

Ex-minister Bakoko returns home next week

BY HENRY LUBEGA
lubegah@ugnationmedia.com

KAMPALA. The former Labour and Gender minister Zoe Bakoko Bakoru is returning home on Friday, next week, ending her 10-year self-imposed exile in the United States. Family sources say the minister and the President met in New York last year and the two reconciled. Cecilia Faith Bakoko, the minister's eldest daughter, said yesterday that her mother is a diehard Movement supporter and wants to come back to a country she so much loves and served. "My mother has dedicated her life to serving this country right from Ayivu County's health service up to national level," she said in an interview at this newspaper's headquarters in Namuwongo, Kampala.

Ms Bakoko, whose docket included political supervision of the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), fled after being indicted alongside the Fund's board chairman Onegi Obel for allegedly causing \$4.7m (Shs12b) loss of workers' money when they signed off a deal for a housing development at Nsimbe estates.

"Before meeting the president, she (Bakoko) was disappointed and felt let down by the people she worked with because she never had the time to reach the President and tell him what happened. My mother as-



Family lawyer Lillian Drabo (L) with former minister Bakoko's son Sunday Jaguar Juruwa, and daughter Cecilia Story at Monitor Publications Ltd offices in Kampala yesterday. PHOTOS BY STEPHEN WANDERA

sured me after meeting with the President, the two parties apologised to each other and that's when the decision to come back home was made," said Cecilia Story flanked by the family lawyer Lillian Drabo.

The ex-minister's former constituents in Ayivu County, which she represented in the 7th Parliament, have been jubilating since news of her imminent return broke. Mr Opi Mike Agondua, the chairman of Ayivu elders, said they wrote to the President to persuade him to allow their daughter return.

This newspaper understands that the government will facilitate Bakoko's return and ensure her security. "She is not coming as a government official,

but as a private Ugandan citizen," said Cecilia. Bakoko has been living in the US East Coast state of Delaware, volunteering and counselling youth from disadvantaged background and teaching Americans about Uganda.

"My people want me home and I want to come home too. I am excited to return home to serve my country and, as a grandmother now, I want to nanny my grandchildren and nurse my sick mother as well," Ms Bakoko told this newspaper by telephone yesterday.

Her return to the country has been in the works for months after President Museveni reportedly absolved her on compassionate grounds.

In February 2007, the then Buganda Road Chief Magistrate Margaret Tibulya issued arrest warrants for Bakoko, businessman Isabirye Mugoya and former NSSF managing director Leonard Mpuuma after the trio defied court summonses to respond to charges of causing loss of millions of dollars to NSSF.

Prosecution alleged that while as a minister, she abused office by approving a private company to enter into a joint venture with NSSF, which caused NSSF to lose \$4.7. A year after Khiddu Makubuya cleared the controversial project, warning that revoking the agreements would leave the Fund liable to pay damages for breach of contract.