

## Interview: Godfrey Binaisa



# If Museveni wins, it will mean chaos for the region

*Godfrey Binaisa, the former President of Uganda, gave this interview to EIR's Linda de Hoyos on April 30:*

**EIR:** Who are the major contenders in the Ugandan Presidential election?

**Binaisa:** The two main ones are President Yoweri Museveni, the incumbent, and Mr. Paul Ssemogerere, who a couple of years ago was foreign minister in Museveni's government. There is a third candidate, Mohamed Mayanja, who is not very consequential, not a threat to either of the above two.

**EIR:** Ssemogerere represents a coalition now?

**Binaisa:** Yes, Ssemogerere is the candidate for the coalition of political parties, namely the Democratic Party, which he leads; the Uganda People's Congress, or UPC, which is led by Milton Obote, who was President twice and is now in exile in Zambia; and the Conservative Party, which is a much smaller party, and all the other groups who believe in the right to organize political parties in Uganda.

**EIR:** Have you, as a former President of Uganda, given your endorsement to any of the candidates?

**Binaisa:** Oh yes, because this is a situation in which all reasonable, thinking members of the public cannot afford to be neutral. I support Paul Ssemogerere for President this time.

**EIR:** Why are you opposed to Museveni?

**Binaisa:** First of all, Museveni has been President for ten years. I think a decade is long enough for anyone. Here in the United States, you can only be President for eight years, two terms. But he has been more than that. I think it is time for a change; the people of Uganda want a change. Secondly, he is the leader of the URM, the Uganda Resistance Movement, which took power in 1986. Now, this movement came into being for the purpose of providing an umbrella under which everyone could go, organize, and get into parliament, and decide later whether they wanted to go into political parties. But Mr. Museveni has used it as his own instrument of remaining in power, namely, it is the only political instrument which is allowed to organize; which has branches; which has all the paraphernalia of a political party, which means that at the end of the day, it is a one-party state which is running now in Uganda. I am opposed to that.

**EIR:** The *Financial Times* and other Western press hail Museveni as the "IMF success story" and praise Uganda as an economic growth area. Is this how you see the situation?

**Binaisa:** Yes, Museveni is the darling of the Western donors. . . .

**EIR:** Even though there has not been democracy in Uganda—

**Binaisa:** Yes, he is their darling, because, I think, he is one of the only Presidents in Africa that has chosen to dance to every tune that the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank calls, and I think he sometimes dances even when there is no music. This is why he is such a darling. The IMF Structural Adjustment Program, as we know it, to me only adjusts the people of Uganda's stomachs to hunger, and their bodies to disease. They are no better off now, than they were when Museveni took power in 1986. By that I mean, the ordinary people of the land, not the middle class, not the upper class, not the members of the Armed Forces, members of parliament, or ministers of cabinet, who are getting preferential treatment, and are therefore not conscious of what is happening to the rest of the public.

There is no question at all, that the stringent conditionalities of the IMF and the World Bank have not eased the suffering and plight of the ordinary people in Uganda. In other countries in Africa, in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, and in South Africa, there is a lot of agitation to prevail upon the IMF and the World Bank to change their policies toward Africa. But Museveni is doing nothing of the sort. You don't hear him complaining about the conditionalities; he just takes them for granted, because he benefits by them. For instance, he has sold most of the government-owned public companies and utilities, to foreigners, at rock-bottom prices—even those utilities in which he played no role at all in founding or promoting.

**EIR:** Life expectancy in Uganda has gone down in the last decade under Museveni, from 49 years to 42 years. Do you have a sense of the reason for this?

**Binaisa:** The reason is the bad economic policies. Most of the money he gets is spent on servicing the enormous foreign debt, which now has topped \$3 billion. I understand that roughly 30% of whatever money he gets is spent on servicing the debt, and consequently, he does not have much left, after

spending money on the armed forces to keep him in power permanently, to allocate to the health services the country needs. Consequently, all the diseases that we had put under control at the time of independence, more than 30 years ago, have now come back in full force—like tuberculosis, malaria, typhoid fever. As if this were not enough, we have the new phenomenon of HIV, the AIDS virus.

**EIR:** Is HIV the major killer?

**Binaisa:** No, the HIV is *not* the major killer, because these other diseases are terrible. People have no access to clean water. From the United Nations Development Program Report, I learned that only 15% of the total population of about 20 million Ugandas even have access to clean water—access only, mind you, to clean water. We are next to the bottom. The very bottom is held by the Central African Republic, and Uganda is next to that. If so many people do not have access to clean water, what else do you expect than that most of them will succumb to malaria fever, they will succumb to tuberculosis, they will succumb to typhoid.

