

# EALA has chalked impressive successes in a short period

In its very ordinary and mundane sense, Members of the East African Legislative Assembly swore “to protect and defend” all matters pertaining to the integration of the East African Community. Put in the strict parlance of the Treaty, that means “to widen and deepen” the integration agenda.

That some members should retreat into their national cocoon to a point where they abstain from a plenary session in one partner state because of a perceived political differences, certainly brings into disrepute the very essence of their mandate.

The Burundi MPs who recently wrote to the EALA Speaker indicating that they will not attend the forthcoming session in Kigali from next week, citing alleged security concerns, were definitely not acting in the spirit of the Assembly’s independence.

Coincidentally, it was this same Assembly that at a previous sitting in Kigali stood up for four Burundi MPs who were illegally recalled by their national parliament before the completion of their term. I had the honour to move the popular motion as an illustration of the camaraderie, collegiality and team spirit that exists in the House.

Besides, critics of EALA can point to the rancour over the position of Speaker of the Assembly following the unceremonious ouster of Margaret Nantongo Nzziwa two years ago and her renewed claim that she has been reinstated through a recent ruling of the East African Court



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of Justice. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In fact, the Court’s ruling, particularly on the matter of Mrs Nzziwa’s prayer for reinstatement, was both categorical and unambiguous – her argument was superfluous and overtaken by events since. The ruling may have questioned the processes employed by the Assembly in managing the impeachment and subsequent ouster that did not in any event amount to an order for her return to the helm.

The two separate events have lately placed the regional Assembly on the spot. While it is quite understandable for critics to question the need and value of the Assembly at this point in time of the integration process, there are nonetheless numerous reasons to underscore the centrality of the Assembly in the EAC.

EALA has managed to chalk up impressive achievements, especially considering the short time since it settled to work. The election of

Speaker Dan Fred Kidega allowed stability to return to the Assembly.

As the Third Assembly winds down on its tenure in the next couple of months, a fresh and focused leadership have returned the desired normalcy and members have co-operated in safeguarding the integrity of one of the most important supranational institutions, which the population of the region has come to look to to drive the economic development of the region.

Over the past five years, EALA has passed 27 Bills. Many of these are currently awaiting assent by the heads of state of the member countries. Such Bills, which have a major impact on the lives of the citizens of the region, include the EAC Elimination of Non-Tariff Barriers Bill, the EAC Co-operative Societies Bill, the EAC Persons with Disabilities Bill, the EAC Customs Management Bill and the EAC Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Bill, among others.

During the period, the Assembly also debated, approved and passed close to 80 reports. In addition, it adopted 63 key resolutions, including one recognising Kiswahili as one of the official languages of the Community.

Further, EALA received and adopted five petitions. A particularly significant one led to the public hearing on the deteriorating human-rights and humanitarian situation in Burundi.

Over the past few months, the Assembly achieved an important milestone when it began working to bring probity and integrity to the activities of the EAC by enhancing its oversight of

the programmes and projects of the Community. Tellingly, the Assembly has lately questioned the shady deals at the Community, especially those revolving around irregularities in procurement, recruitment and other matters of public interest.

It has called on the Council of Ministers to enhance its political supervision over the EAC Secretariat.

The outgoing Assembly has laid an important foundation for the incoming one to build on. Much more needs to be done, but they will definitely inherit an Assembly with an enhanced stature, willing and able to flex its muscle to attain the aspirations of the Community.

These are certainly no mean achievements given the many challenges the Assembly has been faced with.

But it is therefore incumbent upon the incoming Assembly to speak with the same voice across all levels, regional and country allegiances notwithstanding. EALA must continue to be strong and lead the integration process.

Second, the implementation of the protocols has been way below par. The Assembly needs to take its place, and perhaps enact relevant legislation to anchor the said protocols.

Only then can the people of East Africa look to the future with confidence, and an assurance that the integration process is right on course, enhanced and strengthened.

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