



DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE FACILITY CLOSURE EVENT

Remarks by H E Mr Jan Sadek

**Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Uganda
and Chair of the DGF Board**

30th May 2023

EU Ambassador's Residence, Kampala

Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance Vincent Waiswa Bagiire,
Other Government Representatives here present,
My fellow DGF Board Members, the Heads of Mission of Austria, Denmark,
Ireland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden,
The Head and staff of the DGF Facility Management Unit,
DGF Partner Organisations representatives,
Development Partners here present,
Media Representatives
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Good afternoon,

You are all most welcome here today to the EU residence where we have come together to mark the closure of the Democratic Governance Facility.

I am delighted to be here with so many of you and that we have this chance to celebrate the achievements of this longstanding programme. Above all, this is a moment to recognise the work of the DGF partners, most of whom I am happy to see are here with us today.

Reflecting the wide reach of the DGF, I can see we have friends and partners here today from all over the country – from Gulu, Kabale, Masindi, Mbale and of course Wakiso and Kampala.

You are all most welcome – mwebale kujja!

We also welcome here today government partners. The DGF is often recognised for its strong support to civil society over the years – and rightly so! – however let us not forget that one of the programme’s key features is that it has worked consistently with *both* government and civil society. This emphasis on bringing citizens and the state closer together is, for me, key to many of the successes of the DGF that we are recognising here today.

We see the fruits of this collaboration in many areas, for example the Civic Education Coalition of Uganda which brings together government bodies and civic groups to advance the public’s awareness and engagement in public life or in terms of accountability where the DGF supported both governmental institutions and civil society. We have also seen excellent citizen-state engagement in the area of access to justice as state and civil society groups worked hand in hand to bring legal aid to the most vulnerable groups.

In addition to being centrally involving in the implementation of the programme, for the past year the government has also been involved in the governance structures of the DGF with four government ministries sitting together with us on the DGF Board and Steering Committee and participating actively in the discussions.

A vibrant civil society has historically played and continue to play an essential role in Europe’s development. Through the DGF, we recognise the role of civil society in advancing development and governance in Uganda. From national level NGOs to community-based organisations, civil society is the critical link between the citizen and the state. Civil society creates space for dialogue, problem solving,

accountability and citizen voice. Without civil society's partnership with the DGF, we would not have many of the innovations that we see today in the governance space, including local government scorecards, community peace advocates and digital systems to defend land rights.

Ladies and gentlemen, while today is a moment to celebrate achievements, I am also aware that this is a sad moment for many of you who have been part of the DGF journey since it started in 2011. For many of you, the DGF's closure represents not just the loss of a funding partner but also the end of 12-year-long collective enterprise that aimed to give a voice to the voiceless, to bring citizens and state closer together and to cement a culture of democratic governance all across this beautiful country. It is my sincere hope that the friendships forged, partnerships built and innovations sparked during this time will endure, even after the DGF cease to operate.

Though I have only been in Uganda for a short time, I know already the huge contribution that all of you here today have made to this very valuable effort. Without your hard work, hundreds of thousands of people would not have had access to a lawyer; without you, numerous victims of conflict and torture would have gone without treatment and counselling; without you, citizens would not have been able to gain crucial access to information on public contracting; and without you, many progressive laws and policies would not have been enacted during the lifetime of the DGF.

A little later on, as we have heard, we will launch the DGF Story – a series of videos produced to communicate the impact of the DGF. What strikes me from watching these stories is that improving governance is, at the end of the day, not some abstract concept, but instead it is about better service delivery and transforming people's lives so that they can reach their full potential.

None of this would have been possible without the longstanding commitment of the development partners who took the decision to combine resources and create a single mechanism for supporting democratic governance work in Uganda. I want to take this opportunity to most sincerely thank my fellow DGF development partners Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden for this commitment and for having engaged so collaboratively in this effort. I also need to mention the United Kingdom who supported the DGF in its first phase from 2011 to 2017.

While we regret that we can't continue with the DGF arrangement, we of course remain committed to strengthening democratic governance in Uganda. As we can see in the news and on social media every day, the democratic model is under attack on many fronts all over the world. At this time, we all need to renew our commitment to protect the foundations of any successful democracy.

Ladies and gentlemen, we know that advancing democracy is never a straight road. It is less like cruising on the expressway to Entebbe, and more like navigating the boda bodas, taxis and trucks on Jinja Road!

In the EU, we have been working on this for over seventy years and it is still very much a work in progress. Setbacks and challenges are inevitable. And yet there is no challenge that cannot be overcome through collective efforts, human ingenuity and courage.

On behalf of the other development partners on the DGF Board, I can confidently say that we aim to continue supporting democratic governance work in Uganda in the years to come. As we have always done, we will align these programmes with government priorities, most importantly with the relevant objectives of the NDP III. Each of our offices are working hard to develop new programmes in this area and we look forward to collaborating closely with relevant government ministries and civil society organisations as these begin to take shape.

This programming will, we hope, continue to be accompanied by an open and constructive dialogue on democratic governance and human rights. We know that these discussions are not always so easy, but we trust that as strong partners we can have respectful, open exchanges and listen to one another's views.

This week, for example, we saw the signing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act 2023. As the EU, we have made no secret of our opposition to this law and, as reaffirmed in yesterday's statement by our High Representative for Foreign Policy Josep Borrell, we believe it is contrary to Uganda's regional and international human rights commitments. As yesterday's statement also makes clear, the EU remains committed to engaging with the Ugandan authorities and civil society to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity, are treated equally, with dignity and respect

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Honourable Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, I cannot leave the podium without thanking Nicole Bjerler and the wonderful team at the DGF Facility Management Unit. They have steered the DGF ship through some challenging times in these past years – including navigating the rocky waters of the COVID-19 pandemic and the suspension of the DGF. At all times, Nicole and her team have risen to meet the challenge, continued to provide great support to the partners and managed the many demands made on them by the Board and Steering Committee. Nicole and team – please accept my most heartfelt thanks for all you have done and I wish you the very best for the future.

With that, ladies and gentlemen, let me conclude by warmly welcoming you all here again today and I look forward to speaking with all of you during the informal networking reception later on.

It is now my honour to invite the Permanent Secretary to make his remarks. Thank you.