

African Leaders Who Believe Africans Are Incapable of Great Things Should Go!

I have been telling myself to refrain from the urge to respond to what is in my view the worst insult ever made to our honour as a nation and as a people since we freed ourselves from colonialism a little over half a century ago.

This insult was uttered by none other than one of the most celebrated academics in Tanzania, Prof. Sospeter Muhongo who currently serves as our Minister for Energy and Minerals.

Challenged on why the Government doesn't seem to have a plan on how to ensure the local private sector plays a meaningful role in what is shaping up to become a thriving gas economy following discoveries of significant quantities of the natural resource off our shores, he has repeatedly stated with shocking displays of disdain and arrogance, that in his view, locals as he calls them have no capacity to participate in such a complex and expensive industry.

He has not stopped making those disparaging statements even after he was criticized by the general public, members of his own government and the media. As a matter of fact such criticism seemed only to provoke even more strident reactions from him. To this day he continues to stand his ground, maintaining that indigenous entrepreneurs are not only incapable of playing a useful role in this economy, but they are most likely corrupt and angling to serve the interests of foreign operators as mere commission agents or middlemen. He has vowed never to budge from this position.

Listening to all this and having been at the receiving end of his tirades on at least two occasions, I have been wondering what in the world could be driving him to cause such immeasurable and irreparable damage to the standing and reputation, not only of the people he likes to call locals, but the entire nation, himself included.

The good professor does not seem to realise that being at the head of such an important ministry at this time, the world pays close attention to every statement he makes whether in public or not. Industry analysts around the world and global news media follow and analyse his attitudes and thoughts knowing they have a direct influence on policy choices and decision made at his ministry.

I know some of these people and even they are shocked and disturbed by what they have heard and seen from this minister. One of them confided in me recently that in his many years of covering the industry, he has never seen a government official put down his own people in such a public manner in the context of an industry as important as oil and gas. "What the hell is he thinking?", was the question he kept

asking.

A leader's job is to galvanise, rally, motivate and guide his people to believe that they can do great things. A good leader never puts down his people. A good leader never tramples on his people's spirit. More importantly of all, a good leader never broadcasts to the world that he his ruling over inept and corrupt imbeciles because not only is that the stuff of pure madness, but also the world may not be able to tell the difference between the ruler and his citizens.

I know Prof. Muhongo is not the only leader in our government who harbours these negative thoughts about the Tanzanian private sector. He is just the most courageous in a way that gives courage a bad name. Some say this kind of thinking is part of the unfortunate legacy of our dalliance with socialism in the early years of our independence, others say it is a personal dislike the minister has for certain individuals in the private sector. It doesn't give me any comfort.

I am saying leaders who espouse these views about their own people, even if they do not go as far as making them public, should not be allowed to hold a public office in Tanzania, period. Let them go and write books about their thoughts or engage in other activities that cause less harm to society but we should not be wasting good and hard earned taxpayer's cash on this kind of leaders.

Now I feel so much better.

And I would like to wish you my compatriots and fellow East Africans a healthy, happy, peaceful and profitable 2014.

We can still salvage the African Dream if we believe in our ability to rise and claim a century that is truly ours to take. Let us do just that.

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