

Mr Nsibambi was formally unveiled at the NRM headquarters in Kampala yesterday.

BY SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA
& ARTHUR ARNOLD WADERO

Opposition leaders downplay Nsibambi's defection to NRM

Opposition leaders yesterday downplayed the defection of outgoing Mawokota South MP Yusuf Nsibambi from the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) to the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM), saying his exit would not weaken forces opposed to President Museveni's government.

Mr Nsibambi, who recently lost his parliamentary seat to NRM's Suzan Nakawuki, was formally unveiled at the NRM headquarters in Kampala yesterday by the Speaker of Parliament and NRM First National Vice Chairperson Anita Among.

His move marks another twist in a political career that has seen him serve as FDC deputy president for Buganda and later as the party whip in Parliament.

However, Opposition leaders insisted his crossing over was neither shocking nor politically damaging.

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Joel Ssenyonyi said party switching was not new and would not dilute the public demand for political change.

"We wish him well, but if someone asks whether this weakens the Opposition, the answer is no," Mr Ssenyonyi said. "Opposition to Mr Museveni is not just about leaders. It is about Ugandans who are angry about poor service delivery, corruption, bad governance and brutality. That does not go away because one individual has crossed," he added.

Mr Ssenyonyi also dismissed claims that Mr Nsibambi had been fronting opposition concerns in previous meetings with President Museveni.

"He has decided to cross over, and that is his right. But for a long time, he pretended that his engagements were for the good of the opposition. We said then that he should be clear about his intentions. Now the pretence is off," he said.

Chief Opposition Whip John Baptist Nambeshe said members were free to make personal political choices.

"As chief whip, I do not police mem-

bers on decisions they make. He is at liberty to choose his direction. But he is not a member of my party," Mr Nambeshe said.

FDC president Patrick Oboi Amuriat said the party would replace Mr Nsibambi within a week, announcing that Soroti District Woman MP Ms Ann Adeke Ebaju would take over as party whip in Parliament.

"The departure of Yusuf Nsibambi does not affect the activities of the FDC. The party remains strong and focused," Mr Amuriat said.

From the People's Front for Freedom, interim president and Kampala Lord Mayor Erias Lukwago criticised Mr Nsibambi's decision, accusing him of using the issue of political prisoners as a bargaining tool.

"It is immoral and obscene if someone uses such a sensitive matter as a stepping stone to cross over," Mr Lukwago said. He also alleged that Mr Nsibambi had been reaching out to Opposition members to join him. "If he wants to cross, let him walk alone without involving innocent people," he added.

Democratic Party spokesperson Opio Okoler said political migration often stems from a search for relevance.

"When individuals feel their contribution is no longer valued, they may seek another platform where they believe they will be appreciated," he said.

Uganda People's Congress Secretary General Fred Ebil said defections have long been part of Uganda's political history, including during the 1960s and 1980s.

"Politics is like faith; one should be anchored in conviction. When a senior leader crosses at a later stage, it raises questions about consistency," Mr Ebil said. He, however, noted that shrinking political space under the NRM government has made survival difficult for some politicians.

However, political analyst Timothy Chemonges, the Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Analysis (CEPA), argued that the defection carries sym-



Outgoing Mawokota South MP Yusuf Nsibambi flashes the NRM victory sign after crossing to the ruling party in Kampala yesterday. PHOTO/ABUBAKER LUBOWA

bolic weight.

"Yusuf Nsibambi's move reflects the fluid and strategic nature of Ugandan politics. In a system where the ruling

party controls significant State resources, such decisions are rarely isolated," Mr Chemonges said.

He added that although the numerical

HIS POLITICAL JOURNEY

- Former Mawokota South MP
- Served as FDC deputy president for Buganda
- Took over as FDC party whip in Parliament
- Lost MP seat to NRM's Suzan Nakawuki in the recent elections
- Announced retirement from elective politics before crossing to NRM

effect may be limited, high-profile exits reinforce perceptions of fragmentation within the opposition and could affect morale and public confidence.

At the unveiling, Ms Among described Mr Nsibambi's move as evidence of growing confidence in the NRM.

"In our culture, a home that has visitors all the time is a successful home. When people keep coming, it means there is something good happening," she said, adding that more than 20 Independent MPs were expressing interest in working with the ruling party.

For his part, Mr Nsibambi said his decision followed years of reflection and discussions with President Museveni.

"When I was in Parliament, we believed we could deliver through defiance, but it was in vain," he said, citing declining opposition electoral performance and what he termed leadership challenges.

He also dismissed claims that he had been rigged out in the last election. "I was not cheated. The people simply did not elect me. In some polling stations, I got only three votes despite having agents there," he said.

He added that about 150 of his supporters were ready to join him in the NRM.

editorial@ug.nationmedia.com