

A Journey Through Austria

I got interested in Austria by a film known as "Sound of Music" and thereafter by the missionary Father Helfer who taught me Philosophy at Katigondo Major Seminary in Uganda. Unfortunately I did not have enough time with Fr. Helfer as I left Uganda for further studies in Rome.

Although Rome was closer to Austria than Uganda I had to go to France for holidays to study French as part of the requirements for my studies.

It was only in 1986 that the "Sound of music" became a reality as I followed in the footsteps of the 1985 "Unterolberndorf-Team". This is where our 10-Point-Programme had been polished. This is what later on the NRM (National Resistance Movement) held on as its White Paper Manifesto when Yoweri K. Museveni came to power in January 1986.

At that time the Ugandan students in Austria like Peter Jjumba who later on was appointed Uganda's ambassador to Libya, had an impact consolidating the contacts between the two countries. They founded in July 1986 the Projectgroup for Rehabilitation of Uganda and Dolores Bauer, an Austrian journalist who had visited Uganda during the war held the first meeting of the Austria - Uganda Platform early 1987 after the return of a fact-finding journey of Maria Hirsch, the chairperson of the Projectgroup.

In September 1987 I was part of a group of Government and Non Government officials which was invited by the Platform to Austria, among them the current Minister Incharge of the Presidency, Kirunda-Kivejinja, Eryib Kyeyune and Janat Mukwaya, now Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs to name but a few.

In 1988 a team of Austrians, namely Dr. Gerhard Hubner, Ursula Steller, Andrea Wintersteiger and others visited Uganda to explore more.

The Austrian Government by then was listening to the Platform where Austrians from different works of life gained interest in Uganda and supported the contacts between the two countries. The Projectgroup started a magazine called "The Crane" which was distributed throughout the German speaking countries.

As our contacts grew, the Austrian Government opened a Consulate in Uganda and later on a Regional Bureau. Activities now between Austria and Uganda intensified and Uganda became one of the focus countries of Austrian Development Co-operation.

I moved around Austria with music, football, religions, NGO- and government groups to explore more about Austria. My journey became exciting as I got to know more and more Austrians. I did not hesitate to accompany my late Bishop Serapio Magambo of Fort Portal to Austria for treatment. Thanks to Wolfgang Böhm, Dolores Bauer, Michi Stadler Maj.Gen. Karl Semlitsch and Maria Hirsch who supported him in every way.

Once everything was moving smoothly, the Unterolberndorf man - President Museveni - had to visit Austria in 1994. I toured with him through Austria till his LC-1 base centre Unterolberndorf. Till today his room number 11 is reserved if he visits again.

Thanks to the Platform that through its high level contacts in Uganda and Austria gave birth to the Austrian Consulate man found in Alfred Chyba.

The great journey has not stopped as the Projectgroup and the Platform have turned into the Austrian - Ugandan Friendship Association that is to be celebrated on no greater day than the 9th October 2003 when Uganda commemorates her Independence.

Long live friendship

Fr. Albert B. Byaruhanga

(Development Co-ordinator of the Diocese of Fort Portal and long serving Advisor of the President)