**EIR:** You said that Museveni is the darling of the West. Does he have any particular ties to the West?

**Binaisa:** Mainly our former colonial masters, the British, seem to be very fond of him through the Minister of Overseas Development, the Rt. Honorable Baroness Lynda Chalker. She is the one who has promoted Museveni so enormously. Another one of the House of Lords, is Baroness Cox, I think. These are the two main figures who are promoting him and who are kind of like “Ladies for Museveni.” And therefore, Museveni gets all the aid he needs, and they are prepared to look the other way on the question of democracy. They do not pressure him, as, for instance, they pressure President Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya, as they pressure Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia, that it is time to hold elections, that it is time to hold by the principle of one-man, one-vote, to abide by the principle of multi-partyism. He can get away with everything. I think he is the first person in all of Africa to hold a no-party general election. This is very much contrary to the British so-called high values for democracy.

**EIR:** There was a recent poll published by the Ugandan daily *New Vision*, which predicts that Ssemogerere will win the elections, and that Museveni himself will only poll 17%. Does this sound correct to you?

**Binaisa:** I do not have those figures. If Ssemogerere wins, two things will happen. A change is just good as a holiday. We need a change in Uganda. The British were in Uganda for 70 years; we got fed up with them, so they quit. What about Museveni? I remember that I was present in 1986 when he was inaugurated. He promised to go to the polls in three years' time! And he stayed ten. And, you mean I should endorse him when he wants to stay another 10 years, or 20? No reasonable Ugandan can do that. Therefore, if Ssemogerere wins, it will be good for democracy, it will be good for development, it

will be good for everything that people in the West and other people stand for—namely, that we must have change at reasonable intervals of time.

**EIR:** There have been reports in the newspapers in the United States about the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the north, which has been portrayed as a very brutal group, which is waging war against Museveni. What is the situation there?

**Binaisa:** What is happening in the north of Uganda is really pathetic. Only 10 years, Museveni was himself a guerrilla leader. He was fighting the government of Milton Obote, and he was dubbed a terrorist, a bandit, a rebel, but he resisted until he scored a great victory. He is calling the people of the north the same names, calling them bandits, criminals, saying that they should be destroyed, that he will not negotiate with them. But this is exactly what happened to him. The people who were in power refused to negotiate with him. But that did not stop him from taking over. What I am saying is that these people have shown such resilience. Ever since Museveni took over in 1986, they have been fighting him; there has been no peace in the northern region of Uganda. That is a fact. So, if there is no peace in Uganda for ten years, and you are the leader, why don't you open some kind of dialogue—why don't you talk to them?

**EIR:** But he refuses to talk to the LRA?

**Binaisa:** Yes, he has refused to negotiate. He says they are criminals, murderers. There is a lot of propaganda, it seems to me, as an experienced politician in the area, when you say that they are the only ones cutting off people's noses or mutilating their bodies. The atrocities are being committed by both sides. And we, the people of Uganda, have to put a stop to this by uniting together, by talking to one another. The northerners and the southerners in Uganda have all been to the same schools; they've been working together in the past in different governments. Why can't we work together now?

**EIR:** Aside from the Army, does Museveni have any other base of support?

**Binaisa:** Apart from the area where he comes from, mainly his constituency is the Armed Forces of Uganda. This is the terrible thing we have. If a ruler depends for his support on the Army, then the whole country becomes a garrison, a military camp.

**EIR:** Museveni, according to reports, was a backer of the Rwandan Patriotic Front invasion of Rwanda in 1994.

**Binaisa:** I think that that is a real tragedy—a real Greek tragedy in Museveni's career. Museveni carried out the invasion of a friendly, brotherly country, sister country—Rwanda, in violation of the Organization of African Unity charter, in violation of the United Nations charter. I think that was outrageous. And I think he himself, Museveni, has a lot of explaining to do to the people of Uganda to convince us of why he went into Rwanda in October 1990, or why, if he did not

himself go in, why he supported those people going in who were officers and members of the Ugandan armed forces? Why didn't he stop them? He has a lot of explaining to do. We fear that if we support him this time, without any kind of explanation as to why he went into Rwanda, he may use his power to do the same thing elsewhere! He may be tempted to go into Sudan, or into Zaire, or into Kenya. So we are not going to be a party to this kind of thing.

