

Remembering UPC Achievements

<http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/633479-shaban-nkutu-tragedy-of-a-cabinet-minister-with-solid-achievements.html>

Publish Date: Jul 28, 2012

The Late Hon. ShabanKirunda Nkutu

<http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/633479-shaban-nkutu-tragedy-of-a-cabinet-minister-with-solid-achievements.html>

Shaban Kirunda Nkutu disappeared and died at the violent hands of Idi Amin in 1973 with one of the most outstanding personal records of public service and national development in the history of Ugandan Cabinet Ministers.

As Minister of Health (1966-67), he oversaw the construction of 21 regional referral hospitals and the establishment of a free, quality, national healthcare system. Prior to this period, Uganda's referral hospitals were limited to Mulago and the Grade B hospital at Entebbe.s



As Minister of Works, Housing, Transport and Communications, he laid the foundation for Uganda's post-independence infrastructural foundation. Nkutu, who inherited a murram national road system, was the father of Uganda's national tarmac road network, the national landline telephone and postal services system, the [then] new Entebbe International Airport, regional airfields, quality bus and rail transport services and the National Housing and Construction Corporation, which built Crested Towers, Serena Hotel and the International Conference Centre as well as housing estates across the country, including the Bugolobi and Bukoto Housing estates in Kampala. He also oversaw the establishment of East African Airlines and the ports and ferries on Uganda's lake shore, at Port Bell and Jinja, in addition to the Kalangala and Lake Kyoga ferries

Shaban Nkutu was born in Nakibembe village, Bugweri County, Iganga District on November 15, 1930. His parents were the late Haji Ausi Kirunda and the late Zafalan Namuwaya.

The Nkutu family belongs to one of the 11 royal clans of the Basoga known as the Baisemenha who are direct descendants of the Bunyoro royal family. The clan traces its roots to the migrant Munyoro Prince Kakaire, son of Omukama Agutamba Nyamutukura, then King of Bunyoro. The clan's name "Menha," which means "to break," is derived from the clan's break-away from Bunyoro, following a violent royal succession battle. The Baisemenha clan put down its roots in Bugweri County.

The young Nkutu became the beneficiary of a clan tradition handed down by Baisemenha clan leaders of earlier generations to focus the very limited financial

resources available – not on their biological heirs – but on the education and career development of whichever young man best embodied Bugweri's best hopes in its future generations to provide national leadership in Uganda.

Following this tradition, Prince Muwaabe (grandfather of former Deputy Premier Ali Muwaabe Kirunda Kivejinja) - who had assumed leadership of Bugweri after its last pre-colonial Chief Menha Munhuulo had been deposed and exiled to Kenya by the British – decided to groom not his own son Salim Kivejinja but instead another young Prince, Zirabamuzaale (father of Iganga Woman MP Beatrice Zirabamuzaale Magoola) who became Secretary General of Busoga.

Zirabamuzaale was one of the first 3 Africans in the Legco (the Legislative Council), along with Sir Apollo Kagawa of Buganda and Nyangabyaki of Bunyoro. Zirabamuzaale in turn groomed and placed the clan's hopes for representation and a role in post-independence Uganda on his nephew Shaban Kirunda Nkutu, whose mother had managed to get him to complete primary school. Under Zirabamuzaale, Nkutu was mentored for national leadership.

The young Shaban Nkutu studied at Mwiri College and was trained at Kibuli and Makerere College as a teacher. He was one of the first Muslims in Uganda to get a secular education. During his twenties, he served as a teacher and later as a headmaster at Bwala, in Masaka.

Across Africa in the 1950s, it was common for educated African teachers, then a rarity, such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, to emerge as nationalist leaders. It was during this period that Nkutu became involved with the nationalist movement for Uganda's independence, first through the Uganda National Congress (UNC) and later the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC). He had earlier met Uganda's future Prime Minister, Milton Obote, during secondary school at Mwiri and the two were close friends.

