

REMEMBERING MWALIMU NYERERE

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It is three years since that heart wrenching Thursday, 14 October 1999, when the shocking news reached our nation and the world at large, that Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere is no more with us. Since then, it has been so hard to accept that we will never again be with Mwalimu, that icon of Africa's struggle to retrieve its full humanity. So powerful was his presence, so profound was his mission in life; and with so much commitment, determination and impact did he represent our cause, Africa's cause and that of the peoples of developing countries, that forever he will remain alive in our memories.

Often times one enters into deep thought listening to his moving and inspiring speeches repeated in the radio and television, beseeching us Tanzanians to protect our unity, reinforce our solidarity in the Continent, and work hard to surmount the challenges of our development. While in the end, Mwalimu, like all of us, was a mortal being, the deeds of his life have been immortalized in the proud history of our country and the hearts of many of our peoples.

Like the Franciscan appeal he passionately made about lighting a torch on Mount Kilimanjaro, which will bring love where there is hatred, hope where there is despair, light where there is darkness, and joy where there is sadness; Mwalimu himself has been the eternal torch that will continue to shine on our nation. He embodied leadership at its finest, a statesman of high stature, a militant fighter of the oppressed, and a fine human being of outstanding integrity. It was a monumental privilege to work so closely under him and with him.

I first met Mwalimu when I was a very young man. It was in April 1959, in my third year of Secondary school, when he came to Zanzibar as part of his and PAFMECA's efforts at reconciling and mobilizing Zanzibar's political forces in the quest for national independence. I was instantly impressed. Perhaps, a better word to use, is that I was mesmerized by his eloquence, sincerity and commitment not only to the cause of Zanzibar and of the then Tanganyika, but above all to the destiny of the African continent as a whole. I was equally impressed by his simplicity, which, as I came to learn more deeply in the years to follow, was Mwalimu's hallmark. Little did I know then, or even dared to anticipate, that I would have the honour, pleasure and

privilege of working very closely with this great African Leader at some point in my life.

The speech that Mwalimu delivered that afternoon at the grounds of Mnazi Mmoja left an indelible mark not only to me but also to the thousands of fellow Zanzibaris who had assembled to see and hear him. He urged us to unite and submerge, if not totally eliminate, our differences- both actual and artificial – and strive for the greater goal of freedom, equality and dignity for everybody irrespective of colour, creed, or political affiliation. This important message, conveyed in the most convincing and captivating manner by Mwalimu that afternoon, has ever since remained a central compass for many of us in our lives.

Mwalimu was relentless in his advocacy of the unity of the people of Zanzibar as he was in his effective articulation, sensitization, promotion, strengthening and consolidation of the unity of the people of Tanganyika and subsequently that of the United Republic of Tanzania. Indeed, throughout his life, Mwalimu remained an uncompromising fighter and defender of unity not only in our continent, but even beyond the borders of Africa as

was clearly manifested by his indefatigable championing of the unity, solidarity and cohesion of the Third World.

It was five years before I met Mwalimu again. This was in May/June 1964 when I was recalled to Dar Es Salaam and appointed as Ambassador of the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar to the Republic of Egypt. Prior to that I had been in Cairo sent by the late President of Zanzibar, Mzee Abeid Amani Karume, as the first Ambassador of the Peoples Republic of Zanzibar. This time, however, my meeting with Mwalimu was very brief.

It was when he came to Cairo for the first Ordinary Session of the Assembly of 1964, that I had the privilege of a somewhat closer contact and association. I say somewhat primarily because of my own inexperience. For, normally when a Head of State visits a country, his or her Ambassador at that country has the rare opportunity of being with him or her most of the time. However, in my case, having not had the opportunity of being adequately briefed and guided, I failed to make effective use of the occasion!

I have vivid memories of that historic meeting in Cairo that constituted part of my formative years and gave me a greater insight on Mwalimu both at the

political and human level. First, there was the great debate, or if you like, the somewhat highly charged debate, between Mwalimu and the late first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah on the issue of continental Unity. Both leaders, as we all know, were great and militant Pan Africanists. Both believed strongly in the unity and liberation of the Continent. However, there was a difference between them on how best African unity can be attained. While Nkrumah advocated immediate continental Government, Mwalimu on the other hand urged for a gradual approach arguing that it was the only viable way of realizing such a lofty goal.

