

Gen Biraaro turns mediator between Museveni, Besigye

On a mission. The former presidential candidate has held separat talks with President Museveni and Dr Besigye and floated the idea of a unity government.

BY ALBERT TUMWINE
atumwine@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. Maj Gen Benon Biraaro has quickly transformed from a presidential candidate to an arbitrator between President Museveni and Dr Kizza Besigye, the two candidates around whom the country has been polarised following a disputed presidential election on February 18.

Gen Biraaro, who scored less than one per cent of the votes according to the results released by the Electoral Commission on February 20, said he held talks with President Museveni on Friday and floated the idea of a unity government, having already done the same with Dr Besigye a day earlier.

Ms Linda Nabusayi, the President's Press Secretary, confirmed that the meeting took place although she declined to divulge details. "They met at Rwakitura (President Museveni's country home). The meeting was closed," Ms Nabusayi said.

Gen Biraaro had earlier told *Daily Monitor*: "I met him (Museveni) at his home in Rwakitura and I like the idea that he is ready to talk to other political parties. We talked a lot because I brought up the issue of the unity government, and then talked about how the election was conducted."

He said the President has his "no go areas" should the talks happen, just like Dr Besigye has his stand points on which he is unwavering. Gen Biraaro, however, added that it is only the two principals who can speak to these "no-go-areas."

Last Thursday, Gen Biraaro met with Dr Besigye at his home in



Gen Biraaro speaks to journalists on his way to Dr Besigye's home in Kasangati, near Kampala last week. PHOTO BY ABUBAKER LUBOWA

Kasangati near Kampala, with whom he said they discussed the same issue. Dr Besigye has lived between his home and police cells since election day, with the police restricting his movements, arguing that he is likely to cause a breach of peace as he leads protests against the results declared by the Electoral Commission.

Dr Besigye and former prime minister Amama Mbabazi, who managed

1.39 per cent of the votes, have rejected the results and have not ruled out petitioning court over the election. Mr Museveni was declared winner with 60.7 per cent of the votes, with Dr Besigye coming second with 35 per cent of the votes.

After meeting with both Mr Museveni and Dr Besigye, Gen Biraaro was only cautiously optimistic that it will succeed. "The good thing is that

both leaders are willing to talk but they have no-go areas. But the fact is they are ready to dialogue, which is the starting point. Once dialogue happens, everything under the sun can be discussed."

Gen Biraaro fought alongside Mr Museveni and Dr Besigye in the 1981-85 guerilla war.

After the meeting with Gen Biraaro, Dr Besigye said: "About unity government, I am very okay with it. Even our manifesto mentions that we are to form a unity government, so there is nothing new about that."

"We are all interested in peace and stability but it is not possible to talk peace when there is injustice. It is important to work towards justice in the society before you talk about peace," he added.

ORIGIN OF UNITY GOVT IDEA

The idea of forming a government of national unity has been gaining traction within Opposition circles, with Gen Biraaro floating it at the two presidential debates as his flagship project.

It was also proposed in the manifesto of

the Forum for Democratic Change party, which sponsored Dr Besigye's candidature, just like it was suggested in the protocol of The Democratic Alliance, the Opposition coalition that had been mooted but failed when both Dr Besigye and Mr Mbabazi insisted on standing.