**UGANDA’S CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN POLICY**

**UNDER THE NRM GOVERNMENT:**

**A BROAD OVERVIEW**

**A paper presented to the Uganda Council on Foreign Relations (UCFR)**

**By:**

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**Regional Affairs**

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**The Chairman of the Board of Trustees, and Members of the Uganda Council on Foreign Relations;**

**The Heads of Diplomatic Missions present;**

**The Honorary Consuls;**

**Heads of International Organizations and CSOs;**

**Representatives of the Private Sector and Academia;**

**The Media Fraternity;**

**Representatives of the Students Community;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

It is my honor to present the annual address of the Minister of Foreign Affairs to the Uganda Council on Foreign Relations. I am aware that the series had been disrupted due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and am delighted that we are able to resume this year.

Uganda's foreign policy under the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government has evolved significantly, reflecting our national pursuit of robust economic development, our aim at strengthening regional stability, and our growing active participation in global affairs.

The key policy tenets are derived from Objective No XXVIII (28) of the “National Objectives and Directive Principles of State” as laid out in the 1995 Constitution of the Republic, which mandates the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote and protect Uganda’s interests abroad and undertake programs that underpin the implementation and management of Foreign Policy. To this end, we undertake engagements aimed at leveraging opportunities in the region and globally to promote Uganda's broad national interests. Over the years, Uganda has played a central role in contributing to regional peace and security in the Great Lakes and Eastern African regions and despite our small foreign service, has managed to maintain a wider presence than would otherwise be possible.

This paper summarizes Uganda's key foreign policy engagements across multiple dimensions, including bilateral relations, regional peace and security issues, trade and commercial diplomacy, engagement in multilateral affairs, as well as the prospective of hosting the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Group of 77 (G77) Summits in Kampala in 2024.

**Bilateral Relations**

Uganda's bilateral relations are influenced by its active role in strengthening regional integration for economic growth and political stability, with an accent on the EAC and COMESA region which, until recently, accounted for the larger percentage of our trading relations. Furthermore, the enhanced possibilities for collaboration on infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, and energy have made Uganda today look much closer at the region. In this regard, Uganda maintains robust bilateral relations with Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, DRC and South Sudan through periodic bilateral meetings and Joint Permanent Commissions (JPCs). Efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to engage with partner states bilaterally through good neighborliness policies have helped to expand our markets and reduce trade restrictions that hinder Uganda’s exports thus contributing to the increase in overall trade.

As many of you may be aware, we joined the “Northern Corridor Integration Projects” initiative in 2013 with a view to speeding up our cooperation and integration efforts. Our focus has been on those infrastructure projects that contribute to facilitation of production and trade, such as rail and energy connectivity. We are also focusing on areas that support and promote easy and free movement of our people across our countries. We are still engaged to ensure that the standard gauge railway, currently in operation in Kenya from Mombasa is extended up to Malaba, through Uganda to Rwanda, DRC and South Sudan.

Beyond the region, Uganda is pursuing closer relations and cooperation with other countries of the world for the promotion of our interests. In Africa, for example, while we strive to extend our reach and direct interaction with our African brothers and sisters for mutual benefit, as illustrated by the opening of a new Embassy in Angola this year, we are engaging more closely with countries like South Africa in the SADC region, and Algeria and Egypt in the Maghreb and North region.

Elsewhere, we have maintained and continue to promote strategic partnerships with many other countries outside Africa, which is greatly contributing to our socio-economic wellbeing and development. Countries, such as the United States, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, India, the European Union (individually as countries and the EU), Russian Federation, to mention but a few, have made, significant contribution to Uganda’s development. Through this cooperation and partnership, we have received budget support for strategic sectors of the economy, including in the areas such as: healthcare; infrastructure development; development of industrial parks; the justice, law and order sector; agriculture and rural development; and ICT and capacity building. Progressively, we are also looking to strengthen our cooperation with countries of Eastern Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Other important growth areas that influence our bilateral relations include the Middle East, with United Arab Emirates fast becoming a leading destination of Uganda’s exports and thus determining focused content of bilateral relations.

Meanwhile the European Union remains a key area for bilateral relations with some of its members including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands as well as members of the Nordic countries. Europe's ties with Uganda especially through the UK is largely historical. The EU region remains an important partner for development cooperation with Uganda, although its importance in terms of trade volumes has begun to recede due to the expanding potential of newer markets in the Middle East and Asia and our heightened focus on regional markets.

Meanwhile, Uganda's strategic importance in transnational counter terrorism efforts, particularly in the fight against Al-Shabaab in Somalia and in regional peace and security has served to render the relations between the United States and Uganda of continuing importance. However, I must say that the relations have become “more nuanced” following the recent enactment of Uganda’s Anti Homosexuality Act and the insistence of both the EU and the United States on emphasizing rights of LGBTQ. We believe the enactment of the Anti-Homosexuality Act should not become the moderating factor in our long-term relationship with our development partners, with whom we will continue to engage in a proactive manner.

Where does this lead our foreign policy? Uganda is continuing to seek robust diplomatic relations with the wider United Nations membership, the global south and other developing countries including the strengthening of ties with countries like Brazil, India, Cuba, Indonesia, Vietnam and many others. With regard to Africa-led Partnerships, we note that the international community is increasingly seeking out Africa, for closer cooperation and collaboration. Thanks to Africa’s potential, initiatives such as: Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC); Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD); US-Africa; India-Africa; Russia-Africa; and EU-Africa have been established. Uganda remains an active member and beneficiary of these initiatives.