*It would seem that Nkrumah was initially not too pleased with the OAU decision in Addis Ababa in May 1963 to locate the OAU Liberation Committee Headquarters in Dar es salaam presumably considering then that Tanzania was not revolutionary enough! This uneasy atmosphere between the Ghana and Tanzania delegations manifested itself in Cairo. When Mwalimu addressed the Assembly he was very critical of what he characterized as Nkrumah's simplistic solution to every crisis. More specifically, Mwalimu POINTEDLY reminded the Assembly that when a coup had taken place (in Togo where the country's President, **Sylvano Olympio** had been assassinated) and when countries were complaining*

because of attempts at destabilization, the answer that was given was CONTINENTAL Government. Significantly, all these criticisms and counter criticisms went on without any name calling as such.. It is worth noting that subsequently even after Nkrumah had been overthrown by a military coup-Mwalimu and Nkrumah became great friends and comrades.. Ideed Tanzania was among the few African countries which strongly and unequivocally condemned the usurpation of power by the military in Ghana

A decision of far reaching consequences was taken at the 1964 Cairo OAU Summit at the initiative of Mwalimu. This was the resolution, which came to be known as Assembly Resolution 104 calling for the respect of existing frontiers inherited at the time of independence. This resolution, which was strongly pioneered by the late President, was overwhelmingly supported. If my memory does not fail me, only two countries expressed reservations. These were Morocco and Somalia. Morocco did so because at that time it was laying claims on Mauritania, while Somalia was claiming the Ogaden (part of Ethiopia) and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya.

There have been some critics of Resolution 104, arguing that it maintained the status quo left over by colonialism. In reality, however, any serious

observer of the African scene would not fail to recognize that were Africa to allow territorial claims and counter claims, the continent would have been in much greater mess than it has found itself in recent times as a result of conflicts. It should also be pointed out that nothing in that historic OAU resolution prevents countries from mutually agreeing to adjustments of frontiers.

Mwalimu's authorship of this resolution did not please every one. I recall a meeting in my office in Addis Ababa, as Secretary General of the OAU, with the late President of Somaliland, Mohamed Egal, who after listening patiently to my pleas for unity within Somalia, fired back and said: "You Tanzanians are partly to blame for our disunity and especially your former President, Julius Nyerere. If only you had not interfered with our aspiration and objective of Greater Somalia by coming with the Cairo Resolution, things would have been different" To which, I responded, that if they found it difficult to maintain unity within the present Somalia, how could they have accomplished that by taking over territories which though inhabited by people of Somali ethnic group, are part of other states.

Indeed, if ethnic and tribal identity were to be used as the criteria for belonging to a particular State, then the map of the continent would have to be drastically changed. Instead of having the present 53 member states of the African Union, the number could have doubled. Clearly, Mwalimu was very prudent and visionary in taking that initiative.

All the time, Mwalimu never lost sight of the linkage between the national struggle for independence and development and that of the Region and the Continent as a whole. As early as 1958, Mwalimu invited in Mwanza, fellow leaders of the nationalist struggle from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Malawi where they formed the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa (PAFMECA). Among the clear objectives of PAFMECA was the Promotion of Unity, Solidarity and cohesion among the nationalist ranks and movement toward unity and cooperation in the region. In 1962, this movement was expanded to include other countries such as Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia and South Africa. It became the Pan African Freedom Movement for East, Central and Southern Africa.

He remained uncompromising when it came to issues affecting his country or the freedom and dignity of Africa. Thus in the immediate aftermath of the Union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar in 1964 when he was confronted with a situation where he had to choose between the concerns of Tanzania's national unity and those of German unity Mwalimu did not hesitate. He rejected the unacceptable measures against the then German Democratic Republic- demanded by the Federal Republic of Germany which if carried out could have had unforeseen negative consequences for the Union. Similarly, the Tanzanian Government under Mwalimu's leadership did not hesitate to sever diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom in 1965 in compliance with the collective decision of the OAU Council of Ministers over Rhodesia. Unfortunately this decision was respected only by a selected few African countries including Tanzania.

