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FEBRUARY 14

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All candidates in second TV debate

Moment of truth. Candidates had their unique moments right from their arrival to presentation of their manifestos.

BY FREDERIC MUSISI
musisi@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. Barely a month after snubbing the first presidential live TV debate and thereafter cynically justifying his absence by saying such "talking competitions (debates) are for school kids" President Museveni finally showed up for the second live debate at Kampala Serena Conference Hall last evening.

His arrival at the debate venue stole the show for a while, thrust other candidates who had arrived earlier in some shadow of sorts, but this was cut short at the red carpet moments later when the FDC presidential flag bearer, Dr Kizza Besigye, walked in.

Dr Besigye received a resounding applause as he ascended on the red carpet with his wife Winnie Byanyima in tow. This was a sort of surprise because many Ugandans have not seen her in the campaign this far.

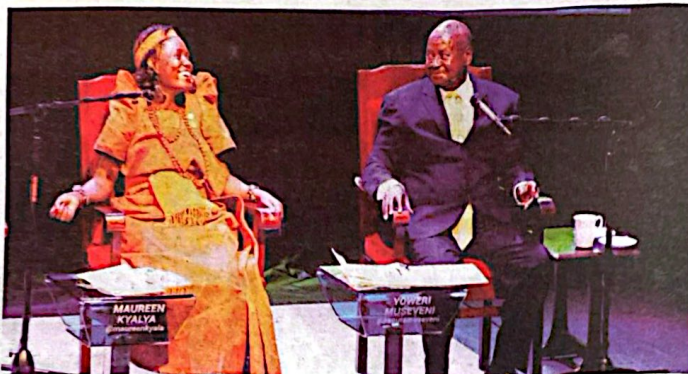
The candidates were welcomed with preliminary interviews with the media; each giving a brief on how he would address various national and international issues in his term as president. The questions focused mainly on peace and security and most markedly foreign policy.

The venue had been invitingly set with sound lighting and unlike last time, the glass lecterns were replaced with chairs. The doors to the Serena Conference Hall had been opened to the guests as early as 1pm.

The former Makerere University vice chancellor, Prof Venansius Baryamureeba, was the first candidate to arrive late in the evening as the sun set. Then retired Maj Gen Benon Biraaro, Dr Abed Bwanika, Ms Maureen Kyalya and former Prime Minister Amama Mbabazi in that order. Mr Museveni and Dr Besigye arrived in similar order.

Television stations beamed with analysis from commentators while social media teemed with comments and conversations—and as was last time the hashtag #UGDebate16—was top hipper on Twitter.

About 1,500 guests were already seated by 7pm. The debate kicked off at 8:14pm with the night's emcee's led by NTVs Joel Ssenyonyi calling the candi-



Independent presidential candidate Maureen Kyalya and NRM candidate President Museveni enjoy a light moment during the debate at Kampala Serena Conference Hall. PHOTO BY DOMINIC BUKENYA

dates to take their seats in order of organisation.

Candidate Kyalya was called first, followed by Dr Besigye, Maj Gen Biraaro, Mr Mbabazi, and Dr Bwanika. Candidate Museveni was called three times but in vain, five minutes later he showed up and took his seat after shaking hands with the rest of the other candidates.

No other candidate had the decency to greet those they found on the stage, only candidate Museveni did, a gesture which earned him a credit perhaps to cover up for his last missing.

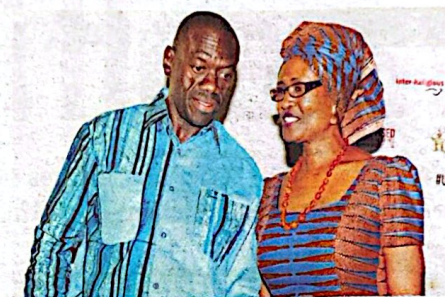
Candidate Joseph Mubirizi was a no show at the time but finally made it to the venue moments later and joined others on the rostrum an hour afterwards.

The national Anthem and East African anthem was sang, and then the Gulu Archbishop John Baptist Odama blessed the gathering with an ecumenical prayer—setting off the show off.

The debate's hosts US-based journalist Shaka Ssali, whose appearance as moderator the NRM had earlier wanted cancelled as a conditionality for President Museveni's attendance for suspected "bias" towards the government, former Commonwealth Secretariat communications officer Joel Kibazo and Makerere University don Suzie Muwanga, then read out the ground rules for every candidate.

The first question to the candidates was why each one of them thought was he/she the right candidate to be trusted by Ugandans to lead them.

Ms Kyalya went first. Seated close to President Museveni whom she acerbically referred to as father and in whose gov-



FDC presidential flag bearer Kizza Besigye and wife Winnie Byanyima at the press briefing before the debate. PHOTO BY MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

ernment she has once served as one of the many advisers she started by reminding him of a song that he sang for them when he visited her former school many years ago—a song about change—however many years later it is now the same Museveni in power.

Like the last time, she talked about motherhood, love, her background in social service and said this made her tick for presidency. But markedly in her opening remarks she said "we [Uganda] are the only country who don't have a past president; all our presidents go to exile; we are the only orphaned country in the whole of Africa and I am praying and beg you father that let us take Uganda forward and work together."

Dr Besigye in his opening remarks started with a brief background of his role in liberation but markedly said: "The problems of this country which are quite similar to those of other countries in the region, which are problems of mismanagement of our politics which then spills over."

Gen Biraaro, like Besigye also a former Bush War fighter,

delved into what inspired them to go to the bush in the early 1980s, his time during Museveni's government in which he served for some time and what led to his fallout. "Elect a government under Biraaro, so we can sort out a direction for Uganda."

Prof Barya delved into his previous "executive experience" in the various sectors, the poor state of education and health in the country to which he said: "I have plans for ensuring that every Ugandan is involved in productive sector. I have a system of redeeming this country, education, agro processing, and others."

Mr Mbabazi opened with a line from renowned American civil rights leader Martin Luther King that "Peace is not a luxury or merely the absence of war." Uganda might not be at war but internally with 16 mothers dying while giving birth, the education system broken and youth unemployment stands at 83 per cent, Mbabazi said, now that there are no wars to fight the country will only be secure with him at the helm.

Dr Bwanika, who started with an anecdote about how he saved a girl from rape in 1987, said he was running for president because he believes he can do "something" for this country.

President Museveni started with a brief about Uganda in 1900, at independence in 1962 and how he found it when he captured power in 1986. By press time, the debate was still going on.

UGANDA DECIDES 2016 today's campaign LOCATIONS

Museveni	Arua, Gulu & Lira	Bwanika	Kampala (Nakawa)
Baryamureeba	Isingiro	Besigye	Kampala, Makindye & Rubaga
Mbabazi	Serere, Soroti	Biraaro	Kiruhura
Mubirizi/Kyalya	Lyantonde, Tororo, Busia		