition in Parliament since independence. For that honour, I am profoundly humbled and deeply conscious of my personal responsibility to be a shining star for all the little girls and young women across this great country that aspire to the top leadership of our country.

Before I go further, let me use this opportunity to pay tribute to the many families who have lost their loved ones who have been in the public service of our country. I will particularly single out our military families who have lost their loved ones at the frontlines in Somalia, South Sudan and other missions abroad where our military are making a contribution to save lives and contribute to regional peace, security and stability.

[In their honour, may I invite you, Hon. Members, to rise up and observe a moment of silence]
Right Hon. Speaker and Hon. Members, I bring to you greetings from our former presidential flag bearer, Col. (Rtd) Dr. Kizza Besigye. I am sure many of you and the majority of citizens across this country know that, had it not been for the fraud that was committed prior to and on February 18, 2016, probably Dr. Besigye would have been the one delivering the 2016 State of the Nation Address. His continued incarceration on trumped up charges and restrictions on his freedoms and rights epitomizes everything wrong with the direction democracy in our country has taken.

Right Hon. Speaker and Hon. Members, on May 31, 2016, President Museveni delivered his annual State of the National Address. This was his 21st State of the Nation Address since the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution. To put this in perspective, a Ugandan child who was born since the promulgation of the 1995 Constitution and is 21 years old and about to complete university, has never listened to any other Ugandan deliver a State of the Nation Address as President.

The tragedy of this situation is that the quality of Mr. Museveni’s address can only be judged against his own record as his longevity in power has denied our children including some in this House any other point of reference.

Hon. Members, this very important tradition of an annual State of the Nation Address is commanded by Article 101(1) of the 1995 Constitution which states that “The President shall, at the beginning of each session of Parliament, deliver to Parliament an address on the state of the nation.”

In my understanding, to qualify for a state of the nation address, that address should not only be delivered at the beginning of the session of Parliament, but it should also address a number of important elements, among others:

i) The state of our democracy;
ii) The health of our economy;
iii) The state of service delivery;
iv) The state of our national defence and security and;
v) Our nation’s standing in regional and global politics and diplomacy.
Because Parliament appropriates financial and other resources for the running of Government, the State of the Nation Address represents an account of what was accomplished by Government during the previous year. It is not an inaugural speech of a leader or a catalogue of his achievements since the 1986 military takeover of the state.

Through the State of the Nation Address, a president inspires an entire nation by acknowledging unavoidable pitfalls, but more so, by articulating new policies and the big ideas necessary to create prosperity for the majority of citizens. The State of the Nation Address is an opportunity for a president to share with Ugandans his or her vision of the future and rally everybody around that vision.

The 2016 State of the Nation Address by the President has many of these elements scattered in its 28 pages. For purposes of ensuring clarity, my responses are organized according to the aforementioned elements.

**The State of our democracy**

Rt. Hon. Speaker, let me state here for the avoidance of doubt that democracy is not some grand idea delivered to us by self-styled freedom fighters, or something that is just written in a political party manifesto, or something that exists just because some person called a president has said it exists. Democracy entails the following:

- Sovereignty of the people;
- A government based on the consent of the governed;
- Majority rule where the rights and voices of the minority are respected;
- Guarantee and protection of fundamental human rights;
- The rule of law, including equality before the law;
- Constitutional limits on government;
- Justice, freedom and representation;
- Regular, free and fair elections.

Even in its narrowest sense, the NRM 10-Point Programme stated that “For democracy to be meaningful and not a mockery, it must contain three elements: parliamentary democracy; popular democracy and a decent level of living for every Ugandan.”
The idea of popular democracy is rooted in the concept of a regular, free and fair election. Under our Constitution, an election that does not meet the three-way test standard does not qualify as an election.

I found the President’s reduction of democracy to having different groups represented in Parliament not only astounding but also a profound misunderstanding of the concept. And for a country to have a president understand the meaning of democracy in that narrow sense should be frightening to all of us!

Right Hon, Speaker and Hon. Members, the state of our democracy is in peril. After many years of progress, we saw a systematic and orchestrated coup against the people of Uganda.

