

Muwanga's case is political, not legal

The outgoing Butambala County Member of Parliament Muwanga Kivumbi appeared in the Butambala Chief Magistrate's Court on Tuesday. The legislator's supporters were outside the court, singing and chanting in solidarity ahead of the verdict on alleged human rights violations raised by the defence in terrorism-related proceedings against Kivumbi and 24 other suspects. The court rejected an application filed by Mr Muwanga's lawyers.

Nonetheless, Mr Muwanga's defence team argues that due process was not fully observed and that he has not recorded a statement in relation to the terrorism charges since his arrest.

"Kivumbi was brought to court without having recorded any statement concerning the charges," said counsel Medard Sseggon, a member of the defence team, citing procedural irregularities without mentioning prosecutorial misconduct.

The prosecution, on the other hand, maintains that investigations are ongoing and that all procedures undertaken so far fall within the purview of the law.

We label Mr Muwanga "outgoing", but the adjective implies an air of finality. It reminds some of us lovers of rap music of the words, "Can't go out like that". These words refer to a common theme in rap music about refusing to succumb to failure, poverty, or disrespect.

Yet, in very many ways, the legislator is "going out like that" and we are reminded of this when we call him outgoing. His supposed "beef" with the government is grilled

His goose seems to be cooked



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Politics



to the extent that his goose seems to be cooked.

Excuse the elegiac tone, but I first met Mr Muwanga at the *Kimeeza* (an outdoor, public, round-table discussion format) which was broadcast live from Club Obbligato on Old Port Bell Road.

He was one of those compelling speakers whose force of personality instead of gift of gab made him a crowd favourite. It was often that we'd see an audience member appear before Muwanga as he spoke to lift him up like a trophy or simply give him money for "speaking facts."

This rockstar treatment was a very public foretaste of the adoration his party president, Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, would receive. Indeed, if Muwanga was planning to be a serious actor on the political stage, *Kimeeza* was the greenroom where he prepared for the role of a consequential leader.

He later became the chairperson of Uganda's Parliament Committee on Public Accountability plus the Buganda parliamenta-

ry caucus in seeming fulfilment of this role.

In 2002, the Uganda Broadcasting Council labelled outdoor radio talk shows like the Radio One *Kimeeza* as "illegal," though they continued to operate. Muwanga continued to assail government on this show with an aplomb that was arresting. He seemed the right man to promote constructive engagement between the government and its opponents. This might be his undoing.

Our political culture is ossifying around bones of contention. Thus, politicians who embody dialogue are in the ruling National Resistance Movement's (NRM) and, arguably, the Opposition's crosshairs.

Uganda seems to have crossed the Rubicon on politics solving actual problems and improving policy outcomes. Rather, the political climate lends itself to adversarial confrontation.

We appear to be caught in a near-formal war between the NRM and its opponents. Depending on which side your political bread is buttered, you may consider Muwanga a stumbling block to progress or martyr to the progress we seek.

At this point of contention, dialogue is possible. Especially when it takes into consideration that before he came to power, Mr Muwanga used the microphone to fight his political corner. Conversely, before Mr Museveni came to power, he used violence and now largely uses the microphone. So, their differences have little to do with who's right and who's wrong; this makes them tractable.

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