

the ban and neither will he back it in its defence.

Ms Ruth Sebatindira addresses a press conference recently. PHOTO BY ABUBAKER LUBOWA

EC phone ban illegal, says rights watchdog

BY ANTHONY WESAKA
awesaka@ug.nationmedia.com

KAMPALA. A human rights watchdog, Legal Brains Trust, has sued the Electoral Commission (EC) over its ban on the use of mobile phones and cameras at polling centres during the general election that starts today.

Legal Brains Trust (LBT), in a suit filed on Monday, contends that the ban by EC chairperson, Dr Badru Kiggundu last Friday, undermines the democratic character of the elections, makes the elections not free and fair and complicates the efforts of the voters in trying to monitor and

observe the elections.

While issuing the ban, Dr Kiggundu neither provided reasons for the ban nor quoted any specific law but simply said it's "an international practice."

In their suit, the rights body states that the ban has no legal foundation, is unrealistic, and violates the fundamental rights of the voters. LBT argues that world over and in the previous elections, mobile phones and cameras were used at the polling stations for purposes of advancing democratic elections.

"The impugned ban came out of the blue and was an ambush against the participants in the electoral pro-

cess. It was also reached without consultations or fair hearing..." reads in part the document before court. It added: "...the impugned ban is prone to abuse by the police and other elements who may want to harass voters, citizens, researchers, election observers and journalists who may choose to carry mobile phones and cameras to the polling areas..."

While appearing on one of the local television stations on Tuesday night, the spokesperson for the commission, Mr Jotham Taremwa, clarified that the voter is barred from using his/her phone upon stepping into the cordoned off area for polling but he/she can use the mobile phone

outside the said area.

Mr Taremwa explained that the ban was intended to avoid voters delaying the electoral process as they may start making calls while in the queue and also avoid scenarios where voters take pictures of the candidate they have voted and post the same on social media.

Timely

The filing of the suit comes at a time when two presidential candidates Kizza Besigye and Amama Mbabazi had expressed dissatisfaction about the ban and asked their supporters to defy it. The two politicians wondered whether the EC had anything to hide. By press time, the court had not yet summoned the EC to respond to the suit.