For five years, the Government has failed to undertake comprehensive electoral reforms to create a system that ensures a free and fair election. It ignored the majority of Ugandans who adopted the Citizens Compact on Free and Fair Elections which was presented to Rt. Hon. Jacob Oulanyah, who then, like now, is the Deputy Speaker of this House. We have seen the Electoral Commission conducting business as if it were a department of the ruling party. And we have seen security forces deployed to harass citizens and contain expression of popular discontent.

Rt. Hon. Speaker and Hon. Members, the February 2016 debacle that passed for an election is the clearest indictment of the state of our democracy. The over 90 parliamentary election petitions, the over 25 elections that have been nullified by the courts, and the others yet to come are a clear indictment of our electoral system. Both the President and legislators can opt to hide their heads in the sand as the proverbial ostrich and pretend that our democracy is on course but the diagnosis reads differently.

The stolen 1980 elections triggered a resistance war that consumed the lives of over 500,000 Ugandans and resulted in a ruined economy. This resistance has metamorphosed into a defiance campaign where citizens are rising up to defend
the Constitution as commanded by Article 3 of the Constitution.

Right Hon. Speaker, our democracy today is in the intensive care unit. Rather than join the President in his state of denial, I implore this August House to refocus its attention on building the pillars of our democracy that I have outlined above.

I particularly call upon you Members to demand that this Parliament does not complete its first year of service without focusing on the range of political and electoral reforms, including those proposed by citizens in the Citizens Compact on Free and Fair Elections.

As you are aware, the term of the majority members of the Electoral Commission is expiring in November this year. I implore this House to ensure that it does not consider any proposals for appointment of new commissioners until Government has brought a Bill to this House and we have enacted an appropriate law that guarantees the independence of the Electoral Commission.

Rt. Hon. Speaker, durable democracies are built on the foundation of strong institutions, not strong men and women. Our country is facing a major challenge whereby state institutions have been brought to their knees.

The capture of the Uganda Police by militias and criminal gangs that are putting honourable men and women of the Uganda Police in disrepute epitomizes this decay. As we speak now, I am aware that Makerere University, the symbol of academic excellence in our education system and other public universities, is on its knees. Strikes at Makerere University and its fight for academic excellence can all be mentioned in one sentence.

The President’s response to systemic institutional failure is to ask the UPDF to take over these institutions. With all due respect, Rt. Hon. Speaker, I believe that deploying the officers and men of the UPDF to run a health centre III, as we have seen happen in the case of Nakawuka, only highlights the crisis of institutional failure that we are confronted with. The UPDF will not execute wars, quell demonstrations, handle disaster, command creation of wealth, run health centres and may be teach at Makerere.
However, when you look at it in the broader scheme of things, it constitutes the deepening of militarisation of our lives or what some commentators have described as a military coup that has been creeping in this country. As you are aware, in any military coup, the military captures and takes over the running of all state institutions and facilities, including civilian institutions.

Rt. Hon Speaker, this is the state of our democracy. This House is empowered by Article 79 of our Constitution to “make laws on any matter for the peace, order, development and good governance of our country. Under clause 3 of Article 79, “Parliament shall protect this Constitution and promote the democratic governance of Uganda.” Protecting the Constitution is the oath that made us full Members of Parliament.

I believe that this House, instead of protecting the Constitution, has always willingly accepted to be conscripted in the game of shifting the goalposts of our constitutional guarantees. The removal of term limits from the Constitution in 2005, one of the fundamental building blocks designed to ensure orderly transfer of power, constituted a failure in our responsibility to protect the Constitution. Imagine the honour we will receive if we are the Parliament that restored the presidential term limits in our Constitution.

Today, sponsored loud voices about removal of age limits are already sounding across this country and some of us the protectors of the Constitution are involved, hiding behind voters as we perpetuate the unending coup against the Constitution. When that time comes, Rt. Hon. Speaker and Members will not say that I didn’t alert you.

Rt. Hon. Speaker and Hon. Members, I cannot leave this point without informing you that the FDC former presidential candidate, Col. Dr. Kizza Besigye, has won himself space in the Guinness World Records book as the most imprisoned political opponent.

