

SPEECH BY MAMA MIRIA OBOTE IN HONOUR OF THE FOUNDING FATHERS OF THE EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY, AT ARUSHA TANZANIA 31ST MAY 2015.

Introduction

We are delighted, humbled and honoured, to stand before this august EAL Assembly representing our Founding Fathers of the East African Community, comrades Dr. Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta and Apollo Milton Obote.

As far as the Obotes are concerned we are true East Africans because of the long experience of living, studying and working in East Africa. Dr. Obote lived and worked in Kenya in the 1950s when the Mau Mau struggle was taking place and had the golden opportunity of meeting the legendary freedom fighter, Dedan Kimathi.

When political activities were banned in Kenya, the focus shifted to social clubs and Dr. Obote went on to head the Kaloleni Social Club. Later the ban on political activities was lifted and Dr. Obote together with other Kenyan nationalists went ahead to found K.A.U, the Kenyan African Union. Dr. Obote was even elected Chairperson of the new party and he led the successful campaigns for the late Tom Mboya's entry into to the L.E.G.C.O.

I, myself am equally a product of the East African spirit and Kenya. My late father Blasio Kalule was an employee of the Kenya-Uganda Railway and we lived in Nairobi, Kenya, for a while.

With the advent of exile in 1971 to 1980 we lived in Tanzania and during our second exile, 1985 – 2005, we lived in both Kenya and Zambia. Our children have studied in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, thus our association with both the old and new East African Community.

I need to inform you that my late husband Dr. A. M Obote had his view of the African Union. When we got married we went for our honeymoon in Ghana with Nkrumah and Nigeria with Tafawa Balewa and ended up in Ethiopia with Haile Selassie.

He embarked on a strong move to develop Uganda very quickly after independence. His achievements were so good that the President of Singapore, Lee Kwan Yew, after one of those Commonwealth Heads of State meeting, had to fly

to Uganda to learn and take the blue print of our development plans which he wanted to copy for Singapore. In fact Singapore copied our education programme. Our first priority programme was to build one nation with one people.

We thank, in particular, and appreciate the Governments of Tanzania, Kenya and their people as original members of the East African Community who truly understood the social-political challenges of Uganda. They welcomed, sheltered and catered for our people as political refugees. This spirit of togetherness was extended to Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the new South Sudan. Not only for receiving and hosting refugees but also for walking the extra mile and facilitating peace talks, for example:-

- The Moshi Conference of Ugandan exiles in March 1979
- Okello – NRM/A peace talks in Nairobi, 1985
- Rwanda peace talks in Arusha
- Burundi peace talks in Dar-es-Salaam and Nairobi
- South Sudan – Sudan peace talks in Naivasha and Nairobi

We thank you for your good neighbourliness, as the saying goes, “a friend in need is a friend indeed”. Asante sana na Mungu Awabariki.

Historically the need for integration in East and Central Africa has been there. The area that was rapidly exploited was long distance trade, as it used to be called. The Sudanese visited East Africa for trade; the Nyamwezi of Tanzania connected the interior with the Coast, the Kamba of Kenya used to link up with Banyoro and Baganda traders. All this was mainly in the pre-colonial times.

With the eventual colonization of East and Central Africa, a new momentum towards integration was ushered in. The Germans embarked on the construction of the Central Railway of Tanganyika; the British started on the construction of Uganda Railway from Mombasa to Uganda; and The BSA Company also moved ahead with a railway from South Africa to Northern Rhodesia (Zambia).

By 1917, a Customs Union was formed between Kenya and Uganda, which Tanganyika joined later in 1927. The then East African High Commission operated from 1948-1961 and subsequently it was upgraded into East African Common Services Organization from 1961-1967, which finally gave birth to the East African Community in 1967. Early in 1950s a British Official talked of the formation of an East African Federation similar to the Central African Federation.

Unfortunately, the Buganda Kingdom over-reacted at such a proposal and demanded re-assurances that it would never be brought up again. The main issue of the Buganda Kingdom's concern was the possibility of the 'settler politics' of Kenya taking root as the white supremacist policies had in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia.

As the independence struggle advanced, Tanganyika under Comrade Nyerere, delayed their Uhuru, to enable Kenya and Uganda to come on board, resulting in Tanganyika gaining Independence in 1961, and the union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar (Tanzania) in 1964, Uganda in 1962 and Kenya in 1963. The Founding Fathers, we are honouring today accelerated the level of talks towards the East African Community that eventually was born in September 1967.

