

“Let’s talk human rights” FNF Human Rights Podcast– Uganda

Transcript

Host: Nangamso Kwinana

Guest: Barbara Itungo Kyagulanyi

[00:00:00] **Audio Clip:** Oh, Zoe tumor declined to accept having played a big role in children's participation in the rest of the august house. She says she backed his decision

[00:00:12] At her home in Maghera in Waukesha district. Barbara Kyagulanyi is coming to terms with the events of the past week, which culminated in the arrest and torture of her husband, Kyadondo East MP Hon. Robert Kyagulanyi Sentamu. So he says when he saw his door open forcefully. He raised his hands in the air and they told him to kneel down and he says before he could kneel down, he was hit with an iron bar

[00:00:38] This is freedom drive a pathway leading to Bobby Wine's residents. Join security teams, comprising of the police and military had barricaded the road in anticipation of post-election violence, but it's now open after Ugandan court ordered them to vacate.

[00:00:57] **Nangamso Kwinana:** I warmly welcome you to this “Let's talk human rights” podcast episode. My name is Nangamso Kwinana and I am happy that you have tuned in again. Thus far, in our journey through sub-Saharan Africa, we have met great personalities with very interesting stories.

If you missed our previous episodes, listen in. You will find these episodes wherever you listen to your podcasts.

As you may know, 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence starts today. We want to take this opportunity to dedicate today's podcast episode to women in Africa. This is the second time that we feature a special episode on 16 Days of Activism. If you missed last year's special episode, hosting Elizabeth Maro Minde from Tanzania as our guest, do listen to it wherever you listen to your podcasts.

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation has set itself the goal to strengthen women in sub-Saharan Africa. Particularly in rural areas, women and girls often battle hard times and suffer from discrimination by men.

Not only in Africa, but *especially* in Africa, the proportion of women in leading positions in business and politics is alarmingly low.

Today, we find ourselves in East Africa again. More precisely, in Uganda. In our previous episodes, we have visited Uganda twice and talked to Human Rights Lawyer and Director of Chapter Four Uganda Nicholas Opyio as well as Ugandan politician, singer, actor and businessman Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, better known by his stage name Bobi Wine.

Human rights violations are rising in Uganda. Reports indicate that

1. violent disintegrations of protest demonstrations and
2. excessive violence by the security forces against the opposition parties, the media and the citizens are a reality.

Violations of freedom of speech, press and assembly are at the core of said agenda by the incumbent ruling party.

I am very pleased that Barbara Itungo Kyagulanyi (Chagulani), the force behind Bobi Wine, is joining us today.

Barbara is a woman and child activist, particularly advocating for the girl child. She focuses on encouraging young women and girls to prioritise their education. Her non-profit organisation, Caring Hearts Uganda works on development initiatives in rural Uganda. They work to shape & empower the youth to walk the straight and narrow course in life and believe that only great foundations can guarantee a virtuous future. Since 2013 Caring Hearts Uganda has been on a mission to raise the living standards of young people through the promotion of proper menstrual healthcare, personal development and entrepreneurial skills.

[00:03:57] Barbara you've often found yourself in the [00:04:00] same predicament as your husband facing regular infringements on your human rights. Your freedoms have been reminded your life and your children's lives have been put in danger and, you know, firsthand what it means to come face to face with the roth of a dictatorship regime.

[00:04:20] Which state of intimidation attempts and situations have left a lasting impression on you?

[00:04:28] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Ah, well, we have been facing intimidation for a very long time. Um, it is hard to pick out one of the incidents, but I will try, um, to incidence. Okay. There are many allow me to have two. One of them is when I, uh, my husband had been tortured in the military prison and kept away from us for about a week and his driver, murdered in one part of the countries [00:05:00] where he had gone for it by election. And very many people were also in prison, but that time he was badly beaten and he could barely walk. So he had a problem with his spinal cord. And he had very many wounds on his body. So we had managed to secure him bail and we could not get good treatment in the country. So we tried to take him out of the country. So this incident happened at the airport. I was with him in an ambulance. We were sheduled for a flight through, um, Antebe airport, going to America.