His supporters and other Ugandans are about to also make a record as the most battered citizens. Police brutality and terror can only breed more terror. We want to thank this Parliament for having condemned this brutality.
We are relieved that some elements of the police militia that have been passing for senior police officers have been subjected to disciplinary procedures. We hope the ministers of internal affairs together with the Inspector General of Police, General Kale Kayihura, the real architects of this brutality, will also face sanctions over these crimes against innocent Ugandans.

Seeking to blame and demonise Col. Besigye, a victim of this brutality, is the highest level of hypocrisy by the President.

Remember this; Besigye is not only a former personal doctor of Mr. Museveni but a Luwero bush war hero, a former minister and NRM Political Commissar. It is not possible that he was a good man while serving the NRM and Mr. Museveni and now a devil because he is pointing out its mistakes. What about Rt. Hon. Amama Mbabazi? Amama also used to disparage Besigye when he was seated where Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda is seated today. You have a duty to sanitize politics because tomorrow you may find yourself on our side.

The State of our Nation’s Economy
Right Hon. Speaker, let me start by acknowledging the progress with regard to efforts to grow our economy since Mr. Museveni came to power in 1986. The numerous economic reforms helped our country achieve sustained GDP growth over a period of two decades, until slowdown set in, sometime around 2010. Since then and throughout 2014/15, the economy continues to suffer from tremendous stress. A proper diagnosis of the health of our economy will highlight the following ailments:

More than two decades of jobless growth – as you are aware, the 2016 Uganda Country Economic Memorandum published by the World Bank and the Government of Uganda presents compelling evidence of slowdown in GDP growth, which has remained below the 7% average since 2010. The President correctly called our country a supermarket. The only characterization he missed is that it is a big supermarket run with a kiosk mentality. And believe me; if you have a manager running your supermarket for 30 years and it still looks like a kiosk, then you need to realize that you should have changed that manager much earlier.
The structure of our economy is changing but it is not transforming. Currently, the services and industry sector contribute more to our nation’s wealth. The contribution of agriculture to GDP has declined considerably over the years. While government continues to celebrate this as an achievement, they rarely point to the fact that over 68% of our labour force is still locked up in the agricultural sector.

No chest-thumping can change the fact that in spite of the constant sloganeering; entandikwa, modernization of agriculture, bona bagaggawale, prosperity for all, operation wealth creation and now hakuna mchezo something, the majority of our people remain trapped in subsistence, low output agriculture.

Rather than focusing on the capitalisation of UDB to provide low interest loans to agriculture, we implore government to, in addition, establish a National Bank for Agricultural Transformation as the epicenter for agricultural finance delivery.

We intend to table a Private Member’s Bill entitled Land and Agricultural Bank Bill so as to establish the Uganda Land and Agricultural Development Bank to facilitate land acquisition, agricultural entrepreneurship, food security and industrialization.

Development of Agricultural Insurance Regulations needs to be undertaken to address the heavy losses arising from inclement weather and streamline operation of agricultural insurance products of banks, insurance companies and farmers. This would be in line with NDP II strategic objective of developing and implementing a national policy on insurance for key sectors of the economy such as agriculture.

We are a generation that is stealing from our young people – all evidence shows that our generation is growing younger, diverse and with fewer opportunities. I don’t know what words I can use to explain to the President and his leadership that for them to understand that human development is much more than the production of goods and services, or the building of roads, dams and bridges, or the mere rise or fall in national incomes. By failing to invest in
our children and young people by giving them a quality and holistic education and letting our roads and dams and bridges be built by Chinese, Japanese and European engineers, we are stealing from them.

On employment, the over 83% unemployed persons deserve more than the rhetoric of job creation over the years. Programmes like Skilling Uganda must be actualised and supported. The size of Uganda’s young and potential working population is an incredible demographic window of opportunity. However, most of the policies pursued by the incumbent regime are designed to harness youth into patronage networks as tools for regime sustenance rather than supporting them to become active citizens, contributing to the transformation process of the country.

An imprisonment trap was set for poor youth through the provisions of loans under the Youth Livelihood Programme. The unemployed youth were required to have formal associations, business plans, bank accounts and in some instances proof of credit worthiness.

