

Currently, five people have expressed interest in the race to unseat current Speaker Anita Among.

BY SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

Justice and Constitutional Affairs minister Norbert Mao has dismissed claims that his declaration to run for election as Speaker of the 12th Parliament is backed by Chief Coordinator of Operation Wealth Creation Gen Salim Saleh.

He also dismissed talk of his candidature being supported by Chief of Defence Forces Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, but reaffirmed he remains focused on the race to ensure Parliament truly serves the people.

Mr Mao, who addressed the media at the Democratic Party (DP) offices in Mengo yesterday, said the speculation stems from his association with Gen Saleh through the Salim Saleh Foundation for Humanity, where he serves as vice president, and the Uganda Development Forum, where he is vice chairman.

"These roles are rooted in development work rather than politics. I think all rumours have a source," Mao said, noting that this relationship spans some 30 years, but has never been based on political alignment or personal gain.

Mr Mao said Gen Saleh deliberately avoids political discussions, even during their interactions. He said their engagement is focused on humanitarian initiatives, including projects to improve livelihoods.

"I urge the public to separate personal relationships from political processes," he said.

since the 1960s.

Leave Saleh, Muhoozi out of my Speaker race – Mao

Mr Mao insisted that leadership decisions within Parliament lie with the ruling party, and that Mr Yoweri Museveni, as chairman of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party, will guide the party's position on the race for Speaker.

"I dismiss speculation linked to my attendance at Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba's birthday celebration in Kigali, Rwanda, because social invitations should not be politicised. In life, we relate with people for many reasons," he said.

Mr Mao maintained that his bid is independent and driven by his own vision.

Mr Mao, who is also the Laroo-Pee Division MP-elect, is one of five people have expressed interest in the race to unseat current Speaker Anita Among. Others are Lydia Wanyoto (Mbale City Woman MP-elect), Persis Namuganza (Bukono MP-elect), Florence Akiiki Asiimwe (Msaindi District Woman MP), and Yorke Alioni Odria (Aringa South).

Going solo?

Mr Mao said, "I am digging my own way to the Speaker's chair. It is an open contest, and I qualify. We have a problem, and I am the solution."

He said he remains firmly in the race for Speaker, presenting himself as a candidate driven by integrity and a vision to transform Parliament into a truly people-centred institution.

"I am still in the race, and I am in it to ensure Parliament truly serves the people," Mr Mao said.



Norbert Mao. PHOTO/FILE

Mr Mao's response came after reports on social media that he was withdrawing from the race for Speaker.

He said his candidacy is rooted in principles rather than personal ambition, noting that the growing public support reflects confidence in the values he embodies.

"The people who support me have confidence in me, and you have seen the polls – more than 70 percent of Ugandans believe I should lead Parliament. They are not doing it because they love me as a person, but because they believe in what I stand for," he said.

Mr Mao described himself as a candidate offering a new direction for Parliament, centred on accountability and public trust.

"I am the candidate for hope, not the candidate for fear. I represent the ordi-

nary Ugandan," he said.

He noted that Ugandans are increasingly taking interest in the role of Speaker, describing it as a positive sign for the country's democracy.

Reform agenda

Mr Mao outlined a series of reforms he believes are necessary to strengthen Parliament and make it more accountable to citizens.

He called for the introduction of electronic voting to ensure transparency in decision-making.

"Members of Parliament should vote electronically so that their positions are clear. This will stop the tendency of denying responsibility," he said.

He also emphasised the need to strengthen research support for MPs to improve the quality of debate.

"Better research support will enhance decision-making and also create opportunities for young people to contribute to Parliament," he said.

Mr Mao further proposed greater public participation in parliamentary processes, including public hearings on legislation.

"Parliament should invite citizens to give their views on laws. It must become a platform where the voices of the people are heard," he said.

He also suggested translating the Hansard into local languages to make parliamentary proceedings more accessible.

Democratise Parliament

Mr Mao said his vision is to democra-

tise Parliament and ensure it reflects the will of all Ugandans, including those in the Opposition.

"The Opposition is part of Uganda and should be given space to set the agenda at certain times," he said.

He proposed increasing the number of sitting days to allow more comprehensive debate on national issues.

"If Parliament sits for fewer days, then debate is limited. We should have at least 150 sitting days annually," he said.

Mr Mao added that Parliament should dedicate time to pressing national concerns such as the flooding in Kampala and youth unemployment.

"Let citizens come and testify before Parliament. We need to hear from those affected, not just officials," he said.

MAO'S PLEDGES

- Transparency via electronic voting for MPs
- Strengthening research support for parliamentary debates
- Greater public participation in lawmaking
- Democratising Parliament and including Opposition voices
- Addressing pressing issues: Kampala floods, youth unemployment