

Ugandans to the rescue



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Ugandans Let Down by All Opposition Candidates.

Posted by Musa

Addressing a campaign rally in Makindye's Mubarak Zone two weeks before the election, Justice Forum president and Makindye West MP Hussein Kyanjo said if the presidential elections were rigged, he would summon a large crowd to take to the Queensway road along Kibuye in Kampala and sit down, blocking all traffic.

That has not happened yet. The most disappointing performance was by the Forum for Democratic Change, FDC. It is widely regarded as the main opposition party in Uganda today. If the true feelings and preferences of Ugandans were to be counted in a truly free and fair election, FDC president Dr. Kiiza Besigye has the majority support in Uganda and has definitely had it at least since (and including) the 2006 general election.

Had the Feb. 18, 2011 been free and fair, Besigye today would be the president-elect. The fact is, the presidential election was heavily rigged and the NRM and its leader Yoweri Museveni know it. However, the focus must now be put on the FDC and they must answer important questions.

Why did the opposition participate in the rigged election?

First, senior FDC leaders had stated over and over again since as far back as 2009 that they objected to the current national Electoral Commission headed by Badru Kiggundu. They called for reforms and warned that the 2011 would be rigged. The question then is, if the opposition leaders knew well in advance that the election was going to be rigged, why did they take part in it? This is the question that the FDC is finding hardest to answer.

What the party has spent its time since the results were announced on Sunday Feb. 20 is pointing out the fraud, the pre-ticked ballot papers, the missing voters on the register, the presence of the army in force all over the country.

What happened to the FDC, DEM Group and DP tally of results?

Addressing Ugandans in Manchester in the United Kingdom in October 2010, Besigye vowed that he has lost faith in the partisan Electoral Commission and as such reserved the right to announce his own results. President Museveni reacted angrily to this pronouncement and threatened to send Besigye to Luzira Prison if he dared announce his own results, saying only the Electoral Commission had the legal authority to declare results.

However, early this month of February 2011, the Electoral Commission itself said there was nothing illegal in Besigye's announcement of his own results, provided he made it clear that these were only provisional and not the final, certified results. Besigye and his campaign assured Ugandans that the FDC had spent the last five years since the rigged 2006 election studying the loopholes that had made possible the rigging of 2006.

The loopholes, Besigye and his party insisted, had been blocked this time. They would have 19 polling agents at each and every polling station in Uganda to guard the vote. The theme of guarding the vote featured prominently during the FDC's campaign. The FDC also announced that they were going to set up a tallying centre complete with electronic equipment to tally incoming results.

Reports said that working under the assumption that the NRM-led government would try to sabotage this tallying centre, a backup tallying centre had been set up in Nairobi, Kenya to which results would be

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mirrored electronically to escape the expected jamming of sms services, the Internet and mobile phones.

Every arrangement possible had been put in place by the FDC, Besigye assured his large crowds, to make sure that rigging was all but impossible this time and so Ugandans' only duty was to turn up in large numbers, be vigilant and vote. However, by Saturday Feb. 19, 2011, Besigye and the FDC were crestfallen. They declared that the election had been rigged. Polling agents in many parts of the country had been harassed, arrested or turned away, their declaration of results forms seized by state security operatives.

The DEM Group, which had also promised to tally results, did not do so. The reason given later was that the sms service the DEM Group had planned to use was jammed by Ugandan intelligence. The Democratic Party's Kenneth Kakande and other DP officials had also talked of the party tallying its own results but nothing has since been heard of this pledge.

FDC/IPC polling agents bribed

One of the first complaints by the FDC after the voting had ended and early results were being announced was that many of the polling agents they had entrusted with the task of guarding the votes were bribed by the NRM party and so absconded from duty.

Of all excuses the FDC can come up with, this is the most ridiculous. To start with, if you are a political party that claims (and in fact is) the largest of all the opposition parties and you claim you wish to take state power, and yet your polling agents, the members of your party who are supposed to have a greater commitment than the average supporter, can casually be bribed, then perhaps you are not yet ready to take power and form a government.

It suggests that either the FDC was not paying its polling agents enough money to help them resist the urge to take bribes, or they were not committed enough, or they were not inspired enough by their party president, or the FDC lacked the means and skill to recruit the right agents from among its large national following of supporters.

If the agents of the FDC can be so casually bribed, would this FDC government be able to handle the rigors and intrigue of state power? Would their government officials resist attempts by hostile governments and intelligence services to bribe them to obtain sensitive state secrets and infiltrate the State House of President Kiiza Besigye?