To some, funds were advanced without any form of training and mentorship. As a consequence unemployed youth across the country are being imprisoned for failure to repay the loans particularly in the districts of Tororo, Pader, Bukomansimbi, Bushenyi and Lwengo. Surely, how can the high unemployment rates among the youth in Uganda be reduced through imprisonment?

We must pursue policies that seek to promote a uniform approach of youth and women development by all agencies of the state, the civil society and the private sector and also support interventions aimed at creating new, decent and well-paying jobs.

We are sinking deeper in debt and mortgaging the future of our children - Rt. Hon. Speaker, as of 31 March 2016, Uganda’s total public debt stock (domestic and external) was UGX 27.4 trillion (USD 8.1 billion) compared to UGX 21.5 trillion (USD 7.3 billion) by end of March 2015, indicating a 27 per cent increase over the past one year.
Out of this, total external debt that is both disbursed and outstanding was UGX 17 trillion (US$ 5.0 billion) while domestic debt was UGX 10.4 trillion (US$ 3.1 billion).

Currently 62% of the public debt portfolio is denominated in foreign currency (external debt) while 38% is Shilling denominated (domestic debt). Hence part of the increase in public debt has been due to the huge depreciation of the Shilling that hit the country over the past one year and Government’s external borrowing for investment in huge infrastructure projects mainly in the transport, energy and oil sectors. The increase in public debt repayment commitments leads to reduction of shareable revenue.

It is worrying that most of the infrastructural projects that require counterpart funding are highly underfunded. As a consequence, there would be penalties in form of interests due to non-disbursement of funds, delayed implementation resulting into increased costs arising from inflation tendencies and exchange volatilities.

**Land grabbing by the state and those with powerful political connections is putting our people at risk and undermining rural productivity** – Politicians and state functionaries have sponsored or consented to all forms of land grabbing or encroachment on major ecosystems ranging from forest reserves to wetlands, community land and land belonging to public schools, hospitals and local administration.

Communities across the country are distressed as they fight to ward off regime motivated enclosures of public and community lands. The mantra that such land grabs are necessary for private investments not only highlights the regime’s profound misunderstanding of how to transform a country with its peoples, but it is also consistent with the regime’s ideology of grabbing everything that constitutes public property.

We propose a reorganisation of the land sector agencies to establish a Public Lands and Assets Trust, whose immediate task will be to develop criteria for accessing public land.
Rt. Hon. Speaker, management of oil revenues is not only a matter of economics but also politics. No wonder President Museveni claimed personal ownership of Uganda’s oil. On the prospect of oil revenue, excess earnings or boom are expected. This raises the temptation to spend more on infrastructural development, reduction of taxes and increment of salaries among others than saving hence a deficit bias. President Museveni emphasized that the anticipated oil revenues would easily fund roads, railway, electricity, irrigation, education, health as well as innovations.

Rt. Hon. Speaker, as Uganda prepares to start oil production that is anticipated to generate revenue boom, there is need to set a fiscal rule enshrined within a law. This would ensure that the fiscal rule is not subject to frequent revisions that undermine fiscal credibility with investors and businesses.

The fiscal rule will set a multi-year numerical constraint on government finances hence governing oil revenue expenditure as well as conduct of the institutions and oversight bodies that will be responsible for implementing the rule. This would be in line with the revenue management principles i.e. managing revenue volatility, avoiding dependency and saving for future generations as articulated in the National Oil and Gas Policy as well as Oil and Gas Revenue Management Policy.

An allocation formula of petroleum revenues from the petroleum fund to petroleum revenue investment reserve needs to be set so as to ensure precision of how much is available for appropriation to the national budget i.e. infrastructure and development projects as articulated in Section 59(3) of the Public Finance Management Act, 2015.

As the country awaits the development of Petroleum Revenue Investment Policy as required in Section 63(1) of the Public Finance Management Act (2015), there is need to set long-term targets for the investment reserves. It is imperative to note that macroeconomic stability is a must target for it drives the economy.

