

**3rd Graduation ceremony of the Uganda Democracy Academy**

**Remarks by Guillaume Chartrain**

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Honourable Ministers, Members of Parliament,  
Colleagues and partners,  
Young leaders of Uganda,

Justice Albie Sachs, one of the first judges appointed by President Nelson Mandela to South Africa’s Constitutional Court, once said: ‘Democracy is not a moment. It is a process. A slow, sometimes painful one.’ That process must be renewed—generation after generation. It must be inherited, challenged, and reimagined.

It is with great pleasure that I return to this National Youth Symposium, one year after joining you for the graduation of the second cohort. But today is more than a continuation. It is a call—to take responsibility, to question assumptions, and to carry forward what others have begun.

This symposium is not just a platform. It is a passage.

Over the past two days, you have revisited Uganda’s democratic journey not merely to commemorate it, but to interrogate its trajectory with clarity and care. You engaged with voices who shaped it—figures like Hon. Beatrice Kiraso, Gen. Mugisha Muntu, and Rt Hon. Amama Mbabazi. You explored the relevance of affirmative action, the tension between tradition and innovation, and the foundations of a future where pluralism can be principled.

You have also heard from young generation leaders, Honorables Phionah Nyamutoro and Joel Ssenyonyi about the realities of political engagements, the tough commitments and pressure required behind the rosy pictures of prestigious positions.

And you have done so not in echo chambers—but across lines of difference, through the kind of dialogue democracy depends on.

As we mark **twenty years since the return to multipartyism in Uganda**, it is essential to remember that this is not the country’s first experience with political pluralism. Uganda experimented with multiparty politics soon after independence. But in those early years, parties were often built around identity more than ideas. Their competition was driven not by visions of society, but by vehicles of belonging—ethnic, regional, or religious.

This led, too often, not to healthy debate but to toxic confrontation. Not to competition over ideas, but to zero-sum battles over access to power and resources.

In a democracy worthy of its name, **elections should not be a scramble for access**, but a contest of visions—about how to implement a shared project rooted in the Ugandan social contract. Parties must be platforms for ideas, not instruments of division. Political competition should not be about *who you are*, but about *what you propose* and *how you intend to serve*.

Allow me to frame this moment with three qualities that I believe any democracy needs to sustain itself:

**First, transmission—across generations.**  
No democratic system survives without memory. It is built on the efforts, the struggles, and the choices of those who came before. But transmission is not about nostalgia. It is about shared responsibility.

Uganda’s journey with multiparty politics—past and present—offers valuable lessons. Your readiness to engage with those who lived that history shows that transmission is alive and active. Not as blind inheritance, but as informed ownership.

Democracy endures when memory becomes mentorship.

And I commend the leaders who were present here not to impose, but to engage. I also commend you—for listening not to conform, but to understand. That, too, is leadership.

**Second, a society that grows—through dialogue, not denial.**

Multiparty democracy is not just a legal framework—it is a civic culture. And like any culture, it must be nurtured.

For political pluralism to thrive, disagreement must be normalised, not demonised. Participation must be inclusive, not transactional. Institutions must be trusted, not bypassed.

A mature society embraces difference without descending into division.  
It chooses debate over dogma.  
It recognises that unity does not mean uniformity.

This is one of the most encouraging takeaways from this symposium: that Uganda’s youth is not afraid to ask hard questions—not to attack, but to clarify; not to weaken democracy, but to deepen it.

**Third, a youth ready to serve—not just to speak.**

The energy of young people is undeniable. But what gives that energy direction is purpose.

Leadership today is often confused with visibility. With branding. But leadership is not a performance. It is a responsibility. A discipline. A choice.

As I said recently at Makerere University:

*Be a leader to be—not to have.*  
*Lead not for the spotlight, but for the institution. Not for status, but for service.*

Aspire not to be admired, but to uplift.

Use your voice not only to be heard, but to help others be heard.

This is the spirit in which the European Union supports you—not by promoting a model, but by enabling a process. A process rooted in local ownership, inclusive values, and long-term partnerships.

Through our collaboration with the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, the Uganda Youth Network, and the Uganda Democracy Academy, we invest not in visibility campaigns—but in leadership preparation. In civic education. In political dialogue. In spaces like this one.

We support you not to speak for you—but to walk beside you.

**Because democracy is not downloaded. It is co-created.**

Let me now turn to the graduates of the **third cohort** of the Uganda Democracy Academy.

You are no longer students of democracy. You are its stewards.  
Over these months, you’ve debated with integrity, built bridges across difference, and practised what many only preach.

You did not come here to recite theories. You came here to test them—to engage, to challenge each other, to grow. And you did it across party lines, with humility and conviction.

Let your leadership be marked not by visibility, but by consistency.  
Not by ambition alone, but by accountability.  
Not by how many follow you—but by how much you inspire others to lead.

*Belong not just to a party, but to a purpose.*  
*Lead not for today—but for what must endure.*

So as we close this year’s symposium, let me return to where we began:

Democracy is not a finished project. It must be inherited, challenged, and reimagined—generation after generation.

Uganda’s future will not be written in manifestos alone. It will be written in your conduct. Your choices. Your example.

So go forward with courage.  
Speak truth to power—but also build the power of truth.  
Challenge without tearing down.  
Lead with humility.  
Serve with integrity.  
And always—**lead to be, not to have.**

**Thank you.**