

A parliamentary perspective

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ANNA SEMAMBA MAKINDA is the Speaker of the tenth Parliament of the United Republic of Tanzania. She is the first woman to be elected to this position since the country's independence. She started her Parliamentary career in 1975 and served as a cabinet Minister in various portfolios from 1983 up to 1995 when she was appointed Regional Commissioner. At the international level, she served as President of the Executive Committee of UNICEF in 1993 and 1994 and as Vice Chairperson of SADC.

A great son of Africa and the founding Father of our Nation Mwalimu Julius Nyerere once remarked, "unity will not make us rich, but it can make it difficult for Africa and African peoples to be disregarded and humiliated. And it will, therefore increase the effectiveness of the decisions we make and try to implement for our development". Although Africa has not realized a full continental unity as envisioned by our post-Independence Leaders such as Nyerere, Nkrumah, Kaunda and others, we in Tanzania have been fortunate. For the past fifty years we have demonstrated that realising a true time unity is not pipedream. It only requires political will and active participation of the people. The union between mainland Tanzania and Zanzibar has strengthened our capacity to finding solutions to the various social economic and political problems that affect our people.

Parliament and the Union

The Parliament of Tanzania, which is itself a product of the Union, has played and continues to play a key role in safeguarding and strengthening the Union. Being an organ for people's representation, the cardinal role of Parliament over the years has always been to ensure that the needs, aspirations and wishes of the people are mainstreamed into government policies and actions. Equally important, Parliament has to ensure that it passes legislations that reflect the needs and wishes of the people. Moreover, through its oversight function, the Parliament ensures that government actions are in consonance with the needs of the people.

The advent of Multiparty and Parliament

In 1992 our Country adopted the multiparty system. This was a defining change in the history of our country. Parliament as an institution that embodies democracy, had to undertake a number of changes to accommodate a new political dispensation. For instance, official opposition in Parliament was institutionalized. Moreover, the concept of the three "line whip" was embraced. Furthermore, the principle of impartiality of the chair in the running of the business of the House acquired greater prominence. Democracy requires that all people irrespective of their gender, colour, ethnic background and social status participate in decision making on matters that affect them in all levels of governance. There can therefore be no democracy if a large section of the population is left out

of the mainstream of decision making. One of the most fundamental reforms is the institutionalization of women quotas. To this end, the constitution was amended from time to time to raise the percentage of women members.

Parliament's role in strengthening the Union

In the fifty years of our Union, our country has remained strong and united, despite challenges that still lie ahead. As a Parliament we have a responsibility to see to it that the government implements its policies and programmes in an efficient and effective manner. Moreover, the onus is on Parliament to ensure that good governance, accountability and observance of human rights are accorded due consideration by the government in its day to day operations.

Transparency in the running of Parliament

Parliament has evolved over the past fifty years. The style in which we run Parliament today is markedly different from that of 1960's. For example Parliament is now more open to the general public than it used to be. In this spirit, proceedings of the House are broadcast and televised live. This arrangement has afforded people an opportunity to assess the performance of their elected representatives. Moreover, the bulk of the business of our committees is open to the media. The recent Parliament has institutionalized the system of public hearing. This practice has provided a useful platform for citizens to participate in the law making process either as individuals or through their organizations. In these times of globalization and clamour for change our parliament has to reposition itself to become an agent of change. We have to devise tools and mechanisms that can address the current challenges such as youth unemployment, environmental degradation and insecurity to name only a few.

Conclusion

As we start a journey towards another fifty years of our Union virtually all Tanzanians wish to see the union grow in strength. This can happen only if we redouble our efforts to fight poverty, ignorance and diseases that afflict our people. Parliament and the other two arms of state namely Judiciary and Executive have to make poverty the top most agenda for another 50 years to come and beyond.

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