



**DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES OF THE UNION**  
**DIRECTORATE B**  
**- POLICY DEPARTMENT -**

**NOTE for the attention of the ad hoc delegation to observe the elections in Uganda**

Subject: The presidential and legislative elections in Uganda<sup>1</sup>

*The 2006 presidential and legislative elections are the first multi-party polls organised in Uganda for twenty years. President Museveni's main opponent, Kizza Besigye, already challenged him in 2001. The risk that Yoweri Museveni loses the election is rather low but the arrest of the leading opposition presidential candidate certainly discredited the regime and the final result could be close. An "Ethiopian" scenario is not to be excluded as the opposition might be upset if it fails. The civil unrest in Kampala, following the arrest of Mr Besigye, provided a clear warning of potential problems that may lie ahead.*

Since the independence from the UK in 1962, Uganda has only known violent transmission of power and conflicts - internal and external. Uganda is surrounded by instable neighbouring countries. The country has been involved in many of the neighbouring conflicts.

The internal conflict officially ended in 1994. But the LRA is still very active in the North. A negotiated settlement is unlikely after the ICC issued arrest warrants for the leadership of the LRA.

Multi-party system:

President Museveni has long claimed that the Western style multi-party system was not suited to Africa and that multi-party in Uganda exacerbated tribal and religious divisions. Multipartyism was rejected by a referendum in 2000. But the opposition boycotted the vote and if 91% of voters rejected multi-party system, the turn-out was merely 51%. The pressure of the international community, which had long be silent on this issue because Uganda performed well on the economic scene, increased after the 2001 elections. Donors threatened to withhold financial support unless restrictions on political freedom were relaxed.

In January 2003 Mr Museveni dramatically announced that the country would return to multi-party democracy. The decision astounded everyone, not least the Movement members, but was

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<sup>1</sup> For the historical and political background of the country, please refer to the separate note from the Directorate-General for Research (2002).

subsequently seen as a pragmatic response to the donor threat. Mr Museveni calculated that the Movement would be able to retain power by converting itself into a political party and winning the first multiparty elections, taking advantage of his level of popular support and the weakness of the old parties. However, an ulterior motive has also become apparent. Under the previous system Mr Museveni could not seek a third term in office, so in addition to the constitutional amendments needed to legalise multiparty elections, the government also introduced an amendment that would remove the two-term limit on the presidency and allow him to stand again in 2006. The removal of the two-term limit on the presidency and the restoration of a multiparty democratic system (last used in 1980) were the two important constitutional amendments adopted in 2005.

The re-adoption of a party system required the approval of the electorate in a referendum, which was given in July 2005. At 47%, the turnout was disappointingly low, but no minimum level was required, and more than 92% of voters were in favour of the proposition. Foreign observers judged the vote to be fair, although some commentators put the turnout significantly lower than the official figure, at between 10% and 20%. The low turnout allowed the opposition to claim a success for their call for a boycott of the referendum. Although the opposition argued that an expensive referendum could have been bypassed by a simple vote in parliament, it seems likely that a prime motivation behind their attempted boycott is to be able to accuse the government of mishandling the transition to multiparty politics at the legislative and presidential elections scheduled for 2006. However, the reason for the relatively low turnout for such a momentous decision is unlikely to have been solely due to the boycott. Another important factor was voter apathy, either because a “yes” vote was widely expected or because of poor civic education about the issues in the period leading up to the referendum.

It does not mean that there were no elections in Uganda. But the activities of political parties were restricted. The candidates could not run for a party and the movement of the President was not qualified as a party.

Inter-ethnic divisions are real and vivid in Uganda but there were actually exacerbated by the British colonial power. The main remaining ethnic conflict in Uganda is with the northern Lord's Resistance Army. But it is actually an intra-ethnic conflict as Acholi civilians are the main victims of Acholi rebels.

