

# A new Civil Rights Movement for Africa

by Godfrey Binaisa

*Mr. Binaisa is the former President of Uganda.*

To introduce myself, I happen, by accident of birth, to have been born in a country known today as Uganda. I lived there, I grew up there. In addition to many other things, I'm a prison graduate of the maximum security prison in Kampala. I was locked up by the British for about one year before independence. I got my impetus to fight for independence, to join the national struggle, from West Africa, by reading the newspaper called *West African Pilot*, which used to be published by Dr. Nambia Sekué. That newspaper used to change hands so often in Uganda, that it always ended it up in tatters. Because it was banned by the British, we were not allowed to read it, it was too revolutionary.

Then we got our independence in 1962, when I happened to have been appointed the first indigenous Attorney General. I held that post for five years, until I resigned on my own accord to go back to private law practice.

I come here to inaugurate the founding of the civil rights movement for all of Africa. That is my purpose here. That was my purpose recently in Sweden, where I went as part of a delegation with the Schiller Institute. I came to this conclusion, after seeing that there is no other way. Thirty-five years ago, most black African countries gained their independence from their colonial masters. All we witnessed, was a lowering of the national flags of the colonial master over our skies, and the replacing of those flags by our little national flags, our little national anthems—and the big Mercedes-Benzes of our Presidents and ministers.

We did nothing more than that, because as soon as we got independence, we found in place the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank, which had been established in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, in the United States of America, in 1944. They were established without consulting any of us, because it was 15 or 16 years before any of us became independent—beside Ethiopia and Liberia, which were already independent. Perhaps Egypt, you may say, but in many other respects, also Egypt was still suffering from the agonies of being semi-independent.

The World Bank and the IMF are doling out money to us, under very strict conditionalities, which have to be observed by us African countries. It's a question of "take it or leave it." And we can't leave it. It's a question of telling you that, as long as you pay interest, you can take some time

before you pay the principal. It's the question of the IMF being a debt collector for the big banks in the West. That's how it is. Some people say, "Oh! The IMF in some countries has done wonders." I don't know of a single country where the IMF has done wonders, except in some isolated examples. But even in the colonial days, remember that there were some colonies which were governed slightly better than others. That didn't mean that the colonial system was a good system of government, just because Colony X was governed slightly better than Colony Y. Therefore, that argument doesn't hold much water.

## 'It is up to us to decide'

Now, to come to the second phase of our liberation. The reason why I'm launching this Civil Rights Movement for the whole continent is that, to me, this is the last mile which all of us have to travel if we are to reach the goal of total liberation of Africa. We have to reach that goal by traveling this very last mile. We have to engage the former colonial masters in debate. Some of them don't even want to think; they are afraid of being engaged in debate. They just say, "Oh! this is impossible. This can't change." But just as with the colonial system itself, before we became independent, none of these colonial masters ever came to us to say, "Colonialism is bad," "I'm quitting tomorrow," or "I'm quitting next week." None of them ever did that. It was we, Africans, who said that. We said, "We are tired of colonialism." The famous African-American freedom fighter, Frederick Douglass, wrote: "It's up to us to decide the limits of our endurance. It's up to us to decide."

When we decided, we got independence, on paper only, but we got it. None of you can tell me that the British, the French, the Portuguese, the Spanish, ever woke up one day and made the announcement that they were granting independence to A, B, or C. They were forced into it, because the nationalists engaged them in furious debate. Some of the nationalists paid the ultimate price: with their lives. Some paid the price of being incarcerated to long prison times, paying heavy fines, being beaten. But at the end, what happened? Once the agenda for independence was agreed upon between the political parties and the colonialists, there was a lot of friendship. I remember in 1957 seeing pictures of Kwame Nkrumah, in English papers. He was nothing but smiles. You couldn't even have believed that the same Kwame Nkrumah had been imprisoned by the British authorities in what we used to know as the Gold Coast.

Because the agenda had been agreed. What I'm saying to the former colonial masters, is, "We are not your enemies." It's they who want to be our enemies. We've been their friends for so long that we are getting a little tired. Some time ago, they used the color of the skin as some kind of excuse. But I ask them: Suppose all of you here were white people. Wouldn't it be so boring to look everywhere and see nothing but all white faces? But just because of this mixture of color,

the world looks so beautiful! We are like a forest. All the flowers in a forest are not the same color. Beauty does not rhyme with uniformity of color. So it's only a stupid person who thinks about color as meaning something very much.

They don't want to engage us in debate. I am prepared to argue with any of them, anytime, anywhere. And many other Africans are ready, prepared, and willing, if we only give them a chance.

