

AFRICAN UNION QUERIES KADAGA ON AGE LIMIT FRACAS

PHOTO BY MARIA WAMALA

BY MOSES MULONDO

The visiting African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) experts on Friday tasked the Speaker of Parliament, Rebecca Kadaga, to explain concerns about the independence of Parliament in light of September 27, when security forces entered Parliament chambers and forcefully removed MPs opposed to the lifting of the presidential age limit.

While meeting the APRM team on Friday at Parliament, Kadaga explained that although some of the incidents of that day are regrettable, she was placed between a rock and a hard place when legislators opposed to the motion seeking to introduce a Bill for the removal of the presidential age limit made it impossible for Parliament to do its business.

"For about three sittings, they had acted in a rowdy manner. That is why I decided to suspend them. I directed the Sergeant-At-Arms to remove them. Unknown to me, there were other security forces, not part of our security team, who invaded the chambers. That is why I have written to the President asking for an explanation," she said.

The Speaker also raised concern that for over a week, Parliament had been surrounded with military vehicles and soldiers.

Proving her relentless efforts in fighting for the independence of Parliament, Kadaga cited various scenarios such as when she defied the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party to keep rebel MPs in Parliament.

"The NRM secretary general had written to me to remove the MPs from Parliament after the party had expelled them, but I refused. I even had to create a special place for them to sit," she explained.

She was also asked whether the Uganda Parliament was more independent under the no-party system, than it is under the multiparty



The leader of the delegation of the African Peer Review Mechanism team to Uganda, Bishop Sengulane (seated second left), Kadaga, MPs and the rest of the APRM team pose for a photo after a meeting at Parliament on Friday

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system where members are compelled to tow party lines.

"I was happier when we were not under parties. There were no whips to compel MPs to act in a certain way. Parties have a tendency of monitoring what members are saying. That is why

I had a problem with my party when they expected me to remove the MPs they had expelled from Parliament. I have protected all members from the tyranny of their parties," replied Kadaga.

The Speaker also referred to the incident when she suspended the House until a court order stopping Parliament from debating the golden presidential handshake of sh6b is vacated.

On why Parliament has not done enough to end the high rate of corruption in the country, Kadaga put the blame on the Executive, which she accused of not acting on those implicated in corruption.

"Parliament has no power to arrest the corrupt. That is the role of the Executive. We have written so many reports exposing corruption, but they have not been acted upon by the Government. Our committees have recovered a lot of stolen money, but

the Government has not arrested the culprits," she argued.

The APRM is the African Union agency, which was started in 2003 to advance democracy and good governance in African countries.

As part of the process of preparing Uganda for review in the next African Union summit, which will take place in January, a delegation of 17 APRM experts, led by Bishop Dinis Salomão Sengulane, is in Uganda to verify the country's self-assessment report, upon which it will be reviewed.

The team has since Tuesday been meeting various stakeholders to gather facts on the state of democracy and good governance in Uganda.

Sengulane urged the Uganda Parliament to enact all the necessary reforms to promote good governance and democracy by creating an environment where credible elections can be conducted and leaders are accountable to the citizens.