We also would like to see more deliberate actions to promote transparency in the decision-making processes in the oil and gas sub-sector. Recruitment of
top leadership for oil sector agencies and the issuance of production licenses should have been subjected to open public hearing processes. We also wish to encourage Government to pursue the processes of becoming a member of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) as it committed itself under the 2008 National Oil and Gas Policy.

**The private sector is hurting**
The proposal to develop industrial parks complete with requisite utilities will be supported. However, land in these designated areas needs to be competed for by investors. This would curb the growing trend where land allocated to investors is not developed or has been transferred to another investor without the approval of government. Section 40 of the Land Act needs to be amended to provide for a maximum lease period of 49 years instead of 99 years so as to reduce incidence of idle and absentee landlords.

Rt. Hon. Speaker, the annual private sector credit growth declined during FY 2015/16 from 20.2% in June 2015 to 8.7% in March 2016 on account of weakening demand for credit due to rising interest rates. The quality of loan assets also declined over the same period with the ratio of non-performing loans to total loans increasing from 3.8% in June 2015 to 7.0% in March 2016. Premised on this, the media in July has been awash with the prospect of bailing out a number of indebted companies that had failed to repay their loans.

Although bailouts have been used worldwide to redeem indebted companies, it is crucial to emphasize that they should only be considered for businesses that have wide spreading linkages and are not a victim of poor governance. Besides, there are a multitude of small and medium enterprises that are also indebted and selective consideration of companies to bail out would not be fair. A bailout criterion is a must.

The call on government agencies to procure locally made products is a welcome move. It is our prayer that this call does not become a repeat of the 1986 pronouncement that all agencies including State House would purchase furniture from Bwaise, in Kampala. The pictures beaming from State House
and other government departments however show furniture and other items customer-manufactured in Asian and European countries. The quality in furniture and other products has greatly improved and we therefore support any effort to “buy Ugandan, build Uganda”.

There should, however, be deliberate mechanisms to bolster production both quality and quantity as well as monitor compliance to standards. One such mechanism is strict adherence to the provisions of the Public Finance and Procurement regulations to allow for prompt payments to suppliers and avoid domestic arrears as well as strengthening the agencies responsible for enforcing standards. These payments cannot be left to pronouncements in the Budget speech and State of the Nation Address.

The above notwithstanding, the President’s directive to government to negotiate with banks not to attach assets of individual persons or companies that owe them money simply because they supplied and have not been paid by the same government is untenable.

Not all the debts owed to banks by these targeted individuals or companies are as a result of unpaid supplies to government departments. However, we agree that companies in debt as a result of trade instabilities in South Sudan should be verified and helped out to secure their due payments through bilateral negotiations with the Government of South Sudan.

**Corruption and patronage has become a cancer** – no matter how many political declarations that Mr. Museveni has made, he doesn’t seem to see that corruption and patronage are standing in our way of progress. I don’t think he gets it. Like we stated in our campaign manifesto, those who steal public funds and public assets are stealing from Ugandan taxpayers who have to endure surviving in a hostile economic environment and a distorted taxation regime. They are stealing the future of our children. Yet, the corrupt are enjoying their honeymoon under Mr. Museveni’s leadership. His political rhetoric has been a constant feature of his addresses for the last two decades. Why does he think Ugandans should believe him this time around? Does this House believe Him?
Mr. Museveni has made lamentation about the problems facing the country as part of his policy response. You all recall how he appointed a commission of inquiry into the work of UNRA. The commission found that over UGX 4 trillion which should have built over 5000 kms of roads was swindled. You recall the famous more than UGX 24 billion meant for Mukono-Katosi Road that disappeared into thin air. The levels of theft of public funds have reached frightening levels that Mr. Museveni needs to take political responsibility for the failures of his government to tackle this cancer.

We believe that there is need to take decisive, bold and immediate actions to make corruption, embezzlement of public funds and stealing of public assets risky business. Besides the usual political rhetoric and declarations, the State of the Nation Address did not articulate any new measures to decisively deal with the haemorrhage of corruption.

