

Will you marry me?

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Disclaimer: I am a sucker for love. My folks have been together for more than 40 years and were married in the Catholic church. I have myself been through the rites of marriage and I swear it is an awesome experience. Marriage ceremonies are a huge part of our social-cultural anthropological fabrics. So, this article is never besmirching love or marriage, it is about leadership discretion in the urgency of crisis. Recently, a video clip which swirled on social media, shows our nation's First Lady vouchsafing to an audience that the President popped the question yet again on Valentine's day. If not for the fact that the marriage rites indeed took place this past weekend, it could easily pass as one of those many empty promises and racketeering proposals on Valentine's day. But this was not!

The President campaigned on fixing leakages and shrinking government spending. So, it didn't strike as odd when less than a month into office, the President subsequently suspended Independence Day celebrations to save the nation from the usual lavish spending on that event. Sadly, the President took an about-face-turn approach on many avoidable government expenditures. In two years in office, the President apart from revving up an anti-corruption fight and introducing an ambitious free quality education policy for all pre-university schooling, has very little tangible results to show. This might well be as a result of the enormity of problems bequeathed to him by the earlier administration. But the President's bloated cabinet, retention of many dispensable commissions and state agencies and controversially questionable appointments into strategic positions, may render any legacy-challenge excuse implausible.

Controversies

There are many things that the critics and supporters of the wedding between the President and the First Lady do not agree on, but the fact that the President was already married to the First Lady by civil union was a concurrence. Some say, the President had promised the First lady long before running for office that he would undertake a rite of marriage in his catholic faith. But critics balk that it's been already seven years, why should it be now and not back then before he became President and why not later, after his presidency. The Archbishop of the Catholic church, in an unusual practice, released a press statement, dismissing allegations that the President was once married to another woman in the Catholic church—since the church outlaws divorce—and noting there was no evidence of such marriage hence no impediments to the wedding between our First Gentleman and Lady. However, in his homily, the Archbishop characterised the ceremony as a convalidation (a term which became the buzzword of the ceremony) and not strictly, a marriage, re-marriage or renewal of vows. This instead of settling the controversies, merely inflamed them.

Modest or private wedding?

The wedding was everything but modest. It was witnessed by the who-is-who in both public and private sectors with the Regent-Grafton thoroughfare blocked off to the public. The day following the wedding rites was the main party while there were pockets of receptions and parties in celebration of the first love by their relatives and friends. A penny might not have come from the country's coffers, but colossal cash patronages, characteristic of such event, cannot be dismissed. It was not a state event, they allege, even though the national coat of arms appeared on the invites and almost all government functionaries attended—doomed if they did not—with the state broadcaster covering the event. While opposition voices decried the wedding as mere wastage of resources, pro-government stalwarts drowned them by citing the President as a good example of commitment to love and marriage in a society with short supply of such virtue in our leadership.

Love promise v Campaign promise

This sudden wedding, re-wedding or convalidation comes amidst galloping inflation, worsening electricity and water supply and general underperformance of cabinet. News of the wedding coincided with agitation by public servants that their first salary of this year was delayed, for some even by mid-February. Clearly, the nation is in an austerity crisis, whether admitted or not. This wedding ceremony, a friend says is tone-deaf to the circumstances of the people and I would add that in the context of the President's cancellation of independence celebrations in his first year, such ceremony, whatever the nomenclature, was unneeded controversy. Sadly, this doesn't show discretionary leadership but a deficit of it. Leadership is way more than what you say to the people, it is what you do in the moment of distress. The nuptials may be over but this decision might forever cast a shadow of controversy over the presidency and perhaps, has exposed the President's Achilles heels to political opponents.

It may seem that what is important to the Presidency is delivering on the promise to the First Lady while appearing unbothered about manifesto promises. A friend of mine joked that maybe if Madam Fatima Bio was in charge of electricity or water supply, there won't be any blackout or *pump-lock*. It seems that any promise made to the First Lady is given first priority. The decline in the economy can wait. Blackout can wait. Delay in payment of salaries can wait. Those who cry "*d gron dry*" must wait! But promise to Her Excellency cannot wait a single day. *Marriage promise first and all other promises to the people may be delivered...*