

AKENA, OTUNNU SET FOR TALKS

BY HENRY SEKANJAKO

The Uganda People's Congress (UPC) party adversaries, Jimmy Akena and Dr. Olara Otunnu, have agreed to talk in a bid to forge unity in the party.

The two leaders have had a protracted stand-off since 2010, when Otunnu ascended to the party's presidency, defeating Akena, who is also the son of founding party leader, Milton Obote, in a highly-charged contest.

Akena was mid this year elected party president in an election disputed by the Otunnu faction.

"These talks would have started last week, but because of the festive season, we decided to postpone them to January," Moses Higienyi Kemba, the party's chief administrative secretary, said.

According to Higienyi, the talks follow a court directive early last month that the Akena and Otunnu factions hold negotiations under mediation by a High Court judge, within 60 days starting, December 21.

Justice Yasin Nyanzi in his ruling, said UPC's electoral commission did not have the powers to declare Akena UPC president since the delegates' conference which elected him was not properly constituted.

The ruling was in response to an application filed by Joseph Bossa, the UPC vice-president under the Olara Otunnu faction. Addressing journalists on Wednesday at the Uganda House, Higienyi said the party had set up a team headed by party president Akena, to discuss with the Otunnu faction.

"What we want to achieve is unity because we are preparing to run for presidency in 2021. So, we want to look the Otunnu faction in the eye and tell them this is wrong," he noted.

UPC has no presidential candidate in the February 18 election.

Edward Segganyi, the secretary general of UPC, noted that Akena was legally in office, adding that he can only be ejected through an election.

"Akena cannot vacate this office. He was elected by the party members, Otunnu does not like anything to do with elections that is why he never convened the national delegates' conference to elect a new president," he added.

Segganyi noted that in its ruling, court did not direct that Akena vacates office as it is alleged by the Otunnu faction.

He said Akena's leadership had appealed the ruling, pending hearing next month.