

13th ICOB Convention

22nd – 25th July, 2016

The Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames, London, UK

Opening Speech by Dennis Aguma, Chairman COB, UK

My Name is Dennis Aguma. I'm a son to the late Vasta Bagyenyi, a daughter to the late Rev Bampabura, ba Karobwa b'ahahabuzaniro of Nyacoonga, in Kisaasa aha mabale on your way to Katuna, omu gomborora rya Kamuganguzi, Ndorwa East, Kabale district.

Much as i was given an overdoze of Abahiriha, I'm actually Omuzigaaba, mwene mungwe. My late father was James Kanoni Bwesigye, of Kashekye, Kamwezi, Rukiga Constituency in Kabale District. So as the constituency name suggests, ndy'omukiga kashushu.

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to the 13th ICOB Convention.

In particular, i wanted to acknowledge the presence of;

- Leader of the Government Delegation, Maj Gen (Ret) Jim Muhwezi
- Hon Members of Parliament
- The Mayor of The Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames, Councillor Geoff Austin and his team from Kingston
- The Pro Vice Chancellor Enterprise, and Dean of the Faculty of Business and Law, Prof Ron Tuninga & staff
- ICOB board members
- Fellow, Abanyakigezi, friends, ladies and gentlemen

Welcome in particular to The Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames - the best borough of the best city in the world, London - and I'm not just saying this because the Mayor is here.

I wanted to draw your attention to a discussion that happened on September 20, 1777, between Boswell and Samuel Johnson. Boswell lived in Scotland, and only visited only periodically. Samuel Johnson who hated to spend time alone, was always going out and enjoying what London had to offer. The two were discussing whether or not Boswell's affection for London would wear thin if he chose to live in London as opposed to the zest he felt on his occasional visits.

Boswell wondered why Samuel was yet to find a man willing to live London, to which Samuel Johnson responded, "when a man is tired of London, he is tired of life; for there is in London all that life can afford.", said Samuel Johnson.

So welcome to the best borough, in the best city in the world - although upon reflection, i think Johnson's sentiments of London can also be said of my home town of Kabale, and Kigezi in general - for there is in Kigezi all that life can afford.

This year's theme, which is "Harnessing self-employment / small business ownership to improve household incomes" will be the focus of today deliberations. We have designed the program in such a way as to allow ample opportunity for the delegates to engage and contribute. We hope that the key action points from the deliberations, will form part of the communique and give guidance to the board as ICOB embarks on its teenage years.

That many of you travel long distances serves to remind us all just how important ICOB means to you. In the absence of the Kingdom of Kigezi, ICOB is our only refuge through which we celebrate our culture and heritage and mobilise ourselves, friends and well-wishers towards the socio-economic development of all the peoples of Kigezi.

This particular convention is very unique. It is, possibly make or break convention for ICOB. ICOB has endured thirteen years of non-political cohesion. But most delegates will agree with me that as it enters its teen years, we have a unique opportunity and obligation to press the reset button, to be bold enough and take the button from our founding fathers and forge an ICOB that is fit for the next generation. To this end, we have organised ekimeza, a Q&A session, where the members will have the opportunity to contribute to this crucial discussion regarding what future they wish to see for ICOB. Just as today's deliberations, we hope to have some concrete action points that will form part of the communique, and offer guidance to the new board in during the next year.

Of course work without play makes jack a dull boy. Thanks to our sponsors KI media, we have lined up an impressive dinner banquet, with a red carpet feel, plus African entertainment including traditional dancers, poems, and band performances - this will of course culminate into ekikiga dance where i hope to see you all on the floor.

That is not all, we have also planned a tour of London on Sunday, that will culminate into a family BBQ at the beautiful BoxHill, Part of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which we trust will send your memories flowing back to Kigezi. We want this to be the most memorable convention yet.

As i conclude, i wanted to say that it is not by coincidence that the conference is taking place at Kinston Business School. As you all know, the theme this year is "Harnessing self-employment / small business ownership to improve household incomes". It is therefore very appropriate that the convention is taking place at a University that is close to my heart - a university that has helped to recalibrate mine and my fellow students' lives and careers. You probably won't know this but Kingston University is the No 1 University for student and graduate entrepreneurs in the UK, starting more businesses than any other institution of higher learning in the UK for 6 years in a row. For the last three years, I had a unique privilege of serving my fellow students first as the President of Kingston Entrepreneurs, an opportunity that catapulted me into the world of startups and entrepreneurship. One of my key achievements was establishing the University's Business Incubator (Kingston Nest), for which i received a scholarship to run and manage as the Business Incubation Manager. With Kingston University's support, i have gone on to launch the National Association of Student Enterprises (NASE), which aspires to champion hands-on enterprise education and activities in all colleges and universities in Uganda - in the quest to solve the country chronic youth unemployment challenges.

As well as two key presenters today, Dr Rosemary Athayde and Prof. George Saridakis who work in the Small Business Research Centre, we also have amidst us, Christian Felstenin, who heads Kingston's GEDC, for which Makerere University Business School are partners. Indeed, delegates from MUBS are scheduled to attend the Next GEDC in September and further discussions will be happening to share best practices in the entrepreneurship space and explore potential post graduate scholarship opportunities and student exchange programs between the two institutions.

Kingston Business School and Kingston Law School is an outward looking institution offering programs to students from more than 100 countries, delivered by faculty members from across the globe. So you are not here by accident, and it's not because the Chairman Dennis Aguma works at Kingston University. Kingston has Uganda at heart and Mr Mayor, Uganda also has Kingston at heart, as evidence by all the delegates here.

Mr Mayor, i'm not sure whether you are aware but I'm one of the founding members of the Kingston Young Entrepreneurs Club, part of the Kingston Chamber of Commerce. So seeing as i have already done my bit for Uganda and Kigezi, perhaps it's time for Kingston to return the favour. This could be a start of a lasting relationship between Kingston and one of the districts in Kigezi, preferably my home town of Kabale.

In particular, I'd like to thank my boss Jack Kenward & Prof Ronald Tuninga, the Pro Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Faculty of Business and Law, here at Kingston University. Their support and belief in me, both as a student and member of staff - and now externally, as the Chairman of the International Community of Banyakigezi, here in the UK, is testament of the university's commitment to support community projects. The free venue and sponsoring all our breakfast and all conference refreshments has allowed us to make the event more affordable, hence one of, if not the biggest turn out in the history of ICOB Conventions.

As i invite Prof Tuninga to come and welcome you to Kingston, I want to say once more, on behalf of the organizing committee, welcome to Kingston - it's a pleasure to see so many of you here. Twabashemererwa.

Now please join me in giving Prof Tuninga a warm and powerful Kigezi applause for Kingston University's support to the ICOB Convention.

I thank you.

Dennis Aguma
Chairman | Community of Banyakigezi, UK