



Summary

Online Discussion from 12 January 2021

Uganda Ahead of the Elections – A Conversation with Bobi Wine

Background: On 14 January 2021, Uganda will hold parliamentary and presidential elections. The political atmosphere in the country is tense. During the election campaign, numerous opposition members were arrested. Unrest broke out throughout the country. More than 50 people were killed in violent protests and clashes between opposition supporters and Ugandan security forces in November last year. Finally, in December, a ban was imposed on all election rallies to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

Ten challengers are running in the election against President Yoweri Museveni (76), who has ruled the East African country since 1986 and has long been considered a stabilising factor and a close ally of the West. The front-runner and Museveni's main challenger is the MP and pop star Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, better known as Bobi Wine, who is particularly popular with younger voters. Bobi Wine began his political career in 2017 when he entered the National Parliament as an independent candidate. In this election, he is running for leadership under the newly formed opposition alliance *National Unity Platform*.

Against this backdrop, the **German Africa Foundation** and **MP Luise Amtsberg** organised the online conversation **“Uganda Ahead of the Elections – A Conversation with Bobi Wine”**.

Highlights:

- **Uganda is at a crossroads; the election will determine whether Yoweri Museveni, who has ruled the country for almost 35 years, will remain in the highest office.**
- **Bobi Wine accuses Museveni's government of obstructing or preventing opposition campaign events. Numerous arrests of opposition members as well as violent disruptions of election campaign events are clear signs of the government's repressive approach against the opposition.**
- **Formerly a great admirer of Museveni, Wine now sharply criticises his leadership style.**
- **Wine's central election promise: Restoration of the rule of law and an economy whose successes benefit all.**
- **In order to ensure free and fair elections, Wine appeals to the international community to observe them and to denounce irregularities and violations. He also calls on Germany to make future cooperation with Uganda more conditional on respect for the rule of law and human rights.**

Welcome Remarks

MP Luise Amtsberg

Bündnis 90/The Greens

Introduction & Moderation

David Schwake

Secretary General,
German Africa Foundation

Discussion

MP Robert Kyagulanyi

Ssentamu alias

„Bobi Wine“

Presidential candidate,
National Unity Platform

Summary:

Bobi Wine only managed to join the discussion via audio signal over a VPN access after about 30 minutes. The reason was the blockade of the network in Uganda. In the meantime, **MP Luise Amtsberg** presented her commitment to the Ugandan opposition politician within the framework of the programme "Parliamentarians Protect Parliamentarians".

The election campaign in Uganda

Bobi Wine described the challenges he and other opposition candidates are facing in this election campaign. For example, he said, the presidential candidates have been hindered in their election campaigns with coercive measures and unprecedented violence - and he himself has been imprisoned several times. Currently, his entire 300-member campaign team is in military custody; the Electoral Commission has forbidden him to continue his campaign. The military is stationed all over the capital to take action against him or other candidates.

Democracy, the rule of law and international cooperation

Wine, however, did not give up hope that Uganda would soon return to democratic and liberal values and the rule of law. These are core values that the people of Uganda share with Germany, which is why he calls on the German government to tie economic and development cooperation more closely to adherence to the rule of law and democratic principles in the future. This had been neglected in the past. Sanctions against Museveni's government, but also against any other head of state who disregards these principles, would be a clear sign that international cooperation is not possible without respect for the rule of law.

From Museveni admirer to critic

Bobi Wine stated that he himself had been a great admirer of Museveni for a long time. Wine said he had read Museveni's works with great interest and still admires him for his involvement in the overthrow of Idi Amin and Milton Obote. However, he said, with the introduction of the Public Order Management Act in 2013, which allowed the police to break up public gatherings, as well as the 2005 and 2017 constitutional amendments that allowed Museveni to run for president again, his confidence in Museveni's politics had declined. When he, Wine, finally began to draw more attention to Uganda's social and political problems in his songs - and called for solidarity and against corruption during the 2016 election campaign - he also came under increased scrutiny from the government and Ugandan security agencies.

Economic and foreign policy agenda of the NUP

Although Uganda is often perceived from the outside as an economically stable country, this prosperity benefits only a fraction of the population, criticised Bobi Wine. The majority of people still live below the poverty line, he said, and young people in particular struggle with unemployment or underemployment. Coming from poverty himself, he knows the challenges first hand. Therefore, he and the *NUP* would work for a more inclusive economy.

On Uganda's foreign policy, Bobi Wine assured that he and the *NUP* were clearly in favour of continuing Uganda's role as an important stabilising force in the region, and that Uganda would

continue to participate in peacekeeping missions. At the same time, however, Wine warned that the sovereignty of neighbouring states must always be respected in such missions and that Uganda's domestic peace and stability must not be jeopardised by foreign policy engagement.

Expectations for the election

Bobi Wine stressed that he himself was firmly convinced of a high voter turnout; especially the younger voters were disappointed with the policies of the current government. At the same time, he called for cameras and mobile phone footage to document election day and expressed concern about the freedom and fairness of the voting process. Violence by the military and police was also expected. The members of the electoral commission are all beholden to Museveni, so they cannot be expected to act impartially. Wine will not declare himself the winner on election night.