

BY SHABIBAHNAKIRIGYA

KAMPALA. Democratic Party (DP) president general Norbert Mao has insisted that he remains firmly in the race for Speaker of the 12th Parliament, dismissing growing speculation that the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party, and the Patriotic League of Uganda, a group headed by the First Son, Gen Muhoozi Kainerugaba, have already settled on Defence minister Jacob Oboth-Oboth for the position.

Mr Mao's declaration comes days after outgoing Speaker Anita Among announced that she had withdrawn from the race and would support whichever candidate is endorsed by her party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM).

Speaking during the DP weekly press conference at the party headquarters in Kampala City yesterday, Mr Mao said the country can not afford what he termed as "improvisation" in choosing the next Speaker.

"I'm still in the race, and we cannot choose leaders through improvisation. The Speaker's office is too important for trial and error," Mr Mao said.

The Laroo-Pece MP, also the outgoing Minister for Justice and Constitutional Affairs, argued that the leadership of Parliament should be anchored on competence, institutional reforms, and

I'm still in Speaker race – Mao

political maturity.

He dismissed claims that the contest had already been decided, citing remarks by NRM party electoral commission chairperson Tanga Odoi that the ruling party had not officially endorsed any candidate for the speakership.

Defends NRM-DP cooperation

Mr Mao also defended the cooperation agreement between the DP and the NRM, saying several critics fail to appreciate the historical ties between the two political formations.

He added that DP has honoured its obligations under the cooperation arrangement, although some agreed principles remain unimplemented.

Mr Mao argued that the gaps in implementing the agreement further strengthen his case for consideration as Speaker.

"People should remember history. The partnership between NRM and DP was not accidental. Many of those who sacrificed in the struggle that brought NRM to power were members of DP," he said.

Mr Mao rejected accusations that his political moves were driven by personal

interests or negotiations for political office.

"Some people say Mao is only negotiating for a position. If that was my intention, I would simply have become an endorser and negotiated the next deal. But I chose to stick my neck out because leadership matters," he said.

Despite growing political attention around alternative candidates, Mr Mao

maintained that his reform agenda would give Parliament a new direction.

"We say make Parliament great again. Ugandans must believe that parliamentary debates can influence corruption, education, service delivery, and their everyday lives," he said.

He added that the contest was bigger than individual ambition and would shape the future direction of the country.

"The choice of Speaker will determine the kind of Uganda we want to build," Mr Mao added.

Mao outlines reform agenda

The MP also unveiled plans aimed at transforming Parliament into a more transparent and people-centred institution if elected Speaker.

Key among them is the reopening of the public gallery to allow ordinary Ugandans observe proceedings.

"We shall ensure the gallery is open again. People should be able to access Parliament on a first-come, first-served basis. In the past, citizens queued to attend debates because they believed discussions in Parliament mattered to their lives," he said.

Mr Mao noted that public interest in

the current speakership contest reflects the growing importance Ugandans attach to parliamentary leadership.

"You have seen how the election of the Speaker has become a national issue. Vegetable sellers, boda boda riders, and taxi operators are discussing it because they know the kind of Speaker elected will determine the kind of Uganda we shall have," he said.

Mr Mao also pledged to make parliamentary business more accessible through the translation of reports and official documents into local languages.

"Parliamentary reports should be translated into local languages so ordinary citizens can understand what is being discussed in their name," he said.

Governance and leadership analyst Eddie Kayinda has welcomed Mr Mao's proposals, describing them as a positive step towards strengthening public participation and legislative accountability.

"The effective operation of the parliamentary gallery will enhance research activities and increase the electorate's participation in law-making processes, thereby fostering a greater sense of ownership of the laws enacted by Parliament," Mr Kayinda said yesterday.

Meanwhile, human rights activist Mariam Kuteesa emphasised the need to manage Parliament as a professional institution so that it executes its constitutional mandate.



My stance.
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– Norbert Mao, Laroo-Pece MP