Former freedom fighters petition Museveni over medals

BY ROBERT MUHEREZA

KABALE. A section of former freedom fighters in the Kigezi Sub-region has petitioned President Museveni following their exclusion from the list of medal recipients during the recent 45th Tarehe Sita celebrations held in Kabale District.

The celebrations were held at the former National Teachers College Kabale playground under the theme "Defending the gains of the revolution and honouring the sacrifices of the freedom fighters: A call for national unity, peace and socio-economic transformation". During the ceremony, several veterans were recognised for their role in Uganda's liberation struggle.

However, members of the Kigezi Veterans Association say none of those they recommended received medals, leaving many devastated.

Speaking at a press conference in Kabale Town on Wednesday, the association's chairperson for Kigezi Region, Mr Caleb Turyamutunga, said they had initially submitted a list of 65 former fighters drawn from Fronasa, UPM, NRA, and UPDF, following consultations with the area resident district commissioners.

Complaint

"We were advised to reduce the list to 16 people, which we did. To our surprise, on Tarehe Sita, none of them was awarded a medal," Mr Turyamutunga said. "We need to meet President Museveni so he addresses the matter."

He added that while some of the proposed beneficiaries may not have directly participated in armed combat, they made significant contributions to the liberation struggle by offering logistical and material support, including vehicles, food, and medicine.

Mr Turyamutunga attributed the omission to a coordination gap, arguing that, unlike other regions, Kigezi lacks a minister specifically in charge of its affairs to follow up on such matters.

"We cannot blame President Museveni for this mishap because we know that former freedom fighters who benefit from the Tarehe Sita medals in other regions have ministers in-charge of their regions, which is not so with Kigezi," he said. "We know that our files were received, but could have been sat on by some individuals."

Authorities respond

The Kabale Resident District Commissioner, Maj Godfrey Katamba, confirmed that the list of proposed medal recipients from Kigezi was submitted, but suggested that some nominees may not have met the required criteria.

"I will also find out from the Chancellery and the UPDF Medals Awards Committee so I can adequately inform the aggrieved people," Maj Katamba said. "I suspect that the criteria used may have favoured those still in active service."

The Public Information Officer for the UPDF 2nd Infantry Division, Maj Kiconco Tabaro, said the process of honouring veterans is ongoing and many more contributors to the liberation struggle are yet to be recognised.

"There are several people yet to be honoured for their contribution towards the country's liberation. It is a matter of time," Maj Tabaro said.

"We honour the services of whoever participated in the liberation struggle, even posthumously. Their enormous contributions are always appreciated," he added.

Tarehe Sita, observed annually on February 6, marks the day in 1981 when the National Resistance Army launched its five-year guerrilla war that eventually brought the current government to power in 1986.

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