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REFERENDUM 2000: CHOOSING A POLITICAL SYSTEM FOR UGANDA



ENGLISH

What is a Referendum?

A Referendum is a vote taken on an important issue by all the people of a country. It is an opportunity for all people to show whether or not they support an idea. Usually decisions about government policy are taken by elected representatives of the people (for example, MPs). However, in a referendum, everybody has a chance to vote on a particular issue.

What is Referendum 2000 about?

According to the Ugandan Constitution, the people of Uganda shall decide for themselves what kind of political system should be used to govern the country. To do this, the Constitution says that a Referendum must be held one year before the next Parliamentary and Presidential elections.

In June or July 2000, a Referendum will be held to allow Ugandans to choose between:

- The Movement System
- The Multi-party system
- Any other democratic and representative political system.

What is a political system?

A political system is the way in which a country elects its leaders and governs its affairs. Some political systems are democratic, while others are not. The Ugandan Constitution permits a Referendum to be held to choose between different democratic political systems. In this way, the Constitution protects democracy in Uganda.

What is the Movement System?

At the moment Uganda is governed by the Movement system. Leaders are elected on the basis of individual merit. Any citizen aged 18 years or over is free to contest directly for a leadership position at any level. If an individual wishes to compete in an election, this does not have to be approved by any organisation or party. It is up to the voters to decide if a person will be a good leader or not.

The movement system includes everyone in Uganda and there is no distinction between "members" and "non members". Under the Movement system, elected representatives in any structure of government participate in discussions and make decisions according to their personal beliefs and the views of their respective constituencies.

What is a Multi-party System?

In a Multi-party system, several different parties compete in an election and more than two parties are represented in government. All citizens are given the right to belong to the political party of their choice, or even to form their own political party. A political party is an organisation with strong ideas about the economic, social and political direction of a country. Some parties have strong views about other issues too (for example, cultural or environmental issues).

In a multi-party system, candidates in an election are put forward by a party. Elected Representatives in government participate in discussions and make decisions according to their party's position on the issues at hand. They represent the views of the people who voted for their party, and its members. Opposition parties attempt to offer alternatives to the ruling party.

What other democratic and representative political system could Ugandans choose?

For the Ugandan Referendum in 2000, a third political system might be suggested, although it is not yet clear what this might be. The Constitution emphasises that only a truly democratic and representative system will be accepted as a third option. If no such system is proposed, then Ugandans will simply have to choose between the movement and multi-party systems.

What will the Referendum question be?

A referendum is about an issue, NOT about electing a leader. Remember that the purpose of Referendum 2000 is to choose a political system for Uganda, and NOT to choose new leaders. A specially appointed panel of three judges will decide on the Referendum question. Keep your ears open to find out what it is.

Who can vote in the Referendum?

All Ugandans citizens aged 18 years and over are entitled to vote. However in order to exercise their vote, eligible citizens are obliged to register. If your name does not appear on the voters' register, then you will not be able to vote.

Remember
If you do not register, you cannot
vote in the Referendum

Why is it important for voters to register?

The voters' register is an important tool for organising the Referendum. It provides information about how many voters live in each area and ensures that adequate information about how many voters live in each area and ensures that adequate provision is made for them on voting day. The register also ensures that only eligible voters participate in the referendum, and that nobody votes more than once. In this way, the register helps to guarantee that the Referendum is free and fair.

What is the registration process?

During November 1999 the voters' registers were checked during village council meetings, the purpose being to identify names of dead, non-existent, underage and non-citizens and removing them.

In the meantime and until further notice from the Electoral Commission, those who wish to apply for registration or to transfer from one area to another have a chance to do so in preparation for the Referendum.

How can Ugandans prepare for the Referendum?

In the months before the Referendum, it is important for Ugandans to inform themselves about the different kinds of political systems so that they can make their choice. Civic educators will provide general information about the Referendum. Different sides will organise themselves to campaign for the multi-party and movement systems (and possibly even a

third system). Voters should pay attention to the campaigns and then decide for themselves which system they prefer.

Why is it important to vote in Referendum 2000?

There are many reasons why it is important to vote. It is your right and your responsibility. Choosing a political system for Uganda will decide how the country is governed in the future. This will have an impact on each and every citizen. It is therefore important that the views of every Ugandan should be heard. By voting in the Referendum, you are honouring the Constitution. In order for the Constitution to be a living document, all Ugandans need to respect what it says.

How will voting happen?

In the Referendum, people will vote by secret ballot. This means that your vote is your secret. Nobody will know which political system to choose. When the referendum question has been decided, a special ballot paper will be designed. There will be symbols to represent the different political systems, so that it will be easy for voters to recognise their choice even if they cannot read. Civic educators and campaigners for the different systems will inform voters about the ballot paper nearer to the time.

The actual voting process will be similar to what it was in the past. Voters will mark the ballot paper with a tick or a finger print to indicate their choice.

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