I regard the Civil Rights Movement as the second milestone toward our total liberation, in the same way we regarded the first milestone of getting independence by kicking the imperialists out of our countries, by having our sovereignty given back to us.

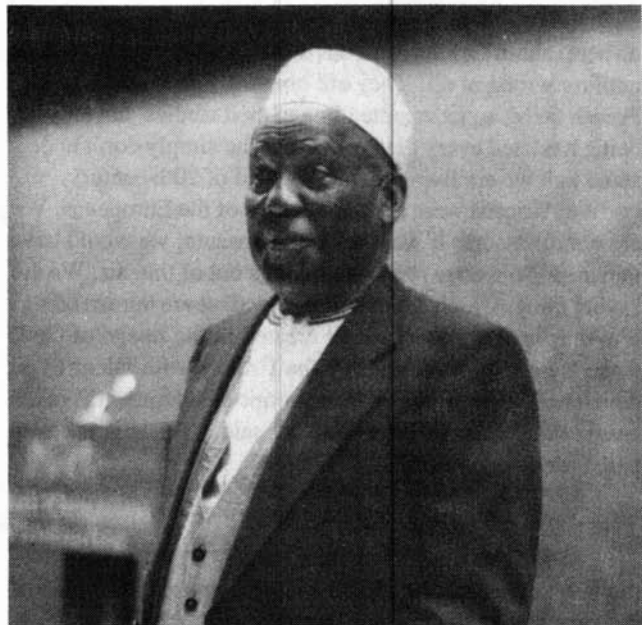
### **The Civil Rights Movement in America**

People in America, where I live, understand the Civil Rights Movement. It was started a long time ago. The person who gave it a lot of impetus was Martin Luther King, Jr., and his colleagues. There are Civil Rights laws, beginning with the major act of Congress in 1964, followed by all the amendments that followed. So, we have something concrete, something written out in law, something which includes [laws against] discrimination according to color, according to gender. For instance, in the IMF, you have to be a Frenchman, i.e., to be French and to be a man, to be head of the IMF. There is no civil right there. And you have to be an American citizen to head the World Bank. This shows that even the so-called advanced countries are not all that advanced yet.

Consider the United Nations. What I call the Victors Club, i.e., the permanent members of the Security Council, are only the victors who won the war against Germany and Japan. And although some of those victors haven't got the economic strength of the vanquished, still, because they were victors in 1945, they are entitled to the permanent seats. My question is: How permanent will they be? Is there no need for change at all after 50 years of the same faces, the same ideas, most of the time stale ideas? In the democracies in the West, elected officials must go to the people to get fresh mandates. But that is not so for the U.N.

In the same way, we Africans have got to stick to the IMF, because somebody in Bretton Woods in 1944 came up with the idea, and therefore we are saddled with it. But what happened in 1944? U.S. President [Franklin] Roosevelt met with Sir Winston Churchill to inaugurate the Atlantic Charter. Roosevelt was trying to prevail upon Churchill to tell him that there was no use continuing with the colonial system anymore. But all those good wishes which President Roosevelt expressed were nullified, as we know, by all these conditionalities, by what happened later.

Today, we are being frustrated. Another person who stood out was President Kennedy. He also stood out when he was a senator. He spoke about freedom and development in the colonies. He continued the same policies until he was mowed



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down by bullets in Dallas. The other person who stood out was Charles de Gaulle of France. He stood against his own fellow countrymen, generals in Algiers, he said, "Enough is enough! I'm granting independence to the French colonies." Remember what happened when Sekou Toure led Guinea Conakry out of the French Union, and got independence.

### **The truth must be told**

We are not against all whites, not at all. We know some people who have done some very good work. Now, we have confidence in President Clinton. He has expressed an opinion that World Bank and the IMF deserve another look. There are many other people of the same view, like Lyndon LaRouche of the Schiller Institute. These are not Africans. Make no mistake, Africans are not stupid. They are fully aware of who is on their side and who is not, and also they are aware of a vast number of people in the West who know the truth and hide it. They only tell you when they are in private. Then they'll say, "Yes, I understand what you are saying is the truth, but I dare not to say that, because the people won't buy newspapers. The people in the West are only used to buying garbage. Therefore, I give them the garbage they need. They don't need the truth anymore." So that's what we are told.

This is a terrible commentary on the world today, in the late 20th century, when man is supposed to have been making progress for the last 2,000 years. I hope that since we now have a Gaullist in power in France, President [Jacques] Chirac, he will follow the great statesman Charles de Gaulle and imple-

ment the policy of de Gaulle, and stop all this nonsense going on here, about kicking Africans out of France, who have done nothing wrong at all. They are obeying French law, paying French taxes, some are attending to their studies, but they are being harassed every day by people who simply don't understand that we are living toward the end of 20th century.