FDC's failure to fully field parliamentary candidates

In the 2001 and 2006 general election, Besigye and his political structure did not field parliamentary candidates in every constituency of the country. At that time, it was understandable. Besigye was just new in elective politics in 2001 and in 2006 he had been sent to jail, barely managed to get nominated and it can be understood that he had little time to organize the grassroots of the party.

But by 2009, the FDC had become a fully-fledged national political party with no excuses whatsoever. Besigye regularly met with western diplomats in Kampala. He visited Europe and the United States and met senior party officials like David Cameron and others.

A week or so before the election, the U.S deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg and the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Johnny Carson, during a visit to Uganda, even met Besigye, UPC's Olara Otunnu and DP's Norbert Mao before they met President Museveni.

So even in terms of diplomatic recognition and international contacts, the opposition cannot say that the West only favours Museveni and denies them an audience. The FDC campaign was well-funded this time, as seen in its many TV and radio adverts. And yet once again, the FDC --- which has the largest

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following of any party in Uganda, even more than the ruling NRM --- was unable to field candidates in all parliamentary constituencies in Uganda. What excuse did they have this time for not fielding a full list of parliamentary candidates for the 2011 general election?

The FDC's experience versus the FDC's incompetence

Once again, the incompetence of the opposition and civil society groups comes into focus. Besigye joined Museveni's NRA guerrillas in 1982. He was once Museveni's personal doctor. After the NRA came to power in 1986, Besigye was the Minister of State for Internal Affairs. He was later the National Political Commissar. He was the Commanding Officer of the Mechanised Brigade in Masaka. He was a member of the army's High Command.

Since 2000, he has been the main opposition leader in Uganda, with a decade of experience in active politics. He spent four years in exile in South Africa between 2001 and 2005 and had time to interact with officials of South Africa's ruling African National Congress. In 2006, just before the election, Besigye said he had the support of 90 percent of the army, meaning presumably that he could and can still count on the army to back him up should a political crisis follow the election.

The FDC's national mobiliser, Major-General Greg Mugisha Muntu was the army commander for eight years. Leading FDC officials like Major John Kazoora and Major Ruranga Rubaramira were once senior officers of the Internal Security Organisation.

The FDC is not short of officials experienced in government and election matters.

The next question, then, is that having all this long track record and experience, having assured Ugandans that all loopholes for rigging had been blocked, having set up a tallying centre under the assumption that the state would block all electronic communications during the voting, how does the FDC come back with the old complaint about rigging and their sms being blocked?

Did these experienced military and intelligence officers and political mobilisers not expect that the state would block the sms service, not just for FDC phones but for the entire country? How does this party continue to exhibit such amateurish incompetence and get away with it?

What next for Uganda?

As is the theme of this edition of the Uganda Record, while this website has spent the last two years exposing and discussing the appalling evil of the Museveni regime, it is important that the opposition also comes under scrutiny, lest Ugandans embrace and put all their hopes in it, only to end up with the same disappointment and despair that the NRM has now plunged Uganda into.

After rejecting the 2011 presidential election results and hinting that he will lead a popular uprising against Museveni, Besigye has since not been much heard off. The street protests he promised to lead have not yet taken place. Olara Otunnu also sounded resolute during his February 19 press conference but nothing has since been heard from him by way of follow up.

This incompetence and inconsistency by the opposition must be explained to Ugandans. It might prove to be a blessing in disguise that while Uganda continues to suffer under Yoweri Museveni, it has been spared a transition from one incompetent government to another.

We might have to start re-defining the political opposition no longer as an organized party with leaders and officials, but as a grassroots movement of individuals, motivated individually as we have seen in Arab North Africa and the Middle East, to provide the resistance in the post-election period.

Finally, from now onward, it should no longer be enough to arouse Ugandans' emotions and attract and

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thrill large crowds. Stating and declaring once's commitment to broad, and vague principles of good governance and justice are no longer enough.

A political party and a politician will have to show some basic administrative, logistical, intelligence, technical, operational and political competence. What the opposition has shown is that if they had won the election, Ugandans would be celebrating today and rightly so. But after about seven months, the disillusionment that set in America following Barack Obama's historic election in 2008 would start to set in Uganda too as Ugandans discover the incompetence of the opposition is similar to the incompetence of the NRM.

Obama was a charismatic politicians and campaigner but as Americans and the world have now discovered, he has proved to be an incompetent president.