[00:05:41] When we reached at the airport, we were roughed up by security and he was plucked off his wheelchair and pulled out of the ambulance and thrown in a, in a military. [00:06:00] And I was pulled away from him. We were separated. Um, I could not help him. I could not scream for help. Uh, all I did was pick my phone and film what was happening, but then, my phone was taken away from me.

[00:06:16] I have never felt so helpless. This is a man. They had beaten and tortured so badly. And I was trying to take him away for treatment, but still they shamelessly came and found us, on our way to the airport were at the airport, actually phoned us on our waits, the hospital, black team out of the wheelchair and draft him up and took him, threw him in a hospital, which they know lacks even the basic treatment, not even a painkiller is available in that hospital.

[00:06:51] So that moment was my most painful moment. It was the [00:07:00] one that made me realize that we're not dealing with the right kind of leadership and that the people who were doing this to him were actually determined to have him gone for good. The second one was recent during the elections where I personally had to face, uh, The military, which was deployed at our house.

[00:07:26] We were kept under house arrest for 11 days without food, without water, without electricity. Our TV was cut off. Our networks, telephone networks were cut off. Nobody came in, nobody went out. But in that house, my husband and I were stuck with a two year old baby. My sister's baby was living with us. So when they put us under house arrest, they closed us in our compound.

[00:07:58] You have a big piece of land [00:08:00] where we do our own gardening, so they made sure they cut us from the water source, cause we pump our own water and they cut us off our gardens because we grew up on food. Then they kept us in our house. Like in a small confinement. So the second incident is when I tried to get out of the house compound to go to a garden, pick food for us, there were these heavily armed men standing at the gate.

[00:08:33] So when I reached, I tried to speak to them to see, we have been here for close to six days. We have nothing to eat. We don't have water. Cause you cut off our water from down there. You know what that comes from down there. We have no food. You have denied anybody to come in. Will you please let me go down and get some potatoes or some cassava.

[00:08:53] And some, atoke for the baby we are living with before I could even explain there was this [00:09:00] man pushing me off the gates with his chest and rubbing his groin on me and pulling my breast. I have a recording because I anticipated that was going to happen. That was the first physical violation I got.

[00:09:19] **Nangamso Kwinana**

: I think we've already touched on our next question, which I was going to share with you. Um, so thank you very much for sharing that very personal and raw account of your experiences. What I would ask is how is it to be the wife of Uganda and musician and political opposition leader, Bobby Wine.

[00:09:41] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Um, now we have two people in Bobbi Wine. One is the musician. The other is the politician. Uh, actually we have the third one, the husband, the father.

[00:09:56] So I am living with so many people in one, but [00:10:00] how is it living with musician, Bobi wine and musician politician, Bobbi Wine it is. Good. And the bad is a bittersweet experience and both of them might extremes. Uh, living with him is living in a classroom. He has taught me so much. Living with him is empowering me, I seat and land from this man every day land to love myself, learn to love and work hard for the people who cannot. be in a position to speak for themselves or do things for themselves. It is so much fun living with Bobby Wine. He is a very, very, very, very funny man. He just chooses when to pull out the funny character, but [00:11:00] Bobby Wine impacts everybody that he meets. He impacts me too positively. And my life has changed because I get to hear from him, speak to me every day. People love him. Those who love him. Love us too. So we meet a lot of love from people.

[00:11:22] We don't get to line up for certain things. We get favors. Sometimes we don't have to ask for what we need. People just give it to us because of the work he has done, some people hate him so much and it trickles down to us. Uh, we get people who don't want to see us. We get people who deny us our rights simply because of what he does.

[00:11:48] So it is a bitter sweet experience. When you find the people who love him. It doesn't matter what procedure they have to go through to get something. They just bring it to you. When you find those who [00:12:00] don't love him, you may try all your life to get what you deserve, because they'll make sure they're the obstacle that are in there to determine that you don't get what you deserve to get. So it's a bittersweet experience and you get very cautious when you want you meet someone you ask yourself, is this person for us? Is this person not for us? So you take a minute to understand how to deal with that person. It's a bit hard living, uh, as their wife of Bobby Wayne, but it is really exciting when you meet the person that believes in what he fights for.

[00:12:46] **Nangamso Kwinana:** That's that's good to hear. Um, we've got a well-rounded, uh, relay here of Bobby Wine, having the four in one persons that Barbara lives with the husband, the father, the [00:13:00] politician, and also the musician.

[00:13:03] Barbara, there is a famous photo of you and Bobby, which was captured when you landed in the USA for his medical treatment, which was just after the brutal assault. What do you say about Bobby's tireless efforts and fight for freedom.

[00:13:21] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** I say Uganda is blessed to have a son who is fighting for her Liberty. Uganda is blessed to have a son who has decided to live his youth time and chose them that his future will be for fighting for Uganda's freedom. I think. Uganda. is blessed to have Bobbi Wine and the people that work with him cause he doesn't do this alone. Bobby Wine has tried to use all fronts to fight for the people who can barely speak for [00:14:00] themselves to use his music, to use his voice, to use the arts.

[00:14:05] And then also to try and do politics as a career to create a means to bring freedom to those who lack it. And they're the majority in our country. So I think Uganda is really blessed to have him.

[00:14:21] **Nangamso Kwinana:** Yeah. And what would you say drives and motivates you to continue? Um,

[00:14:29] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** the achievements we have good so far. The war is not in vain. When we started to speak for the youth and those that

can't speak for themselves, there was not so much response from the youth themselves, but today the youth are more involved. They're more attentive. Um, about the governance of their country. They ask questions, they feel like they're part of the nation and they deserve to know [00:15:00] what.

[00:15:01] Being done to, to bring the best for them. They are more involved. If you look at the Parliament now we have younger people who have taken part in the politics. If you look at the music, they're singing liberation songs. If you listen to the young people, the leaders in the schools, they're speaking and asking for freedom on different front, different fronts.

[00:15:26] It was never like that until he came. So what we have achieved so far gives us the energy to push harder because we know that we are achieving something. Probably we may achieve more. If we keep pushing hard, what else keeps me going? We are doing the right thing. There's nothing wrong that we are doing. We're doing the right thing, demanding for freedom and demanding for the equal rights and demanding that we are told what concerns us and that everything is [00:16:00] transparent with our governors.

[00:16:02] So you're doing the right thing and that keeps us. Yeah. Even amidst, all the challenges we know it is not going to be a slope, but we are pushing. Cause we know that we're doing the right thing.

[00:16:16] **Nangamso Kwinana:** That's good to hear. Um, and may those achievements multiply? Amen. Amen sister. Yeah. Still in the face of unimaginable challenges you power forward in the belief that Uganda will see freedom in the near future.

[00:16:35] Your true nature as an activist is revealed through your commitment to the cause of fighting for the rule of law, human rights and democracy in Uganda. What does freedom mean to you personally? And what role does it play in your life?

[00:16:53] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Um, to me, freedom means the inherent right to speak and [00:17:00] act and do the way I want. And I think it's general description of freedom for someone to be able to be human, because it's a right, that is given by us just being born and a freedom to me means being able to express yourself, being able to get a job, being able to start a family, being able to worship the way you want, being able to associate with whoever you want and being able to speak for those who do not know their freedoms.

[00:17:40] Freedom enables me to have children that enables me to make sure that I come here. Because it's for freedom that I choose to leave my

country and come freedom enables me to speak for everybody else that needs to know their rights because not so many people know [00:18:00] their rights. So I am free to express myself and show them that this is what they deserve.

[00:18:06] So, yeah. Freedom is something that everybody should experience and it's something that should never be taken away from anyone.

[00:18:17] **Nangamso Kwinana:** And reflecting on how you cherish freedom. Would you say, were there times when you wanted to give up

[00:18:28] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Those times happen sometimes, but not to the extent of wanting to give up, you know, I can equate it to when you go to work and then you have it clumsy day at work and things are not going well, when you go home, you don't say I'm quitting. It does say that was a hard day. That was, um, not nice day today. You sleep off a, and then in the morning, sh your teeth and wash your face and say, let's go get this. [00:19:00] There are times like those, but they do not equate to completely quitting. On the larger magnitude we, I have not thought of quitting. No, not at all. You know, there is, there is, um, that there is something that Bobby sang in his song. He said that freedom does not come to those who cry. It comes to those who fight. When you quit, of course you're crying. You're not fighting. And freedom does not come. It is not given to you.

[00:19:37] You have to go and grab it and fight for it. Uh, so quitting will never bring you freedom. We know quitters are never winners. So you wake up and go on and go for it again. It's just the heat and you fail somewhere. Then you get a bit demoralized, but it doesn't equal [00:20:00] to completely giving up. Yeah.

[00:20:03] **Nangamso Kwinana:** Now let's talk a little bit about your projects. Um, your projects are mainly aimed at young women. What does it mean to be born and to grow up in Uganda as a woman? And can you tell us a little bit about your personal experiences?

[00:20:22] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Uganda is a unique country. We have 56 tribes. That means 56 and more cultures. So as an African and as an African girl, you know, when your parents raise you, they raise you in the confines of your culture.

[00:20:42] They teach you what your culture states and so that's what you grow up knowing until you mix and mingle with everybody else at a certain edge that you realize that different ways each one of you has been brought up. So in this uniqueness, girls are brought up [00:21:00] differently,, in different cultures in Uganda.

[00:21:04] We have those who do genital mutilation. That's a culture. You have those who believe in early marriages. That's a culture. You have those who believe in selecting a spouse for you, the girls, they despise this. That's a culture. We have a culture where the women fend and look for the needs of the familiar while men stay home and drink.

[00:21:30] That's a culture. We're having a culture where the women pay dowry to the men. So depending on which culture you're raised in Uganda, the experiences are different. You asked what my experience was. I just wanted to give you an overview of what it is. Um, my experience is not different from most of the African girl children.

[00:21:57] You're not even when these cultures are different. We have some. [00:22:00] Um, similar, similar, small, similar things that are African. We do the chores at home. I did all the chores while my brothers just graced Gato and played football. We fished the water. I fished firewood, a cooked. I carried my little siblings on my back.

[00:22:25] I took them to the garden for my mother to breastfeed. Don't ask me what my brothers were doing then. Um, what else did I do? Oh, I was taking care of the family. My parents were carrier parents. They were doctors, so they were never home. I am the eldest sister. I raised, literally raised every of the four siblings that come after me, but I am lucky to have gone to school.

[00:22:55] I was taken to the best schools. Cause my parents knew they [00:23:00] sense of a good education. So they took me to the best, uh, boarding school that the was. But on holiday, I did all the work, all the donkey work. So it was a bit more physically draining. And um, even when we had many people in our household, uh, there was a lack of help from the boy.

[00:23:26] The boys were the Kings. They did nothing much. So it was a bit hut being a girl while growing up. But I am glad. That I went through all that cause today is nothing I can't do, but still it shows me that I had to fight so hard for the quality and for the proper division of the work at home between the girls and the boys, irrespective of the stakes.

[00:23:53] Now I know what to fight for because I have been there.

[00:23:56] **Nangamso Kwinana:** Now that you know what to fight for because you've had the [00:24:00] experience. What kind of Uganda do you want to see for your children?

[00:24:05] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Firstly, I want a Uganda where my children will be children, uh, was a child, but I was doing so much work. There is a lot of child labour in our country, but child, labor in the cities is different from the kind of child labour in the rural areas. In the cities, there are in the slums collecting plastics for sale, collecting metals for sale. They're doing some stock in some work in the stone, quarries, the younger, younger Leto children, the others are selling stuff on the streets. They are their vendors on the streets. Other young today in the markets, they sit there and sell with their parents. Actually, um, most Leto young girls are walking as house helps below between the ages of 12 to 18. So once he gunna where my children [00:25:00] will be children aren't are you going to where all children will be children being cared for by their parents being protected by their parents and their leaders and their communities.

[00:25:11] Then in future, I want to Uganda where my children have jobs. Where the unemployment level will not be as high as it is where my children will not have to leave the country to go to the Arab countries to work us house helps. Cause right now I think the best export our country has is the young labour we are sending out to Oman to Jordan, to Dubai, to, to. Abudabi to work worker's house helps and, uh, scurries of charisma, like, um, security guards are until Uganda where my children will stay and express their talents and then, earn from them and where they will not be imprisoned for nothing and where my children will not disappear and nobody will be responsive. [00:26:00] For their security. I want to Uganda where my children will do a business and not be scared that tomorrow any major general will come and close it with no explanation.

