

8 November 2017

The Hon. Wilson M. Mukasa
Minister for Public Service
Government of Uganda

Thru:
Mrs. Catherine Bitarakwate Musingwiire
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Public Service

Dear Minister:

We write as scholars of Uganda's history and culture to welcome the opening of the new building to house the Uganda National Archives. The building is well planned and well built, a worthy home to the important historical materials that the National Archives holds. We thank you and your ministerial staff for bringing the building project to a successful conclusion.

Our appreciation for this brilliant new building is heightened by our awareness of the situation in which the Archives were formerly kept. As you know, the Archives were until 2016 housed in Entebbe, in a warren of dusty basement rooms below the National Agricultural Research Organization. The Archives were impossible for all but the most dedicated researchers to find, for there was no sign identifying the building. The repository had been completely full since 1962, and the Archives were therefore unable to acquire new materials for preservation. In its capacious new building in Wandegaya the National Archives have been transformed. With its new space the Archives' staff is in a position to acquire vitally important historical materials from Uganda's government ministries, and in recent months thousands of boxes have been newly deposited by the Ministries of Finance, Education, Public Service, and Health. With space at their disposal the Archives' staff can care for these important files properly. And—because the Archives are now located in the central part of Kampala, in close proximity to academic and government institutions—it can make these materials available to Uganda's public.

While we welcome this building, we are concerned about the following issues.

First: the staff of the National Archives is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the new building. At present there are only three members of staff. In the absence of sufficient staff it is hard to see how the thousands of files that have newly been brought into the Archives will be catalogued and made available to users.

Second: the National Archives lacks the equipment that is needed to properly undertake its work. The building has not been adequately equipped with shelves, desks, chairs, and computing equipment. Neither is there a sufficient supply of acid-free boxes. Most of the materials acquired in recent months are therefore stacked in piles on the floor.

Third: very recently the Commission of Inquiry into Land has been given the entirety of the ground floor to conduct its work. The Archives' staff has been relegated to the lower ground floor. The Archives' furniture has been used to provision the Commission; and even its

storage rooms have been requisitioned. One room—previously used as a library for official and semi-official publications—has been partitioned and turned into offices for the Commission’s use. The publications that formerly lined the shelves have been placed in boxes and stacked in the corner of another room.

We note that the amount of historical material meant to be housed in the new building is tremendous. Thousands of boxes have been deposited in the Archives in recent months, and there are thousands of boxes still to come from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, from the Office of the President, and from other government departments. None of this material is as yet sorted or catalogued, and it is therefore not accessible to Archives users. The volume of paperwork alone will make the building bulge. And there is a need for working space, too, so that the huge amount of newly-archived files can be processed and read. There is also a need for equipment by which government communications kept in digital media can be preserved for posterity.

Given the growing number of universities, research institutions and research-based NGOs in Uganda that draw on archival materials for their work, we feel it important that the new building should be made as accessible and useable as possible. Relegating the Archives to the basement of the building makes it difficult for users to gain access, constrains the working space that the Archives’ staff has available, and limits the amount of historical paperwork that government ministries can deposit.

We therefore urge you to

1. Invest, as soon as possible, in the outfitting and furnishing of the newly built National Archives, including the purchase of shelves, desks, chairs, and computing equipment;
2. Bring the staff establishment up to meet the considerable demands that are being placed in the institution; and
3. Ensure that the National Archives building would not permanently be given over to other government offices or departments to occupy.

A fully funded, staffed, and accessible National Archives will strengthen Uganda’s government and academic institutions, facilitate government accountability, and enable the smoother operation of your Ministry. It will offer students an opportunity to learn valuable lessons about the past. And it will offer Uganda’s citizens a resource with which to engage with the history of their country, so better to inform public debate about the future.

We stand ready to be of whatever assistance we can as the Uganda’s National Archives enters into this new phase in its institutional life. Here is an exciting opportunity: a terrific building, carefully and competently constructed to meet the growing needs of archival preservation in Uganda. We look forward to working with you and with the Archives’ staff to ensure that Uganda’s citizens and scholars make the fullest use possible of this important national resource.

Thank you for your support and interest.

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