During the heated exchanges between the Monrovia and Casablanca groups on the approaches and substance of African unity, Mwalimu was among the voices that sought to ensure that the then division that was becoming evident, would not undermine the momentum towards Pan-Africanism that was being consolidated in the late 1950s and providing hope for the African unity. Though espousing a moderating position, Mwalimu,

nevertheless, had a very clear vision of African unity. His statement at the Addis Ababa Summit that led to the founding of the OAU was quite revealing. In his characteristic eloquence, he stated, and I quote:

"I do not propose to bother you by stating why Africa should be free and why Africa should be united; why Africa should unite in achieving its freedom and free in achieving its unity. Your Imperial Majesty and those of my brothers who have spoken before me have stated that case much better than I can. It has been even better stated by the suffering of our people; by the blood which our people have shed and are still shedding at the hands of their oppressors; it has been better stated by the millions of our people who died in the slave raids organized all over Africa by those powers whose prestige was built upon the humiliation of Africa....

In our approach to unity we have also discovered a common denominator. We have all repeated our dedication to the achievement of a fully united Africa. But we have all said in effect that just as African Independence has been a process, African Unity is about to be a process. There is not going to be a God who will bring about

African Unity by merely willing unity and saying, 'Let there be Unity.' It is not in the nature of human action that the will and the fulfillment should be simultaneous. That is not in our power, that is only in the power of the Gods. In human action there is an inevitable progress between the will to do and the fulfilment of that action. What is required is that immediately after the will the first step should be taken - I repeat then that African unity cannot come by a divine will, 'Let there be unity.'"

Mwalimu was not only a dedicated and uncompromising champion of the Liberation struggle providing Tanzania as a rear base for the liberation movements and chairing the Frontline States, but also a clear thinker and strategist in carrying on the diplomatic and political struggle. He was always ahead in thinking, particularly when it came to tough negotiations and in providing support to the liberation movements.

He spent sleepless nights when negotiations were under way. I know this from personal experience. In 1976, for example, together with Justice Joseph Warioba, we were in Geneva as part of the Frontline States support to the leaders of the Zimbabwe liberation movements and their teams at the

Geneva Conference on Rhodesia. At different times and occasions, Mwalimu used to call us –sometimes two or three times a day wanting to be briefed in detail of how things were going, and giving us guidance and directives. No wonder that during that period both our friends and detractors recognized the crucial importance of Dar es salaam and especially of Mwalimu as the struggle was being forged in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. Dar es Salaam was a critical node in African diplomacy. No world leader would consult on Africa and especially on developments, in Southern Africa without also touching base with Mwalimu. Henry Kissinger, David Owen, Andrew Young and many envoys were among the visitors to Msasani at Mwalimu's residence.

Perhaps one of the most memorable moments at the United Nations General Assembly during the early 1970s was Mwalimu's address during which he thoroughly demolished the call by the apartheid regime in South Africa, and those who were sympathetic to their argument, on having a "Non-Aggression Pact with South Africa" In his elegant combat mode, Mwalimu brought the Assembly to a thunderous applause when he lambasted that position by asking – "How can we have a Non-Aggression Pact with aggression itself?". Mwalimu was given a sustained standing ovation by the

Assembly. It was a very proud moment for Tanzanians and indeed for all Africans there assembled.

Relentless, as he was in the struggle for dignity, justice and equality, Mwalimu was a determined peacemaker. He devoted much of the last days of his life in a selfless pursuit of the goal of achieving peace and national reconciliation in Burundi. Indeed, even when he was unwell, when I went to visit him in London- a few days before he was hospitalized and lost consciousness, he spent a lot of time talking about what he was going to do with respect to the peace process when he was to go back to Dar es salaam. At that time, Mwalimu was in considerable pain and yet he was preoccupied with the developments in Burundi as he was also keen to find out the outcome of the Sirte OAU Extraordinary Summit within the context of the Sirte Declaration of 9:9:99. Sadly, the next time I saw him was when he was in his very last days at St Thomas hospital.