On the eve of independence, in April 1962, Nkutu, with the backing of Prince Zirabamuzaale and the populous and well organized Baisemenha clan (which produced Chiefs in the area), stood for and was elected to Parliament on the ticket of UPC to represent Busoga South East constituency, which comprised of the present day Bugweri and Kigulu counties (Iganga District), Bunya County (Mayuge District) and the whole of Bugiri and Namayingo Districts. He represented Busoga South East in Parliament until the military overthrow of the Obote I government by Idi Amin on January 25, 1971.

During this 9-year period, Shaban Nkutu served as Parliamentary Secretary for Economic Affairs in the Office of The Prime Minister (1962-63), Deputy Minister of Education (1963-64), Deputy Minister of Works (1964-66), UPC Government Chief Whip/ Minister in Parliament (1964-66), Minister of Health (1966-67) and Minister of Works, Housing, Transport and Communications (1967-71). He was also the National Chairman of the Uganda Peoples Congress (1968-73).

One of the legacies of Shaban Nkutu's service in Cabinet of Uganda is that most Presidents of Uganda have appointed a Cabinet Minister from his family. Nkutu's nephew Wanume Kibedi (now Chairman of the Immigration Control Board) served the

Amin government as Foreign Minister from 1971-73 and served Museveni as an Ambassador.

Another nephew, Dr John Luwuliza-Kirunda, served the second Obote government as Minister of Internal Affairs and Secretary General of UPC from 1981-85 while a third nephew, Kirunda Kivenjinja, has served the Museveni government as a Minister in several portfolios since 1986 and was until recently the 3rd Deputy Prime Minister. With Hon. Adoko Nekyon and others, he co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Muslims (NAAM), the precursor to today's Uganda Muslim Supreme Council.

As a political leader, Shaban Nkutu is mostly remembered for his service as Minister of Health in 1966 and as Minister of Works, Housing, Transport and Communications from 1967-71. During his time in the Works Ministry, Nkutu was served as Permanent Secretary and Engineer in Chief by Uganda's pioneer African engineer, James Zikusooka, who died on January 30, 2012.

In September 2008, Zikusooka, long retired, wrote the following letter to the Mayor of Jinja Municipality:

"I wish to formally recommend to Jinja Municipal Council, the re-naming of a road after the Late Hon. Shaban Kirunda Nkutu, M.P., who was one of the greatest sons of Jinja, Busoga and Uganda in the years following independence. I wish to support my proposal with a summary of the late Minister's achievements in the service of Uganda."

"I served as Permanent Secretary and Engineer-in-Chief of the Ministry of Works, Housing, Transport and Communications during the period 1967-71 when Hon. Shaban Nkutu, then M.P. for Busoga South East was Cabinet Minister in charge of that portfolio. My late Minister initiated, planned, obtained funds for, oversaw the execution, completion, upgrade and/or maintenance of hundreds of infrastructure projects across Uganda, including, but not limited to the few I have highlighted below:

- Pakwach Bridge (West Nile)
- Almost all the tarmac roads built in Uganda after independence, beyond the Entebbe-Kampala axis
- The New Entebbe International Airport
- Soroti Flying School
- Airfields and aerodromes in most of the original 18 districts of Uganda
- International Conference Centre and Nile Hotel (now Serena Hotel and Conference Centre)
- The dual carriage-way from Jinja to Kakira
- Iganga-Tirinyi Road
- The Pakwach-Arua Highway (West Nile)
- The Gulu-Pakwach road
- * The Jinja-Kamuli highway
- The Kampala-Mbarara-Ntungamo Highway
- The Ntungamo-Kabale Highway
- The Kampala-Mityana Highway
- The Kampala-Gulu Highway