**EIR:** If Museveni wins, what would it mean for the region?

**Binaisa:** It means total chaos. Because if he wins, he will know that he is in for another ten years, or something, and he is free to do as he likes, and if he chooses to engage in this kind of military adventurism, the way will be paved for him to enter Sudan, on the pretext that he is going to rescue someone—as he did in Rwanda. Everyone will sit back and applaud, as the entirety of the western world just sat back and said on Rwanda, “Look at the Africans killing one another. Let's wait until they finish off one another, and then we shall get in, because their countries will be desert, or uninhabitable, or inhabited only by wild game which we shall go and visit, and the Africans will only be used to shine our shoes and drive our jeeps around the parks,” because all the human beings will have been finished.

**EIR:** Do you see any relationship between the drive by London, and now the United States, in the UN to impose harsh sanctions on Sudan, and Britain's support for Museveni?

**Binaisa:** First of all, I must tell my American friends that they do not understand Africa, or they do not want to. They have confused three things in Sudan. They are confusing religion, on the one hand, with racism on the other, with colonialism, on the other. Remember that we Africans were not present in 1884 in Berlin when the European powers carved up Africa; we were not consulted. They carved up what they used to call the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan condominium, governed by the British and the Egyptians, but the British were more equal than the Egyptians, as you know. Secondly, there is racism—which we have to admit is there, racism between the Arabs and the black Africans. Then, there is religion, between the Christian and African religions in the south, and the north, where most of the people are Muslims. That is the situation we have to face.

Now, the analysts say the reason for the problem in Sudan is that Muslim fundamentalists controlling the Sudan government, want to impose *Sharia*, Islamic law, on the life of everybody in the south. This is wrong; this is not true. They make everyone in the West, particularly those who are Christian, believe that this is a premeditated prosecution being hatched by the Muslims against the Christians. That is not true!

We have ethnic problems in Uganda today, between those in the north who still live in tribalism, against the southern tribes. The British anthropologists who came to Africa, would meet someone along the River Nile, and without batting an

eyelash, report, “I met a new tribe, and that tribe I call Nilotics, because they are living along the River Nile.” Now, you ask, “How much do they resemble the River Nile?” They don't resemble the river at all! But these names have stuck to this day, and people are called “Nilotics.” They will say, “I am a Nilotic.” When they come down to the south of Uganda, they will say, “You are Bantu,” because “bantu” is the word for “man” in most of our languages. And people in the south will say, “Yes, sir, I am a Bantu.” And it is through the intervention of these anthropologists that this confusion has come about.

This is not a matter of religion. If at all, this is a matter of ethnicity, which can be settled at a round table conference. Some of us are old enough now to be able to settle this matter. I am now an African elder; I could sit with these young men and women, with the Sudanese of both sides, and we can settle this matter in one week—but nobody wants us to do this, because they are only interested in seeing this area go up in flames. They have two reasons for this. There is oil in the area, and secondly, the Nile Valley is potentially one of the biggest agricultural areas in the whole world, if there is peace in that area. These are motivations of the outside powers.

**EIR:** They do not want the Nile Valley developed?

**Binaisa:** Yes, they do not want it developed, unless it is developed on *their* terms. Therefore, they are not going to recognize the sovereignty of Sudan as such.

**EIR:** When were you President of Uganda?

**Binaisa:** I was President from June 1979, to the end of May 1980. I was President for one year.

The newspapers in the West say that one of the reasons that people like Museveni will be returned to power, is because he is against Milton Obote, but this is not so. When I was President, I was removed from office by Museveni himself and by the Military Commission of which he was vice-president, and they removed me for one reason—I had moved the general election ahead by six months. They thought that if I had been allowed to participate in the general election, I might have been able to win, so they preempted the election and removed me by military coup. Then they brought back Obote, when they were governing Uganda under the Military Commission from the middle of 1980 to the end of 1980; it was not Ssemogerere who brought Obote back.

**EIR:** What kinds of projects did you try to carry out as President?

**Binaisa:** There were so many. Technical education was my main project; I wanted technical education, because unless Africa wakes up to its responsibilities for technical education, we are not moving anywhere. All our natural resources, all our raw materials have been looted today to be used only in the West and in Asia, to manufacture goods on which they put the prices that we have to pay. I was also interested in agriculture. I was very interested in democracy.