



# ODREK RWABWOGO

## CHAIRPERSON

### PACEID

#### **Remarks at the Uganda Diaspora Summit Speke Resort Munyonyo**

**18th Dec 2024**

The Permanent Secretary (PS), of the Uganda foreign ministry, Mr. Vincent Bagiiire who invited me to speak here, the Ambassadors attending this meeting and you the participants. I thank Vincent for his unusual approach to diplomacy by breaking traditional bureaucratic barriers to reach out to our ordinary citizens abroad and bring them home for a good discussion about their role in their country. This is good and we should applaud it because when civil servants break routine and see outside of their confines, they help us generate new ways to grow their institutions and the country.

Speaking from a strategic perspective viewpoint, there are four things it seems to me the West and much of the developed world, mainly sees and seeks from a relationship with Africa. First is the matter of disease control and containment of viruses and bacteria. Given there are still vectors and unknown diseases from a rich tropical Africa, the west would want very much to contain at source and protect their fragile, wealthy ageing populations. They do this by sponsoring and/or conducting research as a measure to study and know how to contain outbreaks. Partly, this is why they sponsor health and education programs either as grants or loans to governments in Africa. Those who might hold a contrary opinion might want to present it but they should there is such a thing as enlightened self-interest and you shouldn't take it lightly. I do not find that many policy makers and businesses in the west care much about the continent from a mutually reinforcing perspective between the two peoples. The second one is to contain terror threats within the regions of Africa and not allow these problems to spread to the western countries. In countries which have been partly misgoverned with the West's acquiescence or tacit approval, there are large swathes of ungoverned territories that become by extension, breeding grounds of radicalized groups. If you are able to contain the spread of these negative ideas in Africa, it doesn't matter who is in government or which money you give

to Africa, as long as this helps to push back these negative ideas. I suspect this is partly the reason a number of these western countries give military assistance. In giving this military aid, the west is able to create a buffer in men, equipment and training between them (the west) and the bad ideas that generated September 9/11. This way too, they can check what they worry about as Russian or Chinese influence in Africa. This unequal partnership also helps them as the West to gather intelligence on our thinking and our allies and what we see as the future of our world.

The third reason I suspect as a basis of our relationship is the West's need to secure a reliable source of green energy supporting minerals for lithium batteries, satellite technology and high value semi-conductor industry raw materials. As the world narrows down to the power of computing, computer chips and data, rare earth minerals such as neodymium, Cassim and rubidium – these last two used in atomic clocks and navigation satellite systems, cobalt, nickel, manganese etc., key ingredients in the satellite and drones' technology sourced from Africa, becomes crucially important. Oil and gas, gold and diamonds have been as battlegrounds for the last 100 years but these new rare minerals are now taking their place because many sources in the world have put a ban. China is one of these that has put a ban on any export of these. Africa is the only open place for these kinds of exports, sadly with no value added.

The fourth reason is the security of food and water on our planet. As the world's population keeps increasing there are fewer sources of fresh water and large tracts of land for agriculture and often with food that have no chemicals or not genetically modified. This is why organics in food has gained great currency in the west. Your country Uganda is one of the world's well-watered nations on earth with more than 41,000 square kilometers of fresh water yet producing so little catch at 120,000 tones and earning a miniscule USD130m. Some countries in the world that have only 20% of this kind of resh water produce a million tons of fish and pull in USD2bn. Where people have no knowledge or are disunited by small things or are quite attuned to shallow thinking, those who know in our world, will circle like vultures above to make a killing. This fear of food is why our food faces still climb in western markets because the famers there are bulwarked with a USD360bn mega subsidy yet they send us money for workshops on how lizards' mate and how to raise rabbits as if we don't have our cultural foods!

## REMARKS AT THE UGANDA DIASPORA SUMMIT SPEKE RESORT MUNYONYO

If they love you Africans very much, the first act of solidarity is to remove subsidies in their agriculture so we can level with the farmers. Japan which sells you Toyotas keeps a stringent subsidy on her rice and has no intention of relenting on this.