- Most of the feeder roads in the coffee-cotton-matooke areas of Butembe and Bugabula in Busoga
 - First Class Murram roads in all the areas of the country growing cash crops (coffee, cotton, tobacco, sisal and pyrethrum), where there was a Cooperative Union, stretching from West Nile, Acholi, Lango, Teso, Bugisu, Bukedi, Busoga, Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, Toro and Kigezi
 - The Arua-Koboko Road (West Nile)
 - The Busia-Tororo-Mbale-Soroti-Lira-Gulu highway
 - The railway from Busia to Gulu
 - National Housing and Construction Corporation
 - Kampala's Crested Towers building
 - Bugolobi Flats in Kampala
 - Kampala's Wandegeya Flats
 - Kampala's Bukoto Flats
 - In virtually all district towns, the housing estates known as "Senior Quarters" and "Junior Quarters" built for new civil servants under the programme to Africanise Uganda's Civil Service
 - Dozens of Post Offices and telephone exchanges across the country and the extension of the national telephone system beyond Entebbe, Jinja and Kampala
 - East African Airways
 - Uganda Transport [Bus] Corporation, serving southern and western Uganda
 - Peoples Transport [Bus] Company, serving northern and eastern Uganda
 - East African Railways and Harbours Corporation
 - The Port Bell railway link
 - The Busoga railway loop (Iganga-Kamuli-Busembatia-Iganga)
 - The Jinja pier (enabling cargo from Lake Victoria to be transferred to rail and road)
 - The Kalangala ferry and ferries on Lake Kyoga and Lake Bisina in Teso
 - Tarmac upgrade of the Kampala-Mukono highway and the highway from Mukono to Busia
 - And many, many roads across Uganda, which I cannot comprehensively list here."
- Zikusooka added that "Most of Uganda's post-colonial modern infrastructure was put in place during the time Shaban Nkutu served as Minister of Works, Transport, Housing and Communications and very little new infrastructure has been built from scratch since that time."

"He represented Busoga South East in Parliament from 1962-1971 and was one of the few people from Busoga who was actively involved in leading Uganda to independence in 1962."

"During his one-year tenure as Minister of Health in 1966," wrote Zikusooka, "Hon. Shaban Nkutu oversaw the completion of construction and successful opening of 21 modern district hospitals, covering all major regions of Uganda, giving most Ugandans their first proper access to modern medical facilities. From West Nile to Tororo, from Karamoja to Kanungu, from Masindi to Bugiri, from Ntungamo to Gulu, Bundibugyo to Soroti, very good hospitals were built and commissioned. Prior to this achievement, there were virtually no referral hospitals in Uganda outside Kampala and Entebbe and there have hardly been any new referral hospitals constructed by any successor government in the country for most of the last 45 years."

“Earlier, as Deputy Minister of Education, he created open access to educational institutions and scholarships for Ugandans of all religions, especially Muslims and Catholics, who had been discriminated against and kept out of the public school system during the colonial period. He was one of the first Muslims in Uganda to achieve a modern secular education and was a great source of pride and honour to Muslims as the second Muslim ever to serve in the country’s Cabinet after independence.” The first was Adoko Nekyon, from Lango.

In his 1977 book “State of Blood,” former Minister Henry Kyemba, who served alongside Shaban Nkutu as Principal Private Secretary to President Obote and Secretary to the Cabinet in the sixties, says Nkutu was “a gentle and scrupulously law-abiding individual.” In an article written in 2005, Kyemba said “he had a huge number of friends,” amongst whom the closest were President Milton Obote, the former Mufti, Sheikh Obeid Kamulegeya, former Makerere Vice Chancellor Prof Asavia Wandira and Haji Majid Bagalaaliwo, Chairman of Century Bottling Company.

Following the military coup in 1971, Nkutu was arrested and detained without trial at Makindye Military Police Barracks for several months. He shared a cell with Chris Rwakasisi and Edward Rurangaranga. Following his release, he retreated to a quiet life of private business and refused to flee into exile, despite repeated threats and harassment from security personnel.

Over the next one year, the Amin regime began to murder its real and perceived opponents, especially after the unsuccessful invasion of Uganda from Tanzania, by Ugandan exiles in September 1972, who were allied to Milton Obote and Yoweri Museveni. In the 3 months following the invasion, President Amin murdered Chief Justice Ben Kiwanuka and seven former ministers of the first Obote government. They included Hon. John Kakonge (Agriculture – he was father to now UPDF Chief of Personnel, Brig Leo Kyanda and father-in-law to Major Gen Mugisha Muntu), Hon. Basil Bataringaya (Internal Affairs), Hon. Joshua Wakholi (Public Service), Hon. Alex Ojera (Information), Hon. William Kalema (Commerce), Hon. Ali Kisekka (Minister to the East African Community) and Hon. James Ochola (Deputy Minister of Local Government). These prominent Ugandans were abducted by the Amin army and the intelligence service, the State Research Bureau and killed extra-judicially. None of their bodies has ever been recovered or buried by their families.

On January 11, 1973, Shaban Nkutu became the 8th former member of the Obote Cabinet to meet the same fate. In the run-up to his death, after the abortive 1972 invasion, Nkutu was repeatedly hunted and harassed by State Research operatives and Military Intelligence officers from the army’s Gadaffi Barracks in Jinja, forcing him to frequently shift residences amongst his relatives. Close relatives and members of the Baisemenha clan were often rounded up and detained in large numbers in order to force him to report to the authorities. Relatives and friends in the Madhvani family urged him to flee the country.

But at a meeting in early January 1973, at Baitambogwe (half-way between Jinja and Iganga), Nkutu told a secret meeting of his brothers and cousins that Amin was reportedly massacring soldiers from Obote’s Langi ethnic community, together with civilian members of their families and home areas and that while his going into exile

might trigger a massacre of Baisemenha and Basoga by President Amin, his individual death would restrict tragedy to his immediate family alone and that he would not flee Uganda because he did not want the blood of many people on his hands. He was killed less than a week later and remained, on Amin's orders, buried at a secret location for the next 32 years until an incredible opportunity that brought his family in contact with the grave-diggers who buried his body.

A statement issued by Nkutu's family in January 2005 revealed to Ugandans how the late Minister was abducted by the army at his office at Scindia Road in Jinja on that fateful morning of January 11, 1973, the attempt to put him in the boot of a vehicle in broad daylight and the brave fight for his life that was put up by the civilian residents of Scindia Road and Jinja market before several gunshots were fired into the air, sending them fleeing for their lives.

Shaban Nkutu was then taken by the army, first to Jinja's Central Police Station and then to the Gadaffi Army Barracks, where he was last seen alive by his driver Abdul Muloiyiva and his nephew Twaha Magala, who refused to leave his side until they were forcefully separated. They saw him alive for the last time, in the office of the then Commanding Officer of Gadaffi Garrison, whom the family has since identified as Lt Colonel Hussein (he died in 2001 after an unsuccessful bid to be elected LC5 Chairman of Arua district).

Nkutu, aged 42, was murdered that night at Gadaffi Barracks by the army, who dumped his body in the River Nile. However the body failed to sink or float away and was recovered at the river bank the following morning and immediately identified by the dozens of people who gathered there in shock. Security personnel turned up and took the body to the Jinja Hospital Mortuary, from where it was hurriedly and secretly taken away by the police and buried in a grave containing five other people at the Mailo Mbiri Cemetery at the junction of Iganga and Kamuli roads.

On the orders of Idi Amin, Nkutu was buried in an unknown place, on an unknown date and registered in the cemetery records as "an unknown person," without the knowledge of his family. The grave-diggers conducted the burial at gun-point and were threatened with death if they revealed what they knew or the exact location of his grave.

The murder of Shaban Nkutu shocked the country and led to the resignation of his nephew, Wanume Kibedi, a brother-in-law of President Amin, who was serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Kibedi's sister, the First Lady, Mama Mariamu, also fled the country.