#### Kizza Besigye's arrest:

The main challenger of President Museveni, Kizza Besigye – leader of the Forum for Democratic Change – came back from exile in South Africa in October 2005. He was arrested two weeks later. Although Mr Besigye was reluctant to come back, the Ugandan Electoral Commission made it clear that he had to return to Uganda in time to register as a voter if he wanted to stand as a candidate. His return was obviously successful. Then he was arrested on a charge of treason, and detained. According to the police authorities his arrest was a consequence of Mr Besigye's involvement with terrorism, and not of his political activities. He was subsequently charged with rape (allegedly committed in 1997). The High Court released him on bail on 2 January, although the charges still stand. His trial has been adjourned until after the elections.

The international community expressed its concern about Mr Besigye's detention and pressured the Ugandan authorities to release him. The EU and the Pan-African Parliament called for his release. Although the charges are not supposed to be linked to Mr Besigye's political activities, there is no doubt that there is a political manoeuvre to discredit him. His detention prevented him from making public electoral campaign. But his arrest raised his profile.

The arrest also raised political tensions to a degree that may be difficult to control if Mr Museveni is re-elected. Indeed the possibility of civil strife after the elections is beginning cannot be discounted. The question is whether newly recognised parties are democratic enough to accept defeat.

*Ethnic division represented in the parties:*

With an ethnic division of the parties they are expected to perform well in their traditional heartlands but, apart from the NRMO, only the FDC could make a good result nationwide.

*The National Resistance Movement Organisation (NRMO):*

Candidate for the presidential elections: Yoweri Museveni

The NRMO is the former "Movement" from President Museveni. The transformation to a political party has not been particularly peaceful for the NRMO. Primaries were organised to select candidates who will contest for parliamentary elections and for the positions within the party. Both created divisions within the party. Many current MPs, including ministers, were deselected by their local parties. The party has forbidden the deselected MPs from standing as independents.

*The Front for Democratic Change (FDC):*

Candidate for the presidential elections: Kizza Besigye

The FDC is described as Uganda's most modern political party. Nevertheless the leadership of the party is divided between people from the country's main ethnic groups. Mr Besigye is from western Uganda, as is Mr Museveni. This proves that no party can ignore the country's fundamental social structure.

*The Democratic Party (DP):*

Candidate for the presidential elections: John Ssebaana

The opposition DP elected John Ssebaana as its new president last November. He is currently the mayor of Kampala and has been a party member since 1953 (he is now 71). When choosing Mr Ssebaana, the party failed to present itself as a national force as its leadership maintains its traditional regional representation (Buganda).

*The Uganda People's Congress (UPC):*

Candidate for the presidential elections: Miriam Obote

The UPC is the party of late Uganda's ruler, Milton Obote, who died in October 2005. Mr Obote seized the power with a coup in 1966 and was overthrown in January 1971 by Idi Amin Dada. He regained the presidency after the flawed elections of 1980, after the toppling of Amin Dada. He was from the North and his second presidency was marked by many civilian deaths and an appalling human rights record. He was in exile in Zambia since 1985 from where he continued to exert political influence on his party.

However the party remains divided as far as Milton Obote's legacy is concerned between a moderate progressive group and Obote loyalists. The latter took advantage of the emotion following his death to take control over the party. They urged Milton Obote's widow, Miria, to take up the reins of the party. With this election, the party has chosen to keep its traditional northern constituency, when other candidates would have helped transforming it into a national political force.

*The 2006 elections:*

*Presidential elections:*

Five candidates are running for the elections: President Museveni (in power since 1986), the main opposition candidate, Mr Kizza Besigye (Forum for Democratic Change), John Ssebaana Kizito (Democratic Party), Miriam Obote (Uganda People's Congress) and Abed Bwanika (independent).

It seems unlikely that Mr Museveni cannot be re-elected but the opposition hopes to oblige him to a second round.

*Legislative elections:*

- 215 members of Parliament and 69 women will be directly elected on 23 February (single mandate constituency).
- 25 will be indirectly elected: they represent "special groups" (military, youth organisations, disabled, workers' unions).