

Ugandans to the rescue



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It's the truth: Coups and assassins are again knocking on the door

POSTED BY MUSA

it was reported in January that the American Congress had directed the Obama Administration to 'tightly' watch Uganda's preparation for the 2011 elections, there was a lot of excitement among the opposition.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, was required to keep the lawmakers up to speed on the electoral process starting in March, detailing a closer scrutiny of candidates' security during campaigns, independence of the Electoral Commission, the hygiene of the voter register, media freedom and citizens' right to political assembly etc.

Mr Olara Otunnu, a presidential candidate on the Uganda Peoples Congress ticket, while appearing on Straight Talk Africa, described the directive as a "milestone because for the first time the Museveni regime is being held to the same electoral standards as other governments." He added: "...up until now, the regime has enjoyed scandalous exceptionalism, particularly concerning democracy, human rights and corruption. This is the beginning of the end of that impunity."

It appeared like an audacious follow-up to the statement in Obama's inaugural speech in which he promised to extend the frontiers of freedom. Similarly, in a speech delivered in Ghana last year, Obama identified promotion of democracy as one of the key pillars of Washington's renewed engagement with Africa.

One cannot tell what Otunnu felt when the same Clinton praised President Museveni recently amidst 'concerns' about the independence and impartiality of the Electoral Commission, freedom of assembly and the media, etc. What is obvious is that America's mode of dealing with 'troublesome democracies' has not changed much. There will always be general statements that sound sweet and a few actions like withholding aid or travel bans that look good. But practically, the weight of matters concerning regime change lie with those that bear the load of a dictatorial regime – the citizens.

With the increasing electoral pressures that the Obama administration is facing at home; 'small matters' like the democracy of banana republics will continuously be relegated to the status of 'any other business' on the agenda. African countries like Uganda will be left to their own devices when it comes to determining who leads them -as the case should be.

Trouble is that the conventional way through the ballot is becoming increasingly irrelevant. Elections are now an expensive shambles intended to keep those in power where they are, a position that they misuse to abuse that power to disempower citizens. Despite the fact that economies are growing at an average of five per cent for the entire continent, the gap between the rich and poor is widening.

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Since the leaders can cheat their way to leadership, they are not accountable to anyone. They are therefore under no obligation to deliver services. Gradually, when the remnants of pretences in the electoral process as a method for appointing and changing regimes fizzle out, we shall revert to the bad old ways.

Already, Mauritania (August 2005), Madagascar (March 2009), Central African Republic, Guinea Bissau, Principe and Sao Tome, Ivory Coast have, in the post-‘wind of change’ era, demonstrated a willingness to change government by force of arms, confounding those who claimed that Coup d’etat were ‘a thing of the past.’

It would not be wishful thinking to assert that now more than ever, assassins and coup plotters are warming up. For if they ever swung into action, they will find the open arms of discontented and frustrated people who will view them as an alternative to the tragic comedy that dictators have made out of electoral democracy