In an article published by "The New Vision" in 2003 to mark the fall of Amin on April 11, Kyemba wrote of his former colleague: "my colleague, Shaban Kirunda Nkutu, was murdered by the state on January 11, 1973. After the coup, he had retired to a quiet life of private business in Jinja and Kampala."

"Nkutu, who was a personal friend, had been very close to President Obote (they had attended the same secondary school at Mwiri) and was senior in the Uganda Peoples Congress party, as National Chairman."

He had risen in the hierarchy and I remember he was one of those ministers whom I, as Principal Private Secretary, did not have to ask the President if he would grant audience, whenever he came to our offices. A former teacher, he had a huge number of friends and was well known for his calm and pleasant disposition.

“Nkutu had chosen not to flee into exile. He was an uncle to the First Lady, Mama Maryamu and her brother, the then Foreign Minister, Wanume Kibedi. He had been detained at Makindye Barracks after the coup but Amin had later released him and guaranteed his safety.”

“Nkutu’s murder shocked the nation and Amin was forced to disclaim responsibility by announcing that Nkutu had “fled to Tanzania.” A massive reward was placed on his head. Everybody knew he had been murdered. Kibedi was in Ghana and when he confirmed the killing, he resigned as Foreign Minister and went into exile. The murder of Shaban Nkutu also took its toll on the marriage between Amin and the First Lady, Mama Maryamu, who fled the country.”

For 32 years, the family of the late Minister lived with the pain of his murder and their failure to bury him. But in early 2004, by pure chance, one of the grave diggers met a relative of Shaban Nkutu. After securing assurances that he and his colleagues would not have the responsibility for the murder placed on them, he revealed where Nkutu had been buried and later led the family to the grave.

The grave diggers were tracked down and recalled that Nkutu had been buried last and on top of five other bodies retrieved from the mortuary and that his body would be at the top of the grave, which helped make possible its retrieval and identification following the exhumation of the remains by pathologists Prof Wabinga and Dr Odida and witnessed by Nkutu’s family in October 2004.

Entry and exit wounds on his skull revealed he had been shot twice in the right hand side of his head, with the bullets exiting the left hand side with a gaping hole. A bracelet identified by his relatives was found intact on his left arm and the state of his clothing completely matched earlier descriptions given by the grave diggers and two witnesses who saw his body at the river bank in 1973.

On February 12, 2005, with his remains covered by the national flag, the remains of Shaban Kirunda Nkutu were re-buried in national honour at his home at Busesa, Bugweri, Iganga District. His funeral was a major national ceremony that symbolized Uganda’s sober and sad reflection on the human rights horrors of the Amin regime. The reburial was attended by President Yoweri Museveni, then Deputy Speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga, Ministers, Prince Kassim Nakibinge of Buganda, Sheikh Obedi Kamulegeya, Sheikh Hussein Rajab Kakooza and other senior Islamic leaders and senior political leaders from all of Uganda’s major political parties, including Paul Ssemogerere and Ssebaana Kizito (DP), Mayanja Nkangi (CP), Major General Mugisha Muntu, Dr Suleiman Kiggundu and Wafula Oguttu (FDC) and most of the national leadership of UPC.

Most of all, his family was finally able to bury him and thousands of Ugandans turned up to honour his memory.

The national anthem of Uganda was played before and after his remains were lowered into his final resting place and President Museveni declared Nkutu a martyr for his courageous decision to face death alone without endangering his relatives and constituents. While it re-opened the wounds of 32 years ago, the reburial gave as much closure as is possible in such circumstances, for his family.

For three families, the exhumation and reburial of Shaban Nkutu resurrected their own sad stories. It was revealed by the grave diggers who buried him that two graves away from his, in the same row, they also buried in a mass grave, 3 other prominent citizens of Jinja, murdered by the army during the same period. They are: the late Ali Balunywa, former Administrative Secretary of Busoga (father of Wasswa Balunywa, Principal of Makerere Business School and Presidential Assistant Ngoma Ngime), who was abducted from his offices with the late Ruheesi, Town Engineer of Jinja (father of Lt Col James Ruheesi, UPDF) and the late H. Kasigwa, Jinja Town Treasurer (and father of former Jinja West MP Harry Kasigwa).