We Africans were contemporaries of the Europeans. We are not dinosaurs. If we had been dinosaurs, we would have perished. So we are not saying things out of thin air. We are saying things which are the truth. Since we are human beings like they are, since we are all created in the image of God, since we are all bestowed by the Creator with talent to be developed, we are entitled to economic development. We are entitled to peace; as Pope Paul VI said, "Peace is the new name for development."

### The attack on Rwanda

I will tell you briefly about a country which is so dear to my heart. You may have read a letter I wrote to the youth of my country, regarding the Republic of Rwanda, which is next door to Uganda. Without shame, Armed Forces of Uganda, in broad daylight, attacked the sister Republic of Rwanda, in violation of United Nations Charter and of the Organization of African Unity Charter. Why? You may say because the President of Uganda was chairman of the OAU. And the man who was the secretary general of the OAU, Salim Ahmad Salim, was his personal friend, and another personal friend was President [Julius] Nyerere of Tanzania. So you can see the conspiracy going around.

And then, the people who gave it all the impetus it needed to take off, were the British Intelligence Service. They knew what was happening. Recently, Baroness Chalker said, "In any case, the Africans in Rwanda were too many." So they can get rid of a few millions, the world won't be worse off. . . . This is the attitude, and yet the British press did not pick up this story, they never told us how this war started. They only said it was a "civil war." I ask them: Have they ever seen a civil war starting from outside the country? Did the American Civil War start in Mexico or in Canada? This was an attack. And they tell us now, that there should be a genocide tribunal to try the Hutus.

In fact, without even the trials, they are already dying by the hundreds. According to my information, between 10 and 20 Hutus die every day in the central prison of Kigali, which had been built for 800 people but is now housing more than 10,000. There is only standing room there, no sleeping room. We are told that the genocide tribunal will try the people who are suspected of having participated in this outrageous crime of genocide.

But the U.N. resolution that set up this genocide tribunal, after the experience with Hitler, says, "Not even a head of state will be spared." But, today, we have never heard about the instigators in Rwanda, the aiders and abettors, those who procured counsel. Where is [Ugandan President Yoweri]

Museveni himself, where is his chief of staff, where is his Defense Council, where are members of his cabinet, under the principle of collective responsibility? Will all these people appear in the dock? We are told: "No, no, no. Don't talk about that, that is too much!" That's not too much at all! Already the Hutus have suffered a lot, even the Tutsis have suffered. I'm not trying to say that no Hutus are guilty. But by the same token, there are also Tutsis who are guilty.

Is this U.N. tribunal going to be fair? Is there going to be a fair trial? This is why, on Aug. 22, 1994, I had the guts to write a letter to the *New York Times*—it was published—suggesting that no international tribunal was going to solve this question. What Africa needs is an African solution that can only be found in reconciliation, in arbitration, and in mediation, by Africans themselves.

I would suggest as mediators, people such as Archbishop of Capetown Desmond Tutu, a very high-level, respected theologian; my friend here, Chief Ojukwu, who, as leader of Biafra, went through this same problem and has learned a big lesson—he is today a member of the Constitutional Conference in Nigeria—who could make a wonderful contribution to these warring factions; Leopold Senghor, the former President of Senegal, who is a francophone African leader, highly respected. These people could go into Rwanda, and Burundi, before it busts. But everybody is now waiting until Burundi explodes. And then, they will wring their hands and they'll say, "Oh! We didn't know. This is too much."

Now, the only thing we can do is to launch a Civil Rights Movement and do it in the same way that we launched the movements to fight for our independence 35 years ago. And then pressure the powers that be, because some of them are still amenable to debate or to reason. Even in England, I know some people in Parliament who would welcome a reconciliation tribunal. The mediators could also decide who should be charged and who not. Because with the U.N., who is going to say that this Hutu is guilty and this Tutsi is innocent. . . ? The U.N. hasn't even told us whether the defendants, i.e., the Hutus, will even get due process. They haven't told us if the U.N. will finance the defense of the Hutus. Otherwise, the Hutus are just as good. If I were a Hutu, I would not even answer to my name. I would stand mute, as we say in law, if I am already a condemned man.

In conclusion, all we are interested in, is to create a New World Economic Order, by way of a Civil Rights Movement, because this is the only movement that will not discriminate because of color, religion, or tribe. We, the Africans, are the only ones who are still called *tribes*. But by *tribesman* is meant someone so backward that he is not even a human being. Some missionary books that I have read say that the African is poor because he is backward, and is backward because he is poor. Where do you go from there? And if you want to get out of the whole thing, you are not desired any more in France or in Europe. The African is not wanted. But your gold or your diamonds or your timber, they still want it.