



Bending rules? The demand was received with scepticism from Mr Museveni's opponent, who accused the organisers of changing rules simply to honour the wishes of the NRM.

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KAMPALA. All the 1,500 guests that will attend the second round of the presidential debate today at the Kampala Serena Hotel will have to be vetted and approved by President Museveni's security.

The Inter-Religious Council of Uganda [IRCU], the debate organisers, yesterday confirmed that the Special Forces Command (SFC) demanded the details of everyone attending the debate to get an idea of what kind of audience Mr Museveni will face during the debate.

The 1,500-strong audience has been drawn from across society, with invitations sent to members of the diplomatic corps, Cabinet ministers, university guild presidents, local artistes and ordinary Ugandans.

All the eight presidential candidates will be allowed a 50-member delegation, up from the 25 members that were allowed for the first round of the debate held on January 15. The candidates complained that 25 allocations were not enough for their parties.

Members of the audience will

Museveni team to vet debate audience

be given an opportunity to ask live at the debate, unlike the first round where the audience only asked via online platforms.

The President's security also rejected lecterns and directed that only chairs and side tables be used.

During meetings with the organisers, NRM secretary general Kasule Lumumba had also asked Justice James Ogoola, the chairman of The Elders Forum Uganda [TEFU], that is part of the debate or-

"We have told him that we do not want to go and attend a Museveni debate. We want to attend a presidential debate. He [Museveni] should be coming to the debate as a presidential candidate and not as a President. He wants the list of the organisers as who?"
SSEMUKU NGANDA, FDC SPOKESMAN.

ganisers, to explain the criteria used to invite guests to the debate. The NRM team also wanted to know whether the foreign nationals that are part of the technical team for the television broadcasts have fulfilled all the requirements.

"They [Museveni security] did [ask for the audience list] and we will be sharing it with them. We are making arrangements to see what can be done. We have the list even for our own security," IRCU secretary general Joshua Kitakule said.

But Mr Museveni's demand for a scrutiny of all members of the live audience was greeted with scepticism from his opponents' camps, who accused the organisers of changing rules simply to honour the wishes of the NRM.

FDC spokesman Ssemujju Nganda said their flag bearer, Dr Kizza Besigye, met Justice Ogoola last week and warned that he would shun the debate if there was any changing of the

rules to favour Mr Museveni.

Ms Margaret Lukowe, the deputy communications director for Amama Mbabazi's Go Forward group, said SFC should just have secured Kampala Serena Hotel-the venue of the debate.

"They are over-stepping their mandate. Do they vet everyone who attends their rallies? What they are supposed to do is to secure the venue and ensure that the person of the President is safe. They are clearly over-stepping their mandate," Ms Lukowe said.

Maj Chris Magezi, the SFC spokesperson, confirmed that they met IRCU on Thursday and agreed that a list of all the guests at the debate be provided for purposes of "access control".

"It is standard practice, especially for closed venues to know whoever is coming to attend. We should know that this person has been identified and cleared to attend," Mr Magezi said.

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