For these and many Ugandans whose loved ones simply “disappeared” during Amin’s time in power, Nkutu’s reburial symbolized the closest they might ever come to burying their own and many families of Uganda’s “disappeareds” attended the re-burial.

Shaban Nkutu’s reburial also sent a strong message to those who abuse state power to abuse the rights of others: the ugly facts of their involvement can still come out many years later. A witness to the Nkutu abduction, Mr Peter Okwera, then General Manager of Uganda Grain Milling Company was driving down Jinja’s Main Street and arrived at the Main Street-Scindia Road junction on the late morning of January 11, 1973, just as the army was firing in the air to scare away the large number of civilians who were fighting for Nkutu’s life as an attempt was being made to put him into the boot of a car.

Mr Okwera, who later served as a Member of the National Resistance Council (the Parliament of 1989-96) and later as a Resident District Commissioner for Kaberamaido (2000-2002), arrived in time to see at the verandah of Nkutu’s supermarket, an army officer he knew very well, visibly in command of the soldiers present and firing his pistol into the air. Mr Okwera, who approached the Nkutu family after the reburial, identified the abductor-in-chief as Captain Issa Habib Galungbe, Intelligence Officer of Gadaffi Barracks.

This is the same man later known as Lt Col Issa Habib who was nominated Ambassador to Saudi Arabia by an unknowing President Museveni in 1988 but lost his appointment after he was accused of rape by a young lady. He died in 2001 and was buried in Arua. Members of the Nkutu family later learnt that it was the same Capt Issa Habib who abducted the late Ruheesi, the late Kasigwa and the late Balunywa in broad daylight, at their Jinja Administration offices, in 1972. Mr Okwera came forward and gave to members of Nkutu’s family, a detailed statement of his knowledge of Issa Habib (a man who had previously been of assistance to him) and the events of January 11, 1973, which had long troubled him.

Concluding his letter to Jinja Municipal Council, Eng Zikusooka said “Shaban committed no crime and certainly, nothing can justify his extra-judicial killing. It is memorable that

dozens of Jinja's citizens – unarmed civilians - put up a brave fight for his life at Scindia Road as the soldiers and intelligence agents attempted to put him in the boot of a car. His abduction succeeded only after heavy gunfire was used by the security personnel to scatter the crowd."

"Late Hon. Nkutu lived a lawful and peaceful life. He was a national leader who scored the many high profile achievements I have listed above. Uganda would be a much better place today if the work he began had been continued."

Zikusooka added in his letter that "Ugandans should treasure the memory of this independence nationalist and honest, hard-working public servant, who endeavoured to put limited national resources to the service of all areas and all tribes of the country as well as East Africa, with total integrity and value for money. He was committed to the development of Uganda and I urge you to re-name a road in his memory. Led by Mayor Baswale Kezaala, Jinja Municipality Council unanimously voted to re-name Allidina Road in Jinja as "Shaban Nkutu Memorial Road." His achievements and service as a Cabinet Minister have set a high target for today's Ministers

Captions for the attached photos:

1. Photo 1: Shaban Nkutu, then Minister of Works, Housing, Transport and Communications, at a diplomatic function in 1968 with Buganda's Prince Badru Kakungulu (2nd Right) and his Permanent Secretary, Eng. James Zikusooka (1st Right)

2. Photo 2: Shaban Nkutu (extreme left), pictured in 1970, watching the TV news at the Uganda Club, is seated with (left to right) President Milton Obote, Interior Minister Basil Bataringaya, Army Commander Idi Amin and First Lady Miria Obote. Within 3 years, Amin had overthrown Obote, exiled Miria and murdered Nkutu and Bataringaya.