Working on their common historical heritage, the sphere of East African integration extended to cover a wider range of areas. Arusha was the Headquarters of the East Africa Community (E.A.C). I remember with nostalgia East African Airways headquartered in Nairobi, and East African Railways and Harbours were headquartered in Dar-es-salaam, Tanzania, and the East African Posts and Telecommunications in Kampala, Uganda. Other areas that brought a sense of oneness were the East African Examinations Board and the East African Court of Appeal, the East African flying School in Soroti, East African Library Board, the East and Central African Challenge Cup in Football, etc.

The advent of Idi Amin's coup in 1971 destroyed the spirit of the East African Community and led to its eventual collapse in 1977. (It has to be recalled that by 1971 Zambia was seriously considering joining the East African Community.) By then the giant steps of the East African Community in the development of the region as explained by H.E. Dr A. M. Obote:- **".....this leads me to another endeavour in the field of economic cooperation, East Africa, that is in partnership in the East African Community have succeeded to negotiate with the European Economic Community an agreement whereby the three East African states have been accorded associate status in the European Economic Community sometimes called the common market."** *Source: Communication from the chair of the National Assembly by the Hon Dr. A. Milton Obote, M.P. .President of the Republic of Uganda, on the occasion of the ceremonial opening of Parliament on 20th April, 1970.*

The early 1980s combined the issue of compensation and re-opening talks for the revival of the East African Community that was later fully reborn on 30th November, 1999. H.E. Dr A. M. Obote reflected on the experience that "the

demise of East African Community will no doubt go down in our history as a great tragedy....as soon as the situation has been stabilized and once normalcy returns in Uganda, I shall, even as a private citizen, take the initiative in approaching our two former partners in East African Community and the Government of Uganda to meet in the cause of re-establishing the old relationship.” *Source: Dr Milton Obote’s Speech at Kololo Airstrip, Kampala, Uganda, 7th June 1980*

Today the need for a re-energised and fully functioning East African Community (E.A.C) is an absolutely necessity with the growing challenges of the times. For example security matters are high on the agenda with global terrorism a major concern. Then there is the issue of economic investment for projects like oil refineries; oil pipelines, the Standard Gauge Railway, agricultural research, food security and climate change etc.

We are very grateful for E.A.C and EALA for recognising the contribution of our founding Fathers, Comrade Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta & Comrade Dr. Apollo Milton Obote and we are also thankful to the Almighty God for having kept us alive as former First Ladies of the Independent East Africa, Mama Maria Nyerere, Mama Ngina Kenyatta and I.

With regard to what the East African Community must achieve or my cherished aspirations, we have to encourage all measures that will improve on our communications and transport networks. We also need to improve on our telecommunication network and transport. It should be easy to send and receive mobile money from one East African Community country to another; this would have a huge impact on economic growth. Today one mzungu has developed a system where money can be sent and received from abroad to East Africa. Can’t we develop an EAC system to send and receive money amongst ourselves? *****

We need to move much faster to have an integrated syllabus and curriculum. This would stabilise the labour market within the East Africa Community as it was in the days of the East African Examination Board. For instance a majority of Ugandans have never learnt proper Swahili. We are now learning proper Swahili in schools and in the public engagement. This is the best way towards integration.

We are tasking the new East African Community to work extra hard to create more and more employment opportunities especially for the youth in the region. This can be achieved through joint or common East African Community investments such as the ongoing projects between Uganda and Tanzania for the

proposed pipeline, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania and Kenya for the Standard Gauge Railway; Kenya, Ethiopia and the new South Sudan for the Lamu Port. The clear call should be an intensification of efforts across various fields to make our region more integrated.

We also need to encourage not only domestic tourism but also inter-state tourism in order to help our people get to know each other and learn how they live in our East African region.

Finally I would like to end with a historic message in form of advice: **“Although it is normal to think and talk of one’s own country because of the greater knowledge one has of that country, it is far nobler to transcend this temptation for purposes of achieving the aims and objectives of our efforts in building the community.”** *Source: opening ceremony of East African Legislative Assembly, in Kampala on Tuesday 11th November 1969, H.E. Dr. A.M. Obote*

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

MAMA MIRIA OBOTE

FORMER FIRST LADY REPUBLIC OF UGANDA