[00:26:10] **Nangamso Kwinana:** Thank you very much for sharing your reflections with us, Barbara. Um, what kind of challenges would you say you deal with at Caring Hearts Uganda?

[00:26:22] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Um, Caring Hearts Uganda our moto says, uh, Caring Hearts Uganda touching lives, transforming communities.

[00:26:31] Generally we want to touch and transform lives in different ways. But right now what we're doing is we're working with teen mothers with the coming of COVID. There is an increase in the number of teenage mothers. Uh, the numbers are skyrocketing because our schools have been closed for over two years.

[00:26:53] They have been closed. Uh, the parents have the children in the houses growing old. So like if I take you back to what [00:27:00] I said about cultures, the cultures, which believe in early marriage, Like Meredith the girls. So we have very many young and educated mothers. So we're out there

teaching them how to look after their children and also skilling them because most of them don't have a proper education.

[00:27:18] So we skill them in how to tailor, how to make crafts, how to make liquid soap, how to start up a small business for themselves, how to make a chaparti, how to. So we want them to be able to learn is cure so they can unbelieving for themselves and their children. So it, in the communities, teaching these young mothers, how to manage their life on their, on their own. But before COVID came who went to schools and empowered girls and encouraged them to stay in school. So we also did a sanitary pads, told the ones in the rural areas, how to make their own sanitary pads using their hands and using [00:28:00] the resources in their vicinity cause a sanitary pad is very expensive.

[00:28:05] In Uganda. And most of the girls have left school because they lacked a sanitary pad they can't go to school in those five days, they stay home. So it impacts their school performance and some end up not liking to go back to school. So they get married off very fast, our work rotates around the girl, child, their education and their well-being.

[00:28:28] **Nangamso Kwinana:** Now before we have to come to the end of this exciting episode, please do allow me one last question. Barbara. It's 16 days of activism. Do you have an empowering message, which you'd like to share with our entire female leadership today?

[00:28:47] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Uh, first of all, I'm very proud of the women that have come out to speak against gender violence.

[00:28:53] Violence against women and children, not many women come out to speak [00:29:00] about this issue. You know, the delicacy with this issue is that it happens behind doors and women have been taught to keep secret what happens in their bedrooms and in their houses. But for one to come up and speak out, It is applaudable first that will applaud them for coming out and front lining this, uh, this kind of activity and activism.

[00:29:26] Um, the advice I'll give them is please speak louder and impact other people in other countries, because this just began in South Africa, but we need to see it spread wings to the other parts of Africa.

[00:29:41] **Nangamso Kwinana:** And thank you very much for interesting insights that you've shared with us today, Barbara, it was amazing having you in this podcast and in the studio.

[00:29:49] Thank you.

[00:29:50] **Barbara Kyagulanyi:** Thank you very much.

[00:29:52] **Nangamso Kwinana:** Wow. This was a very personal interview experience for me today. Having Barbara in the studio with me, it was incredible. And [00:30:00] hearing her story in person was emotional and inspiring. The things that stood out for me in our conversation are the personal journey and cost of being a human rights defender cannot be underestimated.

[00:30:14] I was particularly struck when Barbara spoke of the fact that she has never considered giving up, even though there have been some extremely hard times. What I also enjoyed hearing about was the different experience that she has of Bobbi. Bobbi, the musician, Bobbi, the politician, and then Bobbi, the husband and father.

[00:30:37] It's important to remember that activists are people just like you and me. With families and personal lives. And then they are more public roles and advocacy work, and all that comes with that. The future that Barbara wants for her children is really a great vision for Uganda and Africa in general. One of equality and opportunities for all to flourish, no [00:31:00] matter their gender and political beliefs.

[00:31:03] This has been our special episode of "Let's talk human rights – the FNF Africa podcast exploring human rights issues". We hope you enjoyed it!

The Friedrich Naumann Foundation sub-Saharan Africa (FNF) is an independent German organisation that is committed to promoting liberal ideals and politics in Africa such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, innovation, digitization and free trade. By conducting campaigns, media events, seminars, workshops, study tours, cultural happenings and training courses the foundation promotes human rights including freedom expression, freedom of the press, children's rights and LGBTQI+ rights and engages against violence against women and capital punishment.

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