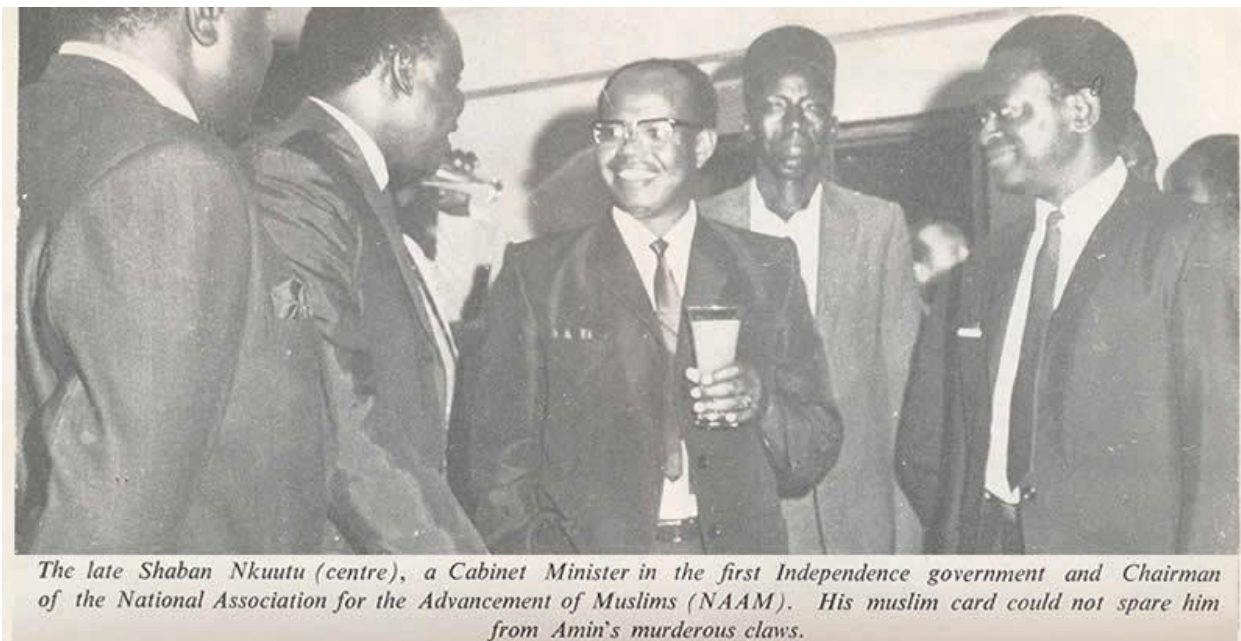
3. Photo 3. UPC National Chairman Shaban Nkutu (extreme right) at a party meeting with President Milton Obote and Defense Minister Felix Onama in 1970



L-R on the front row are: Shaban Nkutu, W. Kalema, Basil Bataringaya, Idi Amin, Miria Obote, and Alex Ojera. Behind Amin is E. Kakonge. They were at a public function listening to President Obote's speech.



L-R: Ministers Alex Ojera, O. Lakidi, W. Kalema, President Obote, Felix Onama, Shaban Nkutu and Joshua Wakholi at the launch of the common Man's Charter (a socialist economic policy) in Kampala in 1970.



The late Shaban Nkuutu (centre), a Cabinet Minister in the first Independence government and Chairman of the National Association for the Advancement of Muslims (NAAM). His muslim card could not spare him from Amin's murderous claws.

UPC Website Launch Message By A. Milton Obote (Office of the President)

Today, 9 October 1999 is the 37th Anniversary of the Independence of the Republic of Uganda. The Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC) was the leading political Party in the struggle for Uganda's Independence. It is the mission of the UPC that the Independence of Uganda means that, at all times, every citizen of Uganda must be independent, enjoy and exercise the inalienable, God given, human rights and freedoms. [\[Read the complete speech\]](#)