The leadership of the Opposition in Parliament will work to achieve the following:

- Introduce a motion demanding government to rationalize the mandates of anti-corruption agencies, remove overlaps and improve efficiency in their operations.
- Build more active partnerships with anti-corruption civil society organizations, including citizens’ anti-corruption movements such as the Black Monday movement.
- Introduce a motion to demand that any public official against whom an official inquiry regarding abuse of public funds and abuse of public office has been instituted is required to resign from office until the completion of such inquiry.

At a general level, the GDP growth from UGX 6 trillion in 1986 to UGX 74 trillion in 2014 sounds impressive. However, Mr. Museveni’s address only deals with half-truths; it does not explain that we are more indebted today than we were in 1986.

That we have even surpassed the 2006 level of indebtedness when we had to plead for debt forgiveness under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) is alarming. At over $8 billion dollars in debt, every Ugandan, including children, is indebted to the tune of close to UGX 1,000,000. Worse still, The
President’s address does not acknowledge that approximately 43% of Uganda’s 34.6 million people are hanging on the cliff of poverty.

I applaud the President for outlining a range of measures to deal with the current economic slowdown. We particularly share the President’s passion for accelerated and sustained investment on transport and energy infrastructure. However, these measures do not go far enough.

Programmes that put money into the pockets of Ugandans must accompany these measures. At this moment, what is needed are measures that are specific, time-bound and comprehensive to have a significant, transformative effect on the economy and the lives of our people. I propose the following measures and policies to tackle the current economic malaise:

i) Reduction in the cost of government – The government, particularly the political leadership and local government bureaucracy has become very big and inefficient. Why have we as Parliament become blind to the fact that the size of this House and the Executive bureaucracy is expanding on the backs of our citizens and taxpayers?

ii) Accelerate the implementation of the Skilling Uganda Programme – As most of you are aware, Government applied for a loan from the World Bank, which was approved by the World Bank Board of Directors around June 2015. The loan approval request spent almost 12 months in this House. Even when the loan was finally approved, the process of establishing the necessary implementation modalities is proceeding on a very slow pace. Any delays in the implementation of this programme does not only demonstrate the levels of inefficiency we have become accustomed to under the current government, but also denies our young people the opportunities to prepare themselves for the job market.

iii) Affordable agriculture financing – I applaud Mr. Museveni for continuously reminding himself and his government that one of the major bottlenecks to agricultural transformation is agricultural financing. He has said this since he launched the Plan for Modernization of Agriculture in August 2008. Since then, his actions have often been in the form of slogans:
entandikwa; bona bagaggawale; prosperity for all and now Operation Wealth Creation. When sloganeering becomes a substitute for public policy, then you know a country is headed for stagnation at best or disaster at worst. This House must demand from the President an appropriate plan with clear milestones and time-bound targets on establishing and delivering an affordable financing plan for agriculture.

iv) An infrastructure transformation plan for Kampala – We believe that Kampala remains our high intensity economic zone. A laser-focus to transform the city infrastructure to reduce traffic congestion, facilitate easy mobility of labour, goods and services, reduce flooding and sanitation-related ailments could unlock more economic potential of our capital city. This House should demand to see a plan for Kampala and allocate adequate funding for such a plan.

The state of service delivery
The primary responsibility of Government is to ensure that the citizens access the minimum quality of public services that enhance their dignity, expand opportunities and improve their standards of living. Accountable governments and responsible leaders often focus on continuously improving the quality of public services especially in education, health, water and sanitation.

It is regrettable that the president paid very little attention to appraise the nation on the state of service delivery in the country. Yet our people are suffering because of public service delivery system that has broken down. Indeed, it is inconceivable that one man and one “party” can run government for 30 years and you don’t find any service delivery system that works. In spite of 30 years of investment in education, health, water and sanitation by both government and development partners, you hardly find systems that work.

I hope that one day, Mr. Museveni will realize that running a country is not about building a school here, a health centre there or a road somewhere, but rather building institutions and systems that endure. The ad-hoc manner in which this government transacts business epitomized in Mr. Museveni’s firing of health services staff at Nakawuka Health Centre III in Wakiso district only demonstrates
the depth of the breakdown of our service delivery system. Our people are not looking for firefighting actions but rather bold actions that constitute a rebooting and resetting of the way government functions.

