

## The Barotseland Debacle

Imute wa Kalilo, BNFA Lusaka Region

The Barotseland debate has been ongoing at various levels of intensity since the Zambian Government under Kaunda abrogated on the [Barotseland Agreement 1964](#) since 1969. There has been several debates and opinions expressed by various political individuals on the debacle, the latest of which was the pronouncement by the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly where she said Barotseland does not exist in Zambia. The Deputy Speaker's utterance led to an angry reaction from the Barotse Kuta which regarded the statement as disrespectful and demanded for an apology. The Deputy Speaker's dismissive assertion was further supported by statements from the Republican Vice President Inonge Wina who reiterated that Barotseland does not exist in the constitution of Zambia.

Whereas Barotseland is not recognized in the current Zambia constitution, it is still a legal existing entity as the [abrogation](#) of the treaty by the then Zambian Government was illegal. There was no consent from the other party to the agreement legally to formalize the change of the Barotse nation to a province, including the change in the boundaries. Given the current circumstances where Barotseland is openly discriminated against in every development sphere, where it has moved to the second poorest, second most illiterate and least developed region in Zambia, and the marginalization of its people in all spheres of governance and the deliberate distortion of history as well removal of historical documents such as the Barotse Agreement from the National Archives, the people of Barotseland feel marginalized as part of Zambia. It is an open truth that people from Barotseland have systematically been excluded from government recruitment process (the army, police, civil service, entry to state training institutions and parastatals) and those already employed retired under the excuse of national interest. It is, therefore, natural that the people from Barotseland feel there is no incentive to continue to be part of a country that treats you as a second class citizen. Therefore, they are now demanding self-determination based on the agreement that was signed in 1964 that guaranteed protection of their minority rights such as employment and co-existence, given the fact the merger treaty was abrogated where Barotseland had agreed to merge with the then Northern Rhodesia to form an independent country we now call Zambia.

The current contention where the Deputy Speaker is asserting that Barotseland does not exist has sparked a debate whether the Kingdom of Barotseland does exist or not, with the proponents of Barotseland contesting that it does and that Zambia should not attempt to erase a centuries old kingdom with its special traditions and cultures, where the agreement provided for continued authority of The Litunga over land, forestry, fisheries and on local government.

The current bone of contention is that since Zambia abrogated on the treaty in 1969, the continued merger has been illegal and that Barotseland is entitled to separate from Zambia as the glue that held the agreement between the two no longer exists. The next logical step is for the two signatories to sit down and discuss the mode of peaceful separation.

The current leadership of Barotseland (The Litunga and the Kuta) has clearly shown that they are not capable to lead the process as indicated by the lack of progress since the 2012 Barotse National Council that solicited opinions from representatives of the Barotse Nation. The outcome of that gathering resolved that the people agreed to accept the abrogation and to consider establishing interim authority to negotiate on the terms of divorce vi a vis boundaries, sharing of resources and liabilities. As a result of inaction of the BRE and The Litunga no progress was made to drive the process forward. Our analysis of

the current impasse identifies the lack of effective leadership in the current BRE as noted by Zambia President Lungu where he made the following observations:

“I have always said, let us resolve the Barotseland issue and BRE only wants to receive money, nothing will come out from them other requesting for budgetary allocation for consultations for their so called Regional Kutas. I have asked them to show me where the boundaries are and also open up the doors to both Barotse activist and BRE, but the BRE and The Litunga do not want to resolve the issue, it takes years for them to table any serious programs.

Given the observation of the Republican President of Zambia, ECL, it is a serious indictment of incompetence of the current BRE leadership which has lamentably failed to lead and provide an atmosphere of serious negotiations on the disengagement process.

In order to make meaning full headway to solve the Barotseland debacle, we suggest the following:

1. A second BNC be convened to deliberate on the way forward to actualize the resolution of the BNC of 2012.
2. The BNC to appoint an independent oversight committee to draw a road map for the implementation of the 2012 BNC
  - For the Oversight Committee to assist the Kuta to establish an interim government that will negotiate with the Zambian Government on a peaceful separation of the two states based on the [2012 BNC Resolutions](#).
3. The interim Government will be responsible for negotiating separation settlements with the Zambian Government.
4. BNC to make recommendations to BRE to overcome procrastination and obstruction of the process of separation resulting from the Zambian Governments monetary cohesion and incentives.
5. BRE to provide active and vocal support to adverse pronouncements on Barotseland and avoid continuing inaction and silence on issues pertaining to the global Barotse issue e.g. silence on the illegal incarceration of the Barotse Activists, the marginalization of the region, victimization and exclusion of persons from Barotseland from most governance and management positions as part of evidence.

In conclusion, we suggest that BRE and The Litunga should call for an immediate BNC to deliberate the disengagement process.