Mwalimu, was an articulate spokesperson of Africa and the Third World. He did so with eloquence, calmness and dignity. He was sometimes devastating in his argumentation and he invariably prevailed. Often, he spiced his

arguments with that legendary laugh which immobilized opponents and captivated audiences of all statures.

A leader of independent thinking, guided by clarity of vision and principled position, Mwalimu was a moving force in the Non-Aligned Movement. He argued that being non-aligned did not imply neutrality or that its members did not have views. He powerfully stated in 1970 that by non-alignment we saying to the big powers that we also belong to this planet. We are asserting the right of small, and militarily weaker nations to determine their own policies in their own interest, and to have an influence on world affairs which accords with the right of all peoples to live on this earth as human beings, equal with other human beings. In the later part of his life, Mwalimu relentlessly pursued this ideal in the endeavour to ensure economic and political justice for the people of the South.

Mwalimu was a strong supporter and advocate of the struggle of the peoples of Palestine, Vietnam and Chile. He firmly supported the Cuban Revolution. Under his leadership Tanzania accorded full diplomatic status to the representation of the Palestine Liberation Organization, gave diplomatic recognition and accepted the setting up of a fully fledged Embassy of the

Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam and in 1970 I represented him at the inauguration of President Allende in Santiago de Chile. Later, he unequivocally condemned the overthrow of the elected government of President Salvador Allende of Chile. He also assigned me in 1969 to represent him at the State Funeral of President Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi .

Mwalimu was a man of principles and with impeccable integrity. He was incorruptible and a fearless defender and advocate of what he believed in. A man of the people, who cared for the people, and was loved by the people. He stood by those whom he entrusted responsibilities. There are many examples testifying to this, but I will mention only one.

In 1971, the Tanzania delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, which at the material time I had the honour of leading, played an important role in the restoration of the lawful rights of the Peoples Republic of China to the United Nations. We did so in concert with a number of other countries, as was in the case in previous years. This time however, those advocating for the restoration of the rights of the People's Republic of China and the expulsion of the Taiwanese regime prevailed and China assumed its seat at the United Nations.

Regrettably, part of the media, instead of focusing on the successful tactics and organized way in which our delegation together with the other key delegations involved in the frontline of supporting China, went on to allege that the Tanzania delegation and myself jumped from our seats and started dancing. In reality while we were all jubilant at this victory, which we considered to be more of a victory for the United Nations in its quest for universality, nothing of the sort happened. However, with these news being dramatized throughout the world, I became a victim of a lot of abuse, hate mail and threats from some people. I was even being occasionally asked as to when I would be recalled by my Government. What they did not know was that Mwalimu paid tribute to our role and was among many leaders who were gratified at the righting of an anachronistic anomaly.

Ten years later, when I stood for the post of UN Secretary General, as a candidate sponsored by the OAU and supported by not only the Third World but also several western countries, Mwalimu was unequivocal in his support and encouraging me to continue with the electoral process. He was the type of leader who did not give up easily, especially on things that he believed in.

He was, among other things, an avid reader and always following world events and news. As Foreign Minister, every time I was called to State House or to Msasani to meet with him, I made it a point to get an up-to-date run-down of all the major happenings in the World, This was because, more often than not, Mwalimu would be asking questions about particular African or international events and it was always advisable that at least one had an idea of what he was referring to.

Mwalimu, truly a man of the people, was a very considerate and humane person. From my own experience, I found him tolerant, understanding and never entertaining any intrigues. He was against any and all sorts of subterfuges and backbiting. He was a truly national leader and national asset. He would at times go to the extreme in being accommodating where he felt some genuine concerns that had to be addressed. Here, I would recall one particular experience.

In October 1980 after the Presidential and Parliamentary elections, I was summoned to Dar es salaam from New York. When I went to Msasani, Mwalimu told me that he wanted me to come home and assist him in Foreign Affairs. He then said, "I know of the possibilities of your being a

candidate for the post of the Secretary General of the United Nations. If therefore you feel that coming back home at this point and time would jeopardize your prospects, then you can continue to remain in New York, until after the elections (which were due in the end of 1981). If, not then you should come back. If you are not certain either way, then you should come back.”