Indeed, Rt. Hon. Speaker, it is painful talking about the health sector of this country. We call upon government to step up efforts toward revitalizing the health sector. The attempts to forcefully spin off the filth in these health facilities during the last electoral process exposed them the more, starting with Abim Hospital. These facilities must return to the past glory of the 1960s and 1980s, when they were healing rather than death committal chambers they have become today.

A number of health facilities in the country are in a deplorable state. They are largely characterized by understaffing, delayed salary payments, inadequate accommodation and inadequate equipment. As a consequence, the doctor–patient ratio stands at 1:1,298 against the recommended 1:439 by the World Health Organisation (WHO). Staffing at local government level is at 49%.

It is interesting to note that despite these appalling statistics, our government bureaucrats have negotiated with countries as far off as the Caribbean to export the few medical personnel, in the name of a better pay.

For national referral hospitals, the hospital:population ratio is 1:30,000,000 whereas the standard should be 1:10,000,000. At the level of Health Centre IV (HC IV), the ratio is 1:187,500 whereas the desired ratio should be 1:100,000. For Health Centre III, the ratio is 1:84,507 whereas the optimum should be 1:20,000.

There is an increase in quack medical personnel who extort money from the public and make wrong prescriptions. It is unbelievable that 60% of medical personnel lack basic tools of work such as uniforms.

Many of the government health facilities operate with non-standardized X-ray units. As a result they were ordered by the Uganda Atomic Energy Council to close their X-ray sections facilities due to non-compliance to radiation safety standards and expired licenses. This has made accessibility to X-ray services hard
for poor patients, adversely hampering effective diagnosis and treatment. On 27 June 2016, the Atomic Energy Council published a list of only 229 facilities authorized to possess and use radiation sources as of 22 June 2016. Majority of the facilities were privately owned. Out of the 14 Regional Referral Hospitals, only 6 were authorized to operate X-ray services, i.e. Fort Portal, Jinja, Kabale, Lira, Mbarara and Mubende. None of the national referral hospitals is licensed to handle radiation sources.

The introduction of Universal Primary Education, Universal Secondary Education, Policy of a Technical School in every sub-county, and the numerous University support programmes was and remains a step in the positive direction. These interventions would boost our regional and global competitiveness if only our government interested itself in issues of quality, allocated commensurate resources and ensured inspection.

The introduction and implementation of UPE is billed as the signature policy accomplishment of the NRM. We cannot be oblivious of the fact that only 25% of our children complete primary education and an estimated 18,594,745 children are unaccounted for between Primary 1 and Primary 7 since UPE was introduced in 1997 up to the cohort of 2009 which sat for PLE in 2015. This is a real tragedy for our country and this is the state of the nation. It is therefore unbelievable that Mr. Museveni talked about education in passing without articulating any measures to reverse this situation.

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Indeed, the low levels of completion especially at primary level, technical skills training; school infrastructure development and staff welfare especially in hard-to-reach areas should be systematically addressed.

Rt. Hon. Speaker, Hon. Members, how many of us in this House would willingly allow being treated in the health facilities in our constituencies? How many of us can be proud of the institutions that have been built in the last 30 years?
Can our children go to the same UPE schools that our voters use? If the answer is no, then Parliament must commit to ensuring that the challenges raised above are addressed mainly through appropriation measures.

The State of our National Defense, Security and Peace

Rt. Hon. Speaker and Hon. Members, a nation’s defense and security is dependent not only on the strength of its security forces but also on the prosperity and patriotism of its people. While the strength of our security forces is one of the pillars for our national defense and security, prosperity and patriotism are the foundation on which these pillars must stand. But more importantly, sustainable peace is built on a foundation of justice, equality and equal opportunity.

Without a doubt, Mr. Museveni’s government has contributed to establishing peace and stability in the country. And for this, the President should be applauded. More so, the men and women who serve in our security forces should be congratulated and we should remain eternally grateful for the sacrifices they make together with their families.

Let me therefore emphasize that the absence of war or insecurity should never be equated to sustainable peace and stability. Our task today and in the future is to strengthen the foundation for sustainable peace and shared prosperity. These cannot be achieved by putting more armed men on the streets of our cities. It can only be achieved when those who are charged with the honour of public service respect the dignity of our people and when government pursues policies that deepen the sense of justice, equal opportunity and shared prosperity.

