

As France marks the Bastille Day, which signifies the start of the French Revolution more than 200 years ago, **UMARU KASHAKA** spoke to the French Ambassador to Uganda, Stephanie Rivoal, on this and other issues pertaining to the Republic's relations with Uganda

**Q** What was your first impression about Uganda when you took up your posting here?

It was my first time in Uganda, but I was well aware of Africa in general. I have been to Sudan, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Liberia and many other places. I think I was pleasantly surprised by the beauty of the country, climate, the potential, especially in agriculture and tourism. I was also pleasantly surprised by the people. They are easy-going. So, I think my first impressions were positive.

**Tell us about the Bastille Day, what are some of the enduring memories of this day?**

Exactly 228 years ago, today, ordinary French people took a bold decision to free themselves from oppression. The revolutionaries stormed the Bastille fortress, a symbol of the oppressive monarchy. The French Revolution brought about a wind of change from down to the top in all people's mind, attitude and way of thinking. The revolutionary spirit of the French led to the birth of a new nation, the First Republic under the motto of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", where every citizen has their place, whatever the differences in opinions, religion or race.

Unlike some other countries in Europe, such as Belgium, Sweden and the UK, which are still monarchies, France is no longer a monarchy. There are no reminiscences of the monarch in institutions. We are still into a strong president that could be symbolically speaking a monarch, but the way the institutions are working are involving the people from A to Z.

So, for us, the French, the Bastille Day is the symbol of the freedom of our country and the beginning of the Republic and the Republic, carries strong values with it. It holds the values that we have written all over the place of equality, liberty and fraternity.

**Recently, your development agency signed a financing agreement to support construction of mini-hydro plants in the country, can you tell us more about the deal.**

The French Development Agency (AFD) is growing its commitment every year, even doubling from last year to this year and it is growing

# Focus on agriculture, says



French ambassador to Uganda Stephanie Rivoal during the interview. Photo by Wilfred Sanya



French Ambassador with Pamela Angwech, the founder and executive director of the Gulu Women's Economic Development and Globalisation. Angwech won the 2017 EU Human Rights Defenders Award. Angwech's organisation is a beneficiary of the French Embassy Social Development Fund

## What Uganda can learn from France

**Your country has just been through an election, what can we learn as a country from your experience?**

France is going through a massive political reshuffle. The parties as we know them, left-wing and right-wing are no longer valid, so to speak. They are reforming, rebuilding and are completely disintegrated, which was a massive surprise because we have a habit in France of alternating left and right and right and left. This is a completely new set up for the French people, politically speaking. President

Emmanuel Macron was not known to the Republic three years ago. He became a minister of economy.

He launched his movement two years ago only and now not only has he been elected president, but he has the vast majority in Parliament and so many people from his movement have been elected into the parliament.

So, when you look at this, we can feel something has changed. When you compare to Uganda, of course I am not sure this could happen or if it is likely to happen here, but

you have quite the opposite in terms of the system. You have a strong National Resistance Movement party, long standing President of 30 years, with 70-something years and my President is 39 only. So, I think we have a different set up as of now. So, lessons learnt? I do not know because no one in France saw it (election of Macron) coming, to be honest. It was a bit of a surprise.

We were surprised ourselves. But we are launching ourselves into a new era, a new world. Macron, to many, is also a symbol of a new era.

fast. We want to be by the side of the Ugandan people, by the side of the Government, in many areas of infrastructure. So, that could be hydroelectricity, big dams, but also the small rural area hydroelectricity.

So, anything to go by green energy, green electricity and infrastructure, such as roads. We are hoping to be the ones selected to build the Kampala-Jinja expressway.

We were involved in the Ggaba water project in Kampala and we are also involved in smaller projects, such as biodiversity, promoting green tourism and ecotourism. There are a variety of activities that we are doing and in terms of electricity, we believe it is going to help Uganda develop massively and quickly.

Access to electricity, of course, will cause industries to grow and hire more people. They will then have access to green electricity. So, we looked at the entire territory and some of them, like the west, can have access to big dams, but some rural areas are more remote and for such, they need mini hydro electricity, they need a specific dedicated way to access electricity and these are the types of projects we are helping Uganda with.

**In your opinion, how can we best empower the youth in Uganda to make a positive contribution in the country?**

Your country has a young population. Half of the people are below 16 years old. It is much younger than France, by comparison. Such people have many needs. Some of them are basic needs, such as access to health, access to electricity and jobs. The needs of some others are more like

vocational training, acquiring skills and another one is possibly to have a vision of the future for them. It is a more intellectual type of need and meaning to their lives. When you have a bodaboda business, it seems to be something that the young people like. It is hard to see the future. What is the future going to be like? I mean, one may ride their bodaboda, until they are 60 years old because there is no evolution in such a type of business.