He gave me twenty four to forty-eight hours to think about the matter and give him a reply. I was overwhelmed by his consideration and, of course, within 24 hours I responded positively. There are many other examples that demonstrate the sensitivity and the consideration that this outstanding and great leader and statesman of our times displayed towards others, including those whom he could at any time hire or fire.

In the same regard, Mwalimu was a leader who exuded confidence. He did not hesitate to confer confidence on those he entrusted with responsibilities. He had great powers of persuasion and total disposition to encourage and assist people whom he has assigned responsibilities. I still vividly recall how he unexpectedly decided to appoint me as Prime Minister in April, 1984 following the tragic and sad death of Prime Minister Edward Moringe

Sokoine. When I hesitated, conscious of my own limitations and aware of the great gap that the late Sokoine had left in the country, and pointing out that as of that moment all my experiences had been mostly on Foreign Affairs, Mwalimu brushed my doubts aside and asserted that I would manage.

In addition to his disarming laughter, Mwalimu Nyerere had a tremendous sense of humour. Some time in the early 1980s, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I accompanied him on an official visit to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the invitation of President Kim Il Sung. In Pyongyang we were accommodated in one of the State Guest Houses. Besides official functions, we used to have breakfast together. On the first day at the breakfast table, there was a bottle right in the middle that contained a snake. I did not feel at all comfortable but protocol considerations dictated that I kept quiet. Little did I know that Mwalimu was also very uncomfortable with that situation. On the following day at breakfast, Mwalimu turned to us and wondered aloud, "Is that bottle really necessary?" To which I jumped at the opportunity to politely request our Korean friends to kindly remove it.

There is another example that immediately comes to my mind. This happened in 1968 when I was serving as the Director of the African and Middle East Department, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In one of the memos sent to the President, it was recommended that when our Ambassadors return home, they continue to be called Ambassadors. In his brief but succinct response and directive, Mwalimu stated: if an Ambassador is recalled and comes back home and assumes some function that in some ways relate to that of an Ambassador, FINE. But if I recall an Ambassador and appoint him as Head of the Sisal Corporation, for example, he cannot continue to be categorized as an Ambassador. In those days, we used to characterize such swift and sharp responses from State House as "STINKERS." And so it was that when this particular communication came from the President, the late Ambassador Daniel Mloka who was then the Director of Political Affairs in the Ministry loudly proclaimed in the corridors of the Ministry that we had a "STINKER".

Mwalimu was a great human being who had a disarming way of making grown ups and kids alike not to feel intimidated. Before, I left for Addis Ababa in September 1989 to take up my position as Secretary General of the OAU, I had one morning gone to the Airport to see Mwalimu off on his way

to Butiama. I took with me my then three and half year old son, Ahmed. The latter greeted Mwalimu who told him that he was his "BABU". My little boy responded, "No, you are not my Babu. My Babu is in Kariakoo", to my embarrassment and bewilderment. Mwalimu took it calmly and told him:" I am your Babu and there are many other Babus that you don't know of!". As we stayed in Addis and Ahmed was growing up, Mwalimu used to pass there on several occasions and on every occasion, he would come to our house- the official residence of the Secretary General. Ahmed grew extremely fond and respectful of Mwalimu who treated the former with great affection that when the devastating news of his most untimely passing away reached us all, we all broke down in tears and Ahmed insisted on coming to Dar es salaam to pay his last respects -which he did.

In my experience of working under him and with him in various capacities both in the Government and in the Party(the CCM), I found him engaging, inspiring and responsive to ideas. It was indeed a great honour, privilege and pleasure to have had that possibility for at least twenty-five years that is until I left the country to assume my new responsibilities in Addis Ababa.

As we now remember Mwalimu we do so with mixed feelings of sadness and satisfaction. Sadness in that although we all know that Mwalimu is no more and that was the inevitable end for him and for all of us mortals, we still find it difficult to get used to the idea that he is no longer with us. Satisfaction in the sense that at a time like this it is proper that we celebrate Mwalimu Nyerere's life, achievements and gigantic contribution not only to Tanzania and Africa- the country and Continent - that he loved and cared for so dearly, but above all our common humanity.