Now, if the four things I mentioned matter to you as the diaspora, from a strategic sense, how do you raise the quality of thinking in your actions, coordination and leadership, wherever you have been dispersed to ensure you bring better action home? When I walked into this room, I found my friends from the student leadership days, Aggrey Kibenge, the PS of Labour and gender talking about Ugandan migrant workers' rights in the middle east and the wonderful work he is doing. Well, perhaps you should know rights are protected by respect of the dignity of an individual and the latter comes from taking up and owning responsibility for the actions that generate labour leaving our country. Top of this is an economy or African economies that don't generate jobs fast enough to catch up with our birthrate. That is why you see me and my team work hard on generating export revenues for our country. We have urbanized without industrialization the reason you see slums in African cities and our small middle class consumes with western appetite without similar western means to production and productivity as the late Mazrui used to say. In my opinion, the African's biggest issue is dignity. When people care about their dignity, they work hard together to find solutions to underlying structural problems of their societies. In our world today, if you touch an American, Chinese, Russian, India etc., their governments will come running but if an African is killed anywhere, who makes their case? How do you make a case when you are 54 different fiefdoms competing against each other in a world that is consolidating its capacity in science, technology, wealth and power? When you lack knowledge and you are poor, you do not matter and your rights are not respected; and sometimes we even transport ourselves to death through the oceans on rafts.

Therefore, for me, diaspora is not colour or country of birth, for if it were so, I would not consider African American brothers and sisters, Indian, Arab, Portuguese and European brothers and sisters. They are our diaspora too if they are allied with us in thinking. Diaspora, for me, is a cause, it is a shared purpose and it is the creation of meaning for your people of the black race, regardless of how you are perceived wherever you are placed in the world. It is not what we face but how we respond that matters in the end.

You should see smaller countries that have strong lobbies in the developed world in order for you to understand that unity on what really matters, gets you to punch above your size and weight. I have shared with you my strategic concerns. These concerns pose an existential threat if not addressed collectively. I now want to ask you to do three things from an operational perspective as diaspora, for Uganda and Africa.

First is to understand the markets you live in especially in the west. We have worked hard on pointing out and researching these markets for our suppliers, we are working on standards and infrastructure, we can now provide export underwriting for orders and invoices, but I would be very much gratified, if we work together on pulling resources to finance an instant or soluble coffee plant in Uganda. Yes, I know there are many small roasteries of USD250,000 now in the country but they won't give our country scale on our coffee sales. A soluble coffee plant is bait USD60m (about UGX200bn) and I can work with you on both the stricture and thinking and how to raise money together, if there is leadership among you. Mzee Mwalimu Nyerere showed us in 1963 that it is doable. He took on the Brooke bond coffee plant and renamed it Africafe and made it turn out instant coffee exports. It is still the largest we have in East Africa here in Bukoba. It was the same approach he adopted on textiles, the reason you Kangas for exports and cashew nuts from Tanzania. He didn't get all things right but his heart was in the right place on what is clearly strategic for African raw materials just like President Museveni, his protégé.

Second, I want you to adopt a Great Lakes Identity not the identity of these little groupings I see of Banyankore Kweterana, of Toro community, of Baganda in diaspora, of Basoga Beene, Bakiga etc. Please listen and understand me well here: To aim at bigger picture, does not mean you do not know your roots. It is simply a realization that these markets and countries you are in, see black people not Batooro. They care less about your little groupings and we too care less. We want to build a bigger and powerful Africa free from prejudices and being stereotyped by other people. I am now 55 and I have full knowledge of my family, at least from my father's side from 1856. I can name all the people in four generations and I speak my language, know much about my food and our community folklore and dances. This does not make me belong to groupings of Banyankore or stereotyping others.

## REMARKS AT THE UGANDA DIASPORA SUMMIT SPEKE RESORT MUNYONYO

It simply gives me a base to unite with other Africans to present to the world a higher value proposition on unity, no borders, African markets etc. and solidarity with other peoples of the world.

For if these small groups were important to us, why didn't they give you the knowledge and wealth needed to process our raw materials and protect us from being traded as slaves or colonized by other people? Once beaten, twice shy. Let us unite as a diaspora under larger platform and not narrow, belittle and undignify ourselves in the eyes of the world.

Third and finally, is the nature and type of communication you the diaspora often makes about your own country. People who do not know about Uganda and Africa get their information from the kind of conversations we hold at home and amongst us as communities. Every country and society hold difficult conversations about itself to resolve internal disagreements. They do these conversations as a family at dinner tables not with cameras on the streets and often many of these cameras capturing lies about each other. Uganda is going through a population, technical, economic and political transitions. We are not where we were 15 years ago but that is not a license for groups to lie about the country and hurt the food from farmers on the market and tourism for the hospitality industry. When some people lie about the country, they hurt mothers in Masaka whose pineapples cannot be bought because of home shot videos that have no basis of truth, they impair the reputation of a country for investment and deny young people jobs. Please talk to each and resolve differences. There is no need to fear each other. We cannot resolve problems by social media. The country is bigger than your likes on your Facebook or followers on your X account.

I hope to hear from you with answers to the requests I have made

The Lord God keep you all

Sincerely,

  
PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR