

## Democracy prevents conflict among nations



**By Rosa Malango,**

UN Resident Coordinator | UNDP Resident Representative

Today, Uganda joins the rest of the world to commemorate the International Day of Democracy. This year's theme, *Democracy and Conflict prevention*, highlights the critical need to strengthen democratic institutions as a foundation for promoting peace and stability. This is an opportunity to reinforce the realization of SDG 16, "*Milaala, na Bwenkania Na Bitongole Binhwevu, as it would be stated in one of the local dialects, Lusoga*. These values are also enshrined in the United Nations Charter and the aspirations of Uganda's Vision 2040.

Recognizing the indivisible link between conflict prevention and peaceful societies, the 2030 Global Agenda addresses democracy in Sustainable Development Goal 16. The goal calls for the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, access to justice for all, and building of effective, accountable institutions at all levels.

### **State of Democracy in Uganda**

Uganda's Vision 2040 underscores good governance as the backbone of transformation. Since 1992 Ugandans have been reaping the fruits of decentralization as a form of governance. This governance system brings services and government closer to the people, enabling representation, participation and involvement in decision making. It also provides an opportunity to invest in

communities and their ability to be resilient in their pursuit of sustainable economic development.

The space for civil society contribution and engagement with Government on development initiatives is also evolving. Over the years, a cross-section of Civil Society Organizations and non-state actors, have led the effort to mobilize greater civic participation and debate on topical issues. Key among these has been the first ever issues based Presidential debate which took place in 2016 transmitted by tv led by the Elders Forum of Uganda and the Inter Religious Council of Uganda with support from United Nations Development Programme.

Like most nations, Uganda still faces a number of challenges in galvanizing democracy. The 2016 Democracy Index that measures dimensions such as Electoral processes and pluralism, Functioning of Government, Political participation, Political culture and Civil liberties, places Uganda in the hybrid category. The other categories are: full democracy, flawed democracy and authoritarian. The hybrid categorization for Uganda means that there have been significant gains and there is room for improvement.

For instance, whereas Uganda has extensively established democratic structures and proposed several political reforms, a shift from highly commercialized politics to issue based politics remains desirable. Similarly, cost effective democracy and a highly civic conscious public would be of benefit to the democratization and development of Uganda.

### **Opportunities for strengthening democracy**

There are several opportunities for Uganda to continue making strides toward realization of full democracy that ensures peace and development; they include upcoming key processes such as the envisaged Constitutional Review Commission, Local Council 1 and 2 elections, electoral reform proposals, regular reviews of the decentralisation architecture, among others. These present opportunities for the government, parliament and citizens in general to strengthen Uganda's democracy. On the other hand, the upcoming National Dialogue is an opportunity to reinforce

indigenous conflict transformation capacities as a foundation for consolidating democracy, resolving grievances and enabling a developed and resilient Uganda.

The affirmative policies in the area of women and youth empowerment as well as the inclusion of marginalized groups are another opportunity to ensure the advancement of the principles of democracy and conflict prevention in line with Uganda's vision.

### **UN contribution to democratisation in Uganda**

The United Nations is working with the Government of Uganda on a number of interventions to improve the state of democracy, reinforce conflict prevention and accelerate sustainable development. Inspired by Uganda's National Development Plan II and based on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) as well as the 2030 Global Agenda, UN agencies in Uganda (UNDP, OHCHR, UN WOMEN, UNICEF, ILO, UNESCO and WFP, IOM, WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, FAO, UNHCR) are working to consolidate rule of law, constitutional democracy, peace and justice.

For economic development and transformation to become sustainable, there should be full confidence in democracy, rule of law, justice delivery systems, effective institutions and a peaceful environment. The United Nations remains committed to walk shoulder-to-shoulder with Uganda on its path to full democracy and sustainable development. Together we can leave no one behind!

### **About Democracy Day**

On November 8, 2007 the United Nations (UN) general assembly passed a resolution for the annual commemoration of September 15<sup>th</sup> as the Democracy Day. The UN called upon all governments to use the day to reflect on the development of national programmes aimed at promoting and consolidating democracy. Several international instruments such as the United Nations Charter, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to mention a few, speak to the centrality of democracy in the well-being of Society. This is in view of the fact that democracy

facilitates legitimacy of sovereign states, effective participation, inclusion, protection of rights, the common good and therefore advancement of any nation. The 1995 Constitution of Uganda also recognizes the importance of democracy in Uganda's social and political order and underscores the commitment to building a better future based on the principles of unity, peace, equality, democracy, freedom, social justice and progress.

Observing the International Day of Democracy therefore goes beyond celebrating democracy in itself, but also includes reflecting on how the promotion and upholding of the core aspirations of democracy can be realized without leaving anyone behind: national governments, cultural leaders, civil society, individuals and international community. Today is an opportunity to raise public awareness about achievements in democracy, its meaning and importance in Uganda's history. It is also an opportunity for Ugandans to renew their commitment to contribute to the various initiatives to promote democracy informed by your values and aspirations.