**Regional Peace and Security;**

Uganda continues to support peace initiatives in the region under the EAC, IGAD, ICGLR and African Union (AU) initiatives for peace and stability especially regarding the situations in Burundi, South Sudan, DRC, Sudan and Somalia among others. With our active engagements at the United Nations General Assembly and the UN’s Security Council, we closely monitor and attempt to influence the decision-making around the various Missions on the African continent and the region.

Our position is to support the normative processes and decisions made by the high organs on the continent in the context of the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities as well as in the United Nations, in support of African led solutions to African problems. To this extend Uganda follows, engages and participates in the deliberations of the African Union Peace and Security Council as well as the UN Security Council (currently as a non-member).

At the strategic level, Uganda participates in counter terrorism initiatives in the Great Lakes Region to combat rebel groups and cross-border threats and we also are actively involved in Peacekeeping Missions which support global security efforts. Examples include Uganda's contributions to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), which showcases our commitment, despite immense odds, to regional peace.

Finally, Uganda’s continued active participation in regional initiatives reflect our strategic commitment to addressing continental issues as a corner stone of Foreign Policy. This goes hand, in hand with our support for other initiatives such as South-South Cooperation in general and strengthening ties with fellow African nations to promote regional stability and development.

**Trade and Commercial Diplomacy;**

As a key pursuit, the Ministry, together with its Missions abroad undertakes active engagements aimed at leveraging opportunities that accrue in the region and globally, to promote Uganda’s exports, tourism, and investment opportunities. To this end, we promote trade in Ugandan goods and services, tourism, attracting quality investments in the identified strategic sectors of the economy as well a technology transfer.

Uganda’s trade and commercial diplomacy initiatives seek to expand the scope of opportunities through bilateral agreements and investment promotion. By diversifying our export markets and collaborating on trade deals, we aim at reducing economic dependency and promoting growth. Our economic diplomacy approach underscores the government’s policy to incentivize and attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Additionally, Uganda's participation in regional economic communities highlight our commitment to harnessing the collective economic potential within the African continent, especially in implementing the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

**Multilateral Affairs;**

Uganda's stance on multilateral affairs reflects our unwavering commitment to international law and treaty obligations, to peaceful coexistence and non-alignment, and to the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means. We also remain nationally, opposed to all forms of domination, racism and other forms of oppression and exploitation. The above values are bolstered by a fundamental respect for sovereignty of states and the upholding of humanitarian principles.

In the context of the War in Ukraine, Uganda's emphasis on non-alignment means that we shall refrain from taking sides in the conflict. This has made it possible for us to be part of the African Peace Initiative which undertook a High-Level Mission of African Heads of State to Kyiv, Ukraine and St. Petersburg, Russia from 16th to 18th June 2023. Uganda, on that occasion, represented by former Prime Minister Ruhakana Rugunda, joined African leaders in calling for an end to the war through dialogue and the necessary de-escalation of the conflict to advance a peace process and avoid further damages and loss of lives. The Mission underscored the importance of the fundamental sovereignty of States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, and internationally recognized principles. It left acutely aware not only of the need for security guarantees for both countries in the conflict, but also of the imperative of resolving the humanitarian crisis.

**Upcoming NAM and G77 Summits in Kampala (2024);**

As you are aware, Uganda will host the 19th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) from 15th to 20th January 2024 and assume its Chairmanship for the next three years. The Movement remains a vital pillar of support for developing countries' shared quest for peace, security, development, and justice in international relations. We have therefore defined our vision during the forthcoming chairmanship around the idea of a stronger and united NAM that contributes to a better world for all, while the specific theme for the 19th Summit will be “Deepening Cooperation for Shared Global Affluence”. Uganda's objectives in hosting the Summit and chairing the Movement includes fostering the much-needed solidarity among NAM member states and promoting a multipolar world. Our expectations will be for strengthened South-South cooperation and enhanced diplomatic influence.

Alongside the NAM Summit, Uganda will also have the opportunity to host the Summit of the Group of 77+ China also referred to as the “Third South Summit” in January 2024. With the theme “Leaving No One Behind” the Third South Summit will look to instill a new dynamic to the cooperation among the 134 Member States of the Group of 77 in a more competitive world. The Summit aims at boosting South-South cooperation including in the areas of trade, investment, sustainable development, climate change, poverty eradication, and digital economy, with a focus on addressing global economic disparities. Uganda looks forward to its role in advocating for the interests of developing countries and enhancing mutual economic cooperation.

Preparations for the hosting of both these Summits are underway, spearheaded by a National Organizing Committee chaired by the Head of Public Service and Secretary to Cabinet and composed of relevant MDAs. My Ministry will do a briefing to the diplomatic community and members of the public as the dates for the two Summits draw closer.

**In Conclusion;**

Uganda's foreign policy is characterized by a commitment to regional cooperation, economic diversification, and diplomatic pragmatism. However, it also faces ongoing challenges, particularly in the areas of sustainable development, managing the adverse effects of climate change, regional peace and security issues, all of which require continued attention and strategic maneuvering on the global stage. Though sustained involvement in regional peace initiatives, trade and commercial diplomacy, multilateral engagements and our upcoming summit hosting responsibilities, Uganda’s diplomatic relations today illustrate our evolving role in the multifaceted international arena.

**I thank You.**