

BNFA MAKES PRESENTATION AT MINORITY CONFERENCE IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

The Barotse National Freedom Alliance (BNFA) through its Chair for the Diaspora Executive Committee (DEC), Professor Sitwala N. Imenda were invited to the International Conference on Minority Rights held on 21st November 2013 to present a paper on 'Minority Rights – The Barotse Perspective'

The conference which was held under the auspices of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organization - UNPO (on the sidelines of the UNPO Presidency Meeting which was to consider among other things BNFA's membership of the organization) took place in the South African parliament which was used from 1902 to 1994 - a very historic chamber, if only for the wrong reasons. But, this was the very place where those oppressive laws were made - which affected all of us in this region. The Prof. Reflects that;

"It was hair-raising, just to be there and absorb all that negative energy."

Prof. Imenda entitled his well researched and detailed paper "ZAMBIA'S DENIAL OF BAROTSELAND'S RIGHT TO SELF DETERMINATION". He started by giving a brief background 'For the sake of those who may not be familiar with the issue of Barotseland' laying out the genesis of the Country known as Zambia today came about as a result of a merger of mainly two previously autonomous nations, namely (a) Barotseland, and (b) the rest of Northern Rhodesia. This merger was made possible through the signing of an International treaty styled as the Barotseland Agreement – 1964 at the dawn of Independence for the central-southern territories.

Professor Imenda made it clear in his presentation that;

"In signing the BA'64, the Litunga was wise to the fact that within the context of the envisaged unitary state, the people of Barotseland descent would constitute a distinct minority. The BA'64 was, therefore, meant to accord the people of Barotseland the full extent, nature and level of **minority human rights standards** as codified in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27); the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989; the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 1992; the two Council of Europe treaties, namely, (a) the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and (b) the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages), as well as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Copenhagen Document of 1990, and the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted in 1966."

He further stated that;

"Indeed, the people of Barotseland descent constitute only about 12 percent of the Zambian population. The vote of the Barotse people has

been ineffectual ... because they constitute a small proportion of the overall population. Their collective vote can never be sufficient to amount to anything to carry a national vote”.

The rest of the paper goes on to give some graphic details of Zambia's great acts of betrayal leading to the demise of the unitary state. He went on to catalogue Zambia's sustained campaign of suppression and repression over Barotseland as a whole and Barotse Activists in particular. He went on to call the attention of the world to the ever deteriorating human rights situation in Barotseland especially the former colonial power which was a signatory to the Barotseland Agreement 1964, as well as international organizations to stop the rot in Zambia and allow for the peaceful disengagement of Barotseland from the rest of Zambia.

Concluding his powerful presentation the Prof said;

“So, as we sit here today, the union between Barotseland and the rest of the former Northern Rhodesia is in its death throes – and in tatters. After nearly five decades of misrule and neglect of Barotseland by the Zambian government, which has seen Barotseland slide from being the most affluent region of Zambia to its poorest, there is nothing left to salvage. Thus, on the basis of public international law, Barotseland, is now seeking formal recognition as the 55th African State, in line with the Barotse National Council resolutions of March 27, 2012. “Recognition” being the proper term, since, on the basis of pure public international law, *de jure* independence has existed since Barotseland chose to terminate the original Barotseland Agreement on 26 and 27 March 2012 – a position that has been made known to the Zambian government. The fact of the matter is that without draconian acts of aggression, repression, suppression, intimidation, harassment, torture, arbitrary arrests – as well as other forms of brutality, Barotseland would have operated as a free, autonomous and sovereign State since 1969. This is what has been the desire of the majority of the people of Barotseland ever since, and this still remains their desire today. Skirting this point will be to do the people of Barotseland an injustice; it will be failing to honour those whose limbs have been amputated, as well as those whose blood has already been shed eternally for this cause.”

It is hoped that the world will pay attention to the Barotseland impasse before it deteriorates further into another Biafra or indeed Rwanda.

Reported by **Mukunyandela wa Nyandi Mukuyoyisa**