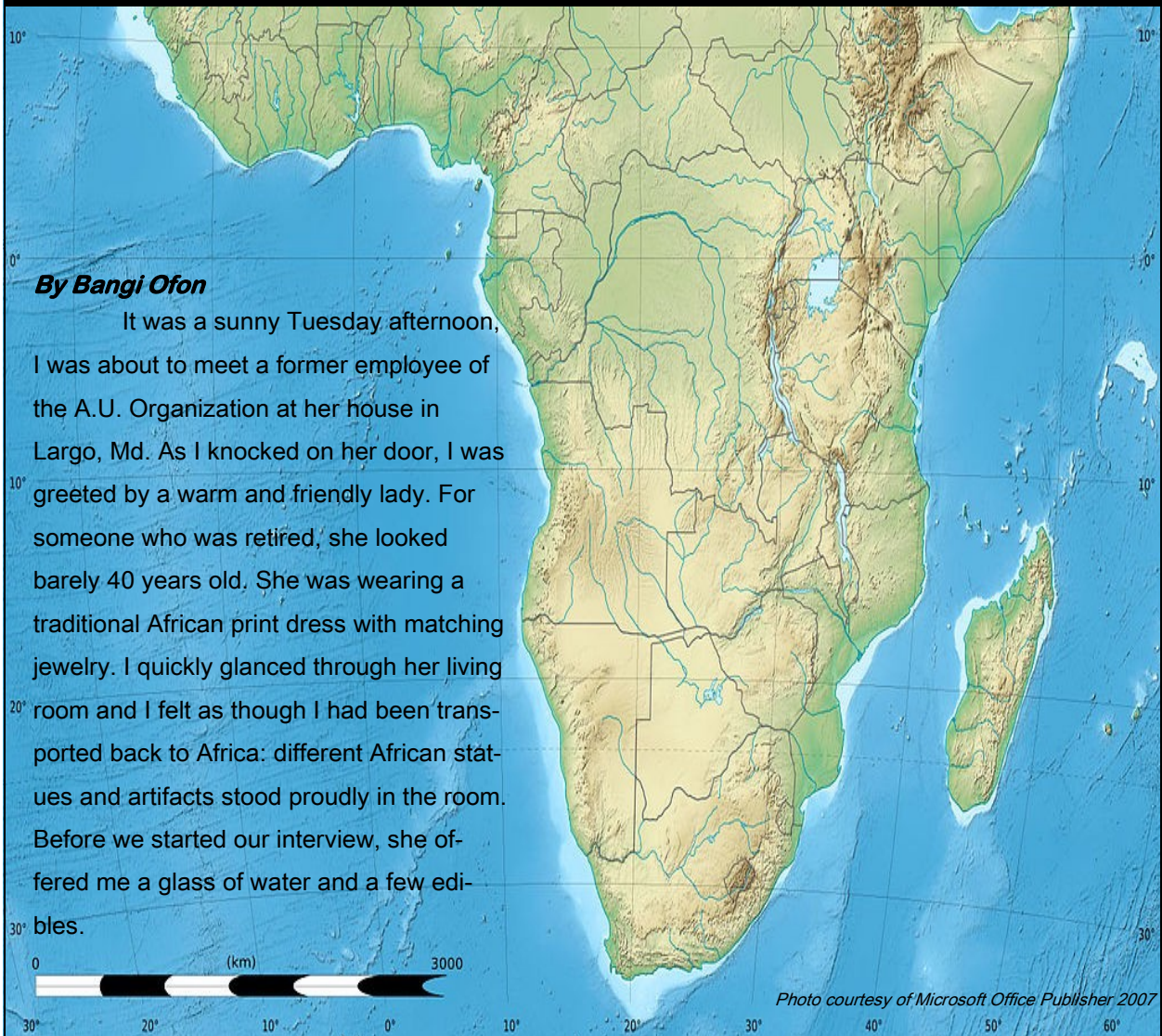


Ugandan Diplomat Recalls Life in the Foreign Service



Macrine Mayanja is a Ugandan national now living in Maryland. She retired from the African Union Organization in 2013. The Organization is a continental organization for 54 African countries which is equivalent to the United Nations of the World. The headquarters of the AU is based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Mayanja worked at the AU for over three decades, representing her country as a diplomat. She was very conversant with the inner workings of the organization.

I started by asking her how she became employed at a very competitive African organization with over hundreds of applicants from other African countries. She acknowledged the struggle, but told me she got the job because she was very knowledgeable, not only about African affairs, but also affairs of the world, due to the fact that she did her studies in the United States at Howard University for her bachelor's degree and Indiana University of Pennsylvania for her master's degree.

She worked in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, at the headquarters of the AU, in the Department of Political Affairs in the Division of Humanitarian Affairs. Throughout her career, Mayanja faced many obstacles and difficulties. When she first reported for duty, there were less than 10 women professionals out of 300 professionals and she said that "this by itself was very difficult dealing with male-dominated colleagues." Additionally, she admitted that since it was her first job without any previous experience, it did not help at all that she was regarded as ignorant. The secretaries further complicated matters because they never wanted to type for a young professional woman! It should be noted that in

the 1980s they depended on secretaries to type all the work. As she told me this I realized the determination and drive she had to have to persevere.