When one educates themselves, they acquire the skills. You can move from one job to another and then possibly acquire more responsibilities.

I think the young people need access to jobs, so you need industrialisation of the country in order to have access to these jobs and people in general need to look

after themselves, not looking up to the Government for help once they are old and say: 'Give me this, give me that.' No, one gets what they want, but through work, acquiring skills, studying and making more in order to pay for their training.

But number one, look after yourself and rely on yourself to succeed and then, of course, it is a duty of the Government to help one achieve what they want, but not to give it to you. So, the real question is: What do the young people in Uganda want to achieve for themselves and for their country?

I look at agriculture, I have been to the countryside, in many places, the land can be worked upon more, but it will require someone to be in the field every day and nurture their profession every day, every hour of the day and that is huge

work, but the potential is right there under your feet. It is your soil.

**How will Brexit affect Uganda?**

I do not think in any way it will affect Uganda or Africa because, the UK is going to look at bilateral arrangements, so, maybe you partner outside the European Union (EU). It is a shame that the UK is leaving the EU, I think we are stronger when we are united, but the history of the UK and Europe has been a passionate one since Margaret Thatcher (Prime Minister of the UK from 1979 to 1990). There was this moment in history, where the UK had always been saying: 'Uh, we want to be out, we are not getting enough of it.' So, they will never be satisfied with Europe. Whereas France, Italy, Germany, the continental Europe

# French ambassador to Uganda



Maj. Gen. Bacquet decorating Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala with the Legion of Honour at a ceremony recently

## Describe the balance of trade between France and Uganda, how can it be improved?

It is a small one. Uganda is exporting agricultural products to France and France is exporting mainly medicine to Uganda. It could be much stronger, especially on the agricultural products. The level of quality that the French people, the French market and the European market is expecting is high.

Agriculture in Uganda, as far as I can tell from my experience of being here, is at crossroads. You want more productivity and I agree with you. You can produce much more, but it should not be affecting the quality of your products, especially with the use of chemicals, because if you do, your products will be banned from the European markets.

There are many standards and they are more and more stringent on the agricultural products to preserve the health of the European people. For example, a lot of pesticides used are banned in Europe and if your products contain pesticides, they will not be sold.

On the opposite side, if one tries to sell to European market organic produce, which is free of chemical products, one will sell them at a higher price and you can find your way into the European market. I think there is an opportunity on agricultural products if Uganda

## THE POTENTIAL IS RIGHT THERE UNDER YOUR FEET. IT IS YOUR SOIL

sticks to high quality, extremely organic and pure products, which you already have here.

### As we mark the Bastille Day, what message do you have for both the French citizens and Ugandans?

On this particular edition of the Bastille Day in Uganda, our message is about the revolution of society. We have chosen to reflect on the 1936 French social Revolution initiated by the left wing government that had just ascended to power. This era was particularly marked by the improvement of the workers' rights and benefits. For the first time, workers enjoyed a two-week paid holiday, a reduction of the number of working hours to 40 per week and also a free train ticket to holiday destinations, such as resorts and seashores. Consequently, the more modest French people had the opportunity to change their lives, to raise their ambition as they gain more

freedom, more time to enjoy the pleasures of life. This also led to the emergence of a middle class, which upheld the ideals of prosperity and democracy. They were able to hire more workers, even house helps at home; they put their children to school and uplifted their society.

My second message is that as we celebrate freedom, we need to pay more attention to the growing extremism and populism in our society. Right after 1936, a difficult period began in Europe. It was the eve of the Second World War, populism started to rise with people engulfed in inflammatory speeches pushing people against one another. Hitler became the leader of Germany and the war started. In France, the far right part is today the second biggest political force.

There is, therefore, a need to remain strong on the values of the French revolutionaries: "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." We shall not forget our history and the true meaning of those words. Liberty for the freedom of all people, all mankind. Equality between man and woman, between people, between all human beings irrelevant of their differences. And most importantly, fraternity for the solidarity with one another, never forgetting that peace is the key to happiness.

Long live the Republic, Long live France.

has been much more into the construction of Europe.

It is a sad story, especially from the UK. It will impact negatively on Europe at the beginning when we need to find new trading arrangements, but we should look at

the bright side. It may strengthen Europe because it brings us together. Either we make it stronger or it will collapse.

So, it is a tipping point. I think it is an opportunity for Europe to be stronger.