



.....Crisis in Burundi takes centre stage during debate

East African Legislative Assembly, Arusha, Tanzania; May 12, 2015: EALA commenced its 6th Meeting of the 3rd Session with Members by commending the Chair of the Summit of EAC Heads of State, President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete for the insightful delivery of the State of EAC Address in Bujumbura, in March this year.

Legislators debated on the speech delivered to the Assembly on March 19th, 2015, terming it concise and one that elaborated on key policy issues for the region. The Motion to debate on the State of EAC Address moved by the Deputy Minister for EAC, United Republic of Tanzania, Hon Dr Abdullah Sadaala Abdullah and Chairman of the Council of Ministers received wide acclamation from the legislators.

Hon Saadala remarked that the speech had called for the full and systematic implementation of the pillars of integration.

The Minister termed the Address as pivotal in addressing matters of integration. He noted that

from a board perspective, the President gave a knowledgeable and insightful outline of the Community's principal priorities and areas of focus.

In his Bujumbura Address, President Kikwete urged Partner States to spare no efforts in ridding the region of Non-Tariff Barriers to spur the integration process. He re-affirmed his commitment during his term as Chairperson of the Summit to ensuring total removal of all barriers to trade.

"The progress made so far, at the ports of Mombasa and Dar es Salaam and, on the Northern Corridor with regard to road blocks shows that it is possible to eliminate these NTBs. Measures are being taken in earnest to reduce road blocks on the Tanzania side of the Central Corridor. I am sure in the next few months we will notice a huge improvement", President Kikwete said.

President Kikwete was emphatic that the incremental approach of the integration process had been a great success. He said under the Customs Union, the region benefited from enhanced trade through the Common External Tariffs.

"Indeed, goods which meet the criteria of Rule of Origin have been moving across borders without paying taxes however non tariffs barriers remain a challenge. Progress has been made but the matter has not been resolved fully yet", he added.

On the forthcoming elections in Burundi, the Head of State was categorical that the country should hold peaceful, free and fair elections. He remarked that any attempts to derail the electioneering in the country would be inappropriate.

"I appeal to the citizens of the country to adhere to the Constitution of Burundi, the Electoral Laws and the Arusha Accord", President Kikwete remarked.

He said that Tanzania would also vote at the plebiscite for its new Constitution before the general elections in October.

During debate today, Chairperson of the General Purpose Committee, Hon Dr. Odette Nyiramilimo called for the total removal of NTBs to create an enabling environment.

"It is our total duty to regularly revisit the issues around infrastructure development and to report to the House at intervals. At the same time, the pace of the Common Market Protocol is too slow, as the Head of State duly declared in his speech", Hon Dr. Nyiramilimo stated.

The legislator noted that President Kikwete's remarks on elections with reference to the Republic of Burundi were clear and emphatic. "You recall President Kikwete urged the Republic of Burundi to adhere to the country's Constitution, the Electoral Laws and the Rule of Law.

We need to ensure this is done not only realized in Burundi but in all the Partner States", Hon Nyiramilimo said.

Hon Joseph Kiangoi termed the speech a milestone in the integration process. He lamented

that several challenges as spelt out in the speech continued to hamper progress in the region.

“In the transportation sector for example, we need to ensure that funding for infrastructural investment is secured”, the legislator said, adding, it was the imperative for the Council of Ministers to take a more central role in ensuring progress is realized.

“It is important for the Council of Ministers to be resident in Arusha to push things much faster”, he added. “As an Assembly, let us take a keen eye on the progress report and ensure there is actual movement in the Partner States,” Hon Kiangoi stated.

“We cannot speak at cross-purposes, we must be progressive at all times”, he added. The legislator noted that the delay for example in the operationalization of the East African Parliamentary Institute (EAPI) Act, 2011 which envisages the establishment of the regional Parliamentary Institute was worrying.

On peace and security, Hon Kiangoi urged the Summit of the EAC Heads of State to pronounce itself clearly on the various challenges in the region.

“We want peace in the region. It is good the Summit shall sit to review the Burundi case. In the same vein, let us come together and address the insecurity issue”, he said, citing the case of the numerous Al-Shabaab attacks in the Republic of Kenya.

Hon Saoli Ole Nkanae termed the speech futuristic and forward looking. He hailed President Kikwete for his astute remark that the notion of regionalism needs to supercede nationalistic tendencies.

Hon Emerence Bucumi urged all concerned parties in Burundi to ensure peace is upheld. “We are grateful to the Partner States for supporting our sisters and brothers who have crossed over into their territories during this period,” she added.

On her part, Hon Dora Byamukama said an immediate end to the Burundi crisis was key. “We feel sad when the capital Bujumbura is on fire since it is part and parcel of East Africa. It definitely spreads fear to us. President Kikwete recently challenged us to ‘walk the talk’ with Burundi all the way - as has been done in the past. This is vital and we must help to find a way out of the problem,” she said.

The legislator said it was necessary for the Assembly to keep tabs on the decisions and Bills passed. In this regard, Hon Byamukama commended the EAC for the scorecard (on the Common Market Protocol) which she remarked was useful.

Hon Abubakar Zein said the House is mandated to translate the aspirations of East Africans in to laws. He thus called on the Council of Ministers to adhere to the Legislative Calendar by introducing Executive Bills as promised.

“I expect that the Secretariat and the Organs of the Community shall in future take into

consideration the policy statements and allocate adequate resources for the same,” Hon Zein noted.

Hon Mike Sebalu termed Bills passed by EALA as progressive and of value addition to the region.

“The Assent of Bills is a process where technocrats are involved in advising the Heads of State. I urge them to advise the Summit appropriately to ensure the Bills are speedily assented to,” the legislator said.

Hon Hafsa Mossi lauded President Kikwete for his commitment to take the region to greater heights.

“His decision to call for the Extra-Ordinary Summit to discuss the unfortunate crisis in Burundi shows our desire to find home-ground solutions,” she added.

Others who contributed to the debate were Hon Nusura Tiperu, Hon Emmanuel Nengo, Hon Bernard Mulengani Hon Valerie Nyirahabineza and Hon Jeremie Ngendakumana. Hon Mumbi Ngaru, Hon Peter Mathuki also made submissions to the House.

The Minister for EAC, Uganda, Hon Shem Bageine, maintained that the Council of Ministers would henceforth play a more central role in ensuring the decisions of the Community are implemented. He noted that Sectoral Councils had at times altered the decisions of the Council of Ministers and said they (Council) had agreed to reduce reliance on the Senior officials and the Co-ordination Committees.

Parliament continues tomorrow.

-Ends-

For more information, contact

Bobi Odiko,
Senior Public Relations Officer,
East African Legislative Assembly.
Tel: +255-27-2508240
Fax: +255-27-2503103,
Cell: +255-787-870945 +254-733-718036.
Email: BOdiko@eachq.org,
Web: <http://www.eala.org>