

Only FDC government will pay veterans – Besigye

BY MOSES WALUBIRI

Richard Onuba is an ex-serviceman in Zeu sub-county, Zombo district. The lanky 64-year-old wears an inscrutable face when asked what challenges residents in the area want the next government to solve.

He reels off a litany of problems residents of this hamlet face ranging from walking long distances to fetch water from brooks, poverty to child marriages.

But when the presidential candidate of the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), Dr. Kizza Besigye, during his rally on Thursday promised to pay all ex-servicemen their pension, Onuba broke into a smile.

"I opened a bank account after being told I would be able to receive my pension. I am afraid I might die without receiving it," Onuba says.

It is the welfare of ex-servicemen like Onuba, whom Besigye claims are being made to run in circles in vain as they seek their pension, that he says will be an integral component of his government.

"I am told there are people registering veterans telling them that they will be paid their pension. They are being deceived. Many are selling goats to open up bank accounts, but they will be forgotten after elections. Only our government will pay veterans," Besigye said at Zeu sub-county.

The plight of veterans, who are yet to receive their pension after years of putting their lives in line of fire in defence of the country, is a contentious issue, especially during every election cycle.

Last week, FDC president and former army chief, Gen. Mugisha Muntu, underscored the plight of veterans, who are in the evening of their lives without receiving their pension that he too is yet to receive his pension.

"If I, a former commander, who retired at the rank of Major General can be cheated of my pension, what about a corporal or a sergeant?" Muntu asked during Besigye's rally in Obongi.

Former prime minister and independent candidate, Amama Mbabazi, has also made the plight of ex-servicemen yet to receive their pension an electoral issue, recently telling veterans in Luwero district that, once elected, his government will solve the veterans' pension woes.

Early this month, Serere Woman MP, Alice Alaso, told Parliament that a criminal cabal was taking advantage of veterans desperate to get paid by taking a huge chunk of their pension for ostensibly helping them secure it.

At Warr sub-county in Zombo district, Besigye told his supporters that he was confident of Museveni's imminent defeat in the impending elections.

His only concern, he said, are



Besigye walks out after a service at All Saints Masindi yesterday. Photo by Nicholas Oneal

the many problems three decades in power are set to leave to the next government to solve.

From high unemployment, poverty, whose level he says is dehumanising, high maternal mortality rate, children, who complete primary education while still struggling to write their names and a sick health sector, Besigye says the recovery process after Museveni will be long and painful.

"That is why I tell you that Museveni has betrayed our country," Besigye said in Paidha town as he headed to Nebbi for other rallies.

■ BESIGYE JOINS WORSHIPPERS IN MASINDI
Meanwhile, worshippers at All Saints Masindi, yesterday forced Bishop George William Kasangaki to let Dr. Kizza Besigye say "hello" to them after the prelate had denied him the platform on account of a busy schedule.

Besigye had joined them in the morning service to usher in the new year.

Upon conclusion of the sermon, Kasangaki introduced Besigye, thanking him for choosing to pray at All Saints Church.

"But he will not talk to you because there is no time," Kasangaki said, spawning a chorus of boos and recrimination.

In the face of increasing boos, Kasangaki quickly reconsidered his stance. "Do you want him (Besigye) to greet you?" Kasangaki asked, receiving a reverberating

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"yes".

In a tacit admission as to why he was wary of letting Besigye address worshippers, the prelate told Besigye not to veer off into divisive politics.

In his two-minute address, Besigye highlighted the importance of God's love, tolerance and forgiveness, saying it is the true essence of the Christmas season.

"I wish you a year of happiness and love because love is the true meaning of Christmas. Love your neighbour as you love your selves," Besigye, quoting Jesus' teaching said.

Besigye, who concluded his campaigns in West Nile on New Year's Eve also took time off his busy schedule to attend a Christmas sermon in Moyo.

He later held rallies at Karuma, Bweyale and Masindi town, underscoring the importance of reverting power to elect leaders back to Ugandans.

"Since independence, Ugandans have never put a leader of their choice in State House. Those who have been presidents have

come through the barrel of the gun and they have gone the same way," Besigye said at Karuma, promising his supporters that the presidential polls next month are set to be a watershed in Uganda's history.

At Karuma, Besigye, who had been trailed by three police cars right from church, told his supporters that the ruling NRM is set to use state funds to "bribe voters."

"These corrupt people will bring money to confuse you. You 'eat' this money, clean your mouths and ask for more. This is your money that they are stealing," Besigye said.

He attributed the galloping inflation in the wake of the 2011 polls to NRM expending colossal sums of state funds on bribing voters, leading to excess liquidity in circulation.

"If you do not make the corrupt trying to bribe you lose elections, you will pay back this money through the nose," Besigye said.

At Bweyale and Karuma, Besigye addressed his supporters in Kiswahili because the two places are a veritable melting pot composed of different communities.

Besigye, who is expected to campaign in Masindi and Bulisa districts today, says if elected president, his government, through a holistic approach, including introduction of an agricultural bank and a tractor per sub-county policy, will haul majority of Ugandans from "dehumanising policy".