The most challenging aspect of her job, she said, was dealing with vulnerable populations, such as refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons (IDPS). Africa has the majority of these persons in the world, accounting for 80 percent, she said. Out of this number, sadly most of them are women and children. Watching these people in the camps was very unnerving, she said. Mayanja said she had to give them hope, encouragement and faith, telling them that one day the situation, especially in political arena, would change in their various countries that would enable them to go back and live a normal life.

Although it was challenging, at the same time it was rewarding, she said, particularly whenever thousands of refugees and IDPs made a journey home after several years in exile and reunited with their loved ones. With a wide smile, Mayanja said it was a way for her to touch the lives of many individuals.

When asked whether she had any regrets, Mayanja proudly and quickly said "no" because it was her dream from her university days to contribute to Africa. She said that she had always been interested in African issues and International matters. The things she misses most about her job is giving hope to all vulnerable groups who are displaced. Additionally, she said she misses traveling around the globe, which allowed her to meet many people. She said she could fill several pages with the names of influential figures she

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met, chuckling as she sips her glass of wine. Mayanja has a great sense of humor. She used to meet several African leaders every year during the AU Summit. Other influential figures from other countries included presidents, prime ministers, artists, activists and writers. She personally met Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), Angela Davis, Winnie Mandela, Miriam Makeba, Wole Soyinka and Haile Gebreselassie.

Her daughter benefited from her mother's job. She was

lucky to have been exposed and to so many thinkers and artists and, as a result, she became open-minded from a

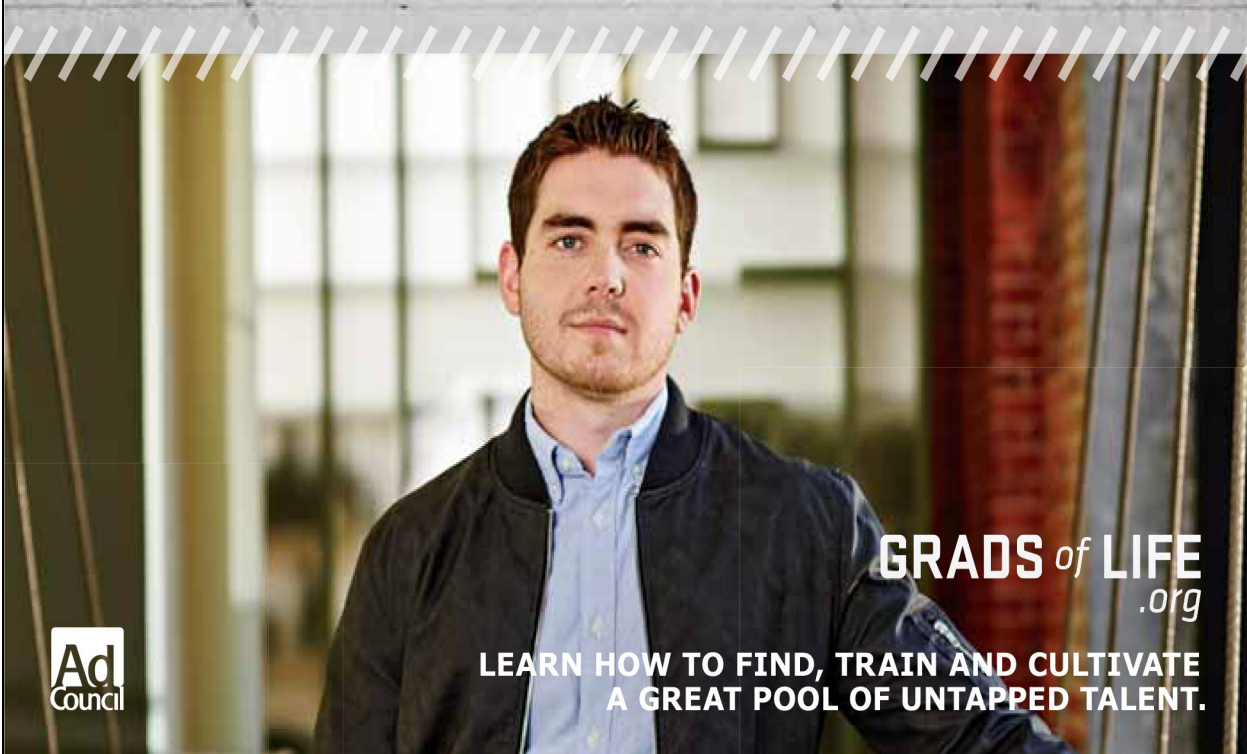
"The most challenging things about her job were to specifically deal with the most vulnerable groups that are refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons."

very early age because of the multicultural environment, Mayanja said.

However on the other hand, Mayanja said she feels that her daughter may have grown up without a sense of belonging because she she did not grow up with her relatives nearby.

Asked about her future plans, Mayanja quickly got up and brought out a world map and pointed to Asia. She said she would also like to write about her experiences at the African Union and is willing to share them in particular with the university students whenever possible.

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