The reliance on military hardware to secure an electoral victory, the recent scenario where Kololo ceremonial grounds were instantly turned into a military garrison, and the police occupation of FDC headquarters are all symptoms of an uneasy peace and demonstrate the cracks in our national defense and security architecture. A government that loses the will of the people cannot, on a sustainable basis, defend a country against foreign aggression. And that is the state of our nation today.
Our nation’s standing in regional and global politics and diplomacy
To the credit of government and Mr. Museveni in particular, our country has continued to project and offer leadership regionally and internationally. Our presidency of the United Nations General Assembly concluded with the adoption of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our leadership in ensuring regional peace and security is fairly well recognized.

However, this House must become more assertive in demanding for accountability and compliance with the law regarding the deployment of our military on foreign missions. Increasingly, our armed forces are deployed on these missions without appropriate parliamentary approvals. We want to encourage the President that the constitutional requirement for deployment of our armed forces is not to curtail missions that promote the national interests of Uganda but rather, to create the checks and balances that are essential for the validity and success of these missions.

Priority legislation agenda
In his address, the President outlined the priority legislative agenda of his Government. We particularly want to emphasize the need for prioritization of legislation that addresses three important areas:

i) Governance related legislation – to ensure that we strengthen the foundation and build the pillars of our democracy. Let me emphasize once again that noise coming from the battlefields of Kyankwanzi about the removal of age limit from the Constitution should be resisted by this House as part of our duty to protect the foundations of our democracy.

ii) Secondly, let’s prioritize the enactment of legislation that create and expand economic opportunities for our people given the stress that our economy is in. Without attempting to exhaust the list, let me point out the following key economic pieces of legislation that should be fast-tracked:

a. Agriculture Extension Bill
b. Fisheries Amendment Bill
c. National Coffee Bill
d. Uganda Construction Industry Commission (UCICO) Bill
e. The Engineers Registration (Amendment) Bill
f. Climate Change Bill

h. Consumer Protection Bill

g. The Cooperative Societies Amendment Bill

iii) In each of these pieces of legislation, what we would want to see are measures to promote and support economic activities by the private sector and individuals, as well as measures to promote local content in the various industries, including the oil and gas sub-sector. Thirdly, we need to prioritize legislation that will boost the quality of education system and skills training programmes. We will therefore unreservedly support the following legislative proposals as pointed out by the President:

a. Amendment of the Universities and other Tertiary Institutions Act

b. National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) Amendment Bill

c. Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) Amendment Bill

I have laboured to present these legislative priorities in clear categories because as Parliament, we should begin to demand from Government a more organized legislative agenda addressing priority sectors in a comprehensive manner. There is no reason why Government should not develop a package of legislation for a particular sector so that Parliament can handle these laws in a more systematic and coordinated manner.

Right Hon. Speaker and Hon. Members, our country is at a critical junction. The President talked of a country that is moving towards achieving middle-income status in about three years’ time. He seems to be reading from a script that is different from the ones many Ugandan households and business people are reading from. The private sector is hurting and the economic pain is beginning to spread across the various segments of our society—from individual households to the business community. The only place that is shielded from the current stressful economic realities is State House where we collectively pay the shopping bills.

Our democracy is either at a standstill or is simply in retreat. We can’t afford to have contested elections every five years and abuse our security forces to sort out the mess. As politicians, we have a responsibility to fix the cracks in our electoral system and restore confidence in our citizens and Ugandan voters.
We are therefore calling for a credible national dialogue process that will bring all Ugandans on the same table where we can talk about these issues in a sober, constructive and honest manner. This dialogue goes beyond us who periodically compete for political power. We should see our business people, religious leaders, youth and women, and the civil society being part of this dialogue about the future of our country.

Finally, the well-being and prosperity of Ugandans must come ahead of our political beliefs and affiliations. It is in this spirit that we hope for continued engagement with the government for the betterment of the lives of Ugandans.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

Kiiza Winfred (MP)
Leader of the Opposition