

**A RESPONSE TO H.E. THE PRESIDENT**  
**On the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026**

7 May 2026

Your Excellency, you have congratulated the NRM MPs for passing the Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026, and dismissed its critics as shameful and disgusting. You have invoked the 1971 coup as a cautionary tale about foreign interference. With respect, our response addresses what your statement said, and, more importantly, what it did not say.

There is a Luganda proverb, “nantabuulirilwa alisabala obw’ebbumba” the one who refuses to be advised embarks in boats made of clay. It is in that spirit that this response is made and in the same spirit that Ugandans responded overwhelmingly to the Bill.

The critics of the Bill you term as shameful and disgusting, spoke in defence of the Constitution as is their right and duty under Article 3, and Article 38 to participate in and influence government policy. It is through the exercise of their constitutional rights that Ugandans exercise their sovereignty under Article 1.

**On Sovereignty: A selective history**

Let us begin with what is true. The 1971 coup was a genuine tragedy, and the historical grievance Your Excellency describes is real. Foreign powers have interfered in African affairs to devastating effect, and Uganda paid a terrible price in the eight years that followed Amin’s installation. Foreign interference can be harmful, and it has been. The question is whether this Bill addresses that danger, or whether it uses that danger as cover for something else entirely.

Uganda’s record on sovereignty shows mixed results. In 1979, it was Tanzania that helped get rid of Amin. The NRA war was sustained, in significant part by Tanzania, Cuba and Libya. The International Court of Justice, in DRC v Uganda (2005), found us guilty of violating the DRC’s sovereignty and ordered reparations. Uganda’s national budget has, for much of your presidency, been largely donor funded.

One cannot simultaneously rely on foreign resources to run the State and invoke sovereignty to silence those who question how that State is run.

The framing of foreign influence as a novel and malign threat misreads Ugandan history entirely. When Kabaka Muteesa I invited the Christian missionaries to Buganda in the 1870s, he was making a deliberate sovereignty calculation, using external actors as a counterweight to Arab and Egyptian influence, and as a source of literacy, technology, and diplomatic leverage. It was not weakness; it was strategy.

Where foreign engagement coincides with our purposes as a people, in trade, technology, education, health, justice, it has always been, and will remain, welcome. The objection raised against this Bill is that a law drafted in opacity, passed in a rush, with suppressed public consultation, and defined in terms broad enough to capture legitimate civil society activity, is not a sovereignty instrument. It is a state control instrument.

## **The constitutional arguments you have not answered**

Your statement congratulates the MPs. It dismisses critics. What it does not do is engage a single constitutional objection raised against the Bill. The Bill in its original form took the sovereignty of Ugandans away and concentrated powers in the hands of a Minister. The Bill threatened citizenship of Ugandans in diaspora, rights from freedom of expression and association, freedom of worship, rights to earn a livelihood, right to fair trial, right to fair treatment down to the basic civic right to participate influence the policies of government.

The critics stand on the Constitution and claim its rights freedoms and protections as well as citizenship. They are arguing from the Constitution, enacted to protect Ugandans from exactly the kind of overreach that omnibus security legislation has historically enabled. There is absolutely no shame in that, and the critics should be proud!

A substantive defence of the Bill's constitutionality would require engaging with the text. That engagement has not occurred, not in your statement, and not in the parliamentary process that preceded it.

## **The internal threats to sovereignty you have not mentioned**

Sovereignty is not threatened only from without. Your Excellency's letter is silent on the threats that come from within, for example from the misuse of public resources that belong to the very people whose sovereignty you now champion.

As Bishop (Rtd.) Mutebi told Attorney General Kiryowa Kiwanuka at Namirembe Cathedral, hours before passing of the Bill, sovereignty is the citizen going to hospital and getting medicines, sending his children to school and getting education provided by the State, travelling on roads without potholes. Sovereignty is the right of ordinary Ugandans to have a State that works for them, one that spends their money honestly, delivers services faithfully, and holds all citizens equal before the law.

Corruption is a sovereignty issue. Every shilling diverted from a hospital, a school, or a road is a diminution of the State's capacity to serve its people, and therefore a diminution of the sovereignty that is worth defending.

Recently, some African governments have expressed reservations about the proposed U.S health funding deal that your government has embraced over sovereign data threats. Components of the Kenya - U.S health deal were frozen by High Court of Kenya over digital sovereignty and privacy rights. Your government seems unbothered about these data sovereignty breaches.

## **On selective prosecution: The mabati scandal**

Your Excellency, one case above all others illustrates why the sovereignty argument, however rhetorically powerful, cannot substitute for the rule of law. In the mabati scandal, public resources intended for vulnerable Karamojong were misappropriated. The investigation and prosecution that followed was notable not for its reach, but for its limits.

Agnes Nandutu, a relatively junior minister, is serving a four-year sentence. Meanwhile, big fish who were implicated in the same scandal, including Vice President Jessica Alupo, Prime Minister Robinah Nabbanja, Speaker Anita Among, and Minister Matia Kasaija, Minister Amos Lugolobi, go scot-free, allegedly forgiven by you. The DPP also appears to have concluded that the facts justified prosecution in one case and forbearance in the others. He dropped charges against Minister Lugolobi even after the court found there was a case to answer.

This is not sovereignty. This is its opposite: a system in which accountability is rationed according to proximity to power. If Uganda's sovereignty means anything, it means that the law applies equally to the powerful and the powerless. This is the rule of law. Until that principle is honoured in practice, invocations of sovereignty in defence of pressive legislation will continue to ring hollow.

### **A word to the Bazzukulu**

Your Excellency addressed this statement especially to the Bazzukulu, the grandchildren, the young generation. We address them also.

To the Bazzukulu: your true inheritance is a claim, a legitimate, constitutional claim, on a State that spends your resources honestly, prosecutes corruption without favouritism, and governs under a Constitution that protects your right to speak, to organise, and to dissent, and gives you full and fair opportunity to earn a decent living in your own beautiful country.

Sovereignty worth defending is sovereignty that serves you. Hold your leaders, all of them, including those who invoke your name, to that standard.

### **Conclusion**

Your Excellency, the question of the utility of Protection of Sovereignty Bill to Ugandan deserves serious, open, constitutional debate, the kind that the Bill's passage did not permit.

The critics of this Bill are not the enemies of sovereignty but people who believe that a sovereign Uganda is one governed by the Constitution, with public resources honestly deployed, and with the law applied without fear or favour. We commend the Ugandans who raised their voices against the Bill, and we also commend Parliament for the massive amendments they made to mitigate the worst aspects of the Bill.

We call for two things. First, we respectfully invite Your Excellency to decline to assent to the Bill and to refer it back to Parliament for further review of its constitutionality, specifically its consistency with Articles 1, 28, 29(1)(a), 38, 42 and 45 as well as our treaty obligations.

That is not a sign of weakness. It is the mark of a Statesman who places the Constitution above the convenience of the moment.

Second, we call for the prosecution of corruption to proceed equally against the powerful and the powerless, without the selective mercy that has characterized the mabati scandal. These are not opposition demands. They are constitutional ones.

*Sovereignty that cannot withstand scrutiny from its own citizens is not sovereignty. It is merely authority, and authority, as history has shown, is a far more fragile thing.*



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