

Speed up regional integration, former First Ladies urge govts

Background. Former first ladies of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania were instrumental in the birth of the East African Community.

BY DOROTHY NAKAWEESI
dnakaweesi@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. The founding First Ladies of the East African Community (EAC) have called for fast-tracking of the integration plans by the member countries.

This call was made during a special sitting of the East African Legislative Assembly (Eala) in Arusha, Tanzania, on Tuesday.

Ms Ngina Kenyatta, the widow of Kenya's first president Jomo Kenyatta, and Ms Miria Obote, the widow of former president Milton Obote, reminisced over the memories of the first EAC and challenged Eala members to ensure the future of integration is both guaranteed and realised.

Ms Maria Nyerere, widow of Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania, did not attend the function and was represented by Makongoro Nyerere, an Eala member.

Ms Obote called for the prioritisation of economic investment projects, including oil refineries, the Standard Gauge Railway, agricultural research, food security and climate change.

She urged the region to move faster to have an integrated syllabus and curriculum to stabilise the labour market within EAC.



Ms Miria Obote (Left) addresses the East African Legislative Assembly as Ms Ngina Kenyatta and Speaker Dan Kidega (Right) look on in Arusha, Tanzania, on Tuesday. COURTESY PHOTO

"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," she said.

Ms Kenyatta informed the regional MPs that EAC's founding fathers had "walked and worked tirelessly" in anticipation of unity of the region.

"In 1967, all three of us were witnesses to the establishment of a community that spoke to that shared sentiment. The East African Community was built on the understanding that our nations and our people were stronger together. I request

you to keep the hope of the founding fathers alive and to ensure that unity in the region is achieved," she said.

"It is a credit to your hard work and persistence—and the hard work and persistence of your respective governments—that today, that the community

is more vibrant and active than ever," she added.

EALA speaker Dan Kidega lauded the former First Ladies for their contribution to the integration process.

"We are happy that you still show leadership in your own rights and continue to be involved in numerous humanitarian causes throughout the EAC region much akin to your active and prolific years when you worked for political and social justice and advocated for a wide range of human rights issues," Mr Kidega said.

The speaker said the integration process was on course and that it was stronger.

BACKGROUND

The Eala assembly on March 16 passed a resolution recognising the role played by former First Ladies in galvanising East Africa in the integration process and in the service of East Africans as "informal Institutional memory".