

Ugandan President Gets Third Term

Author: IWPR

Final results give victory to the incumbent Yoweri Museveni with 59 per cent of the vote, as his closest challenger cries foul.

With 98 per cent of poll stations reporting, Yoweri Museveni was declared president of Uganda for the third consecutive time late on the afternoon of February 25, with 59 per cent of the total vote.

The final results were released moments before a 5 pm deadline, and were immediately rejected by Kizza Besigye, the main challenger.

Besigye said that his party, the Forum for Democratic Change, FDC, was still compiling its own results, which have so far differed widely from official results.

Riot police were deployed to FDC party headquarters as what the authorities said was a precautionary measure. The move resulted in a minor confrontation with Besigye supporters.

FDC spokesman Rubaramira Ruranga said the government's show of force was unnecessary.

"Why're they're doing it, we don't know," he said. "We're not interested in a war."

Meanwhile, Museveni supporters began celebrating early in the day, dancing and singing in the streets.

Besigye, meanwhile, urged his supporters to remain calm and to ignore the declaration of the official results.

The FDC conceded defeat in western regions where Museveni was heavily favoured, but claimed victory by large margins in northern and eastern districts.

A parliamentary election was taking place at the same time as the presidential ballot, and the FDC claimed a substantial numbers of seats.

Figures from the official election commission indicated that as expected, the other three presidential contenders fared poorly - Abed Bwanika received just .9 per cent of the ballot papers counted, Miria Obote got 0.8 per cent, and Sebaana Kizito had 1.5 per cent.

With the Museveni victory, a run-off election will not be held next month. Ugandan law requires that a candidate must win by a majority in the first round, or else a run-off must be held between the two highest scorers.

Museveni has extended his 20-year rule after facing Besigye for the second time; the two fought the 2001 presidential ballot. Besigye went into exile after he lost that election, but returned in October to run again. He has spent much of his time since then in court facing charges including treason and rape that his supporters say were fabricated in order to prevent him campaigning successfully.

The February 23 presidential and parliamentary elections got off to a slow start at many polling stations because voting materials had not arrived.

When polls opened, many voters complained that their names did not appear on official voter lists, even though they had obtained official voting cards.

Later in the day, heavy rains across much of Uganda stalled voting and caused floods in southwestern Uganda, delaying the delivery of results to district counting centres.

Observers said the voting went smoothly and was generally free of violence, despite a number of minor incidents, such as in the southern town of Sembabule, where police chased three men who stole unmarked ballots from three polling stations, which were then forced to suspend voting.

Police in the eastern town of Soroti arrested a man for pouring acid in a ballot box; while in the southwest they arrested five Makerere University students from Kampala who had smashed the car windows of a political opponent. Also in the southwestern town of Kanungu, police arrested a district candidate for bribing voters on the eve of the election. In Mbarara, a poll officer and two assistants were arrested when they were found with ballots pre-marked for Besigye. In the same town, two students were arrested for trying to vote twice.

On election day, an estimated 80 convicts escaped from a prison in Apac in north-central Uganda, after most of the prison guards were deployed for polling station security. About 16 of the prisoners were recaptured.

Campaigning in Uganda's first multi-party election in 26 years concluded earlier in the week after a string of violence, punctuated with the shooting deaths of three Besigye supporters.

Besigye subsequently cancelled his final Kampala rally and returned to his home in southwestern Uganda to vote.

Museveni campaigned right up to the end, holding a large rally in Kampala where he criticised foreigners and opposition members of parliament for the country's recent power generation problems. He blamed them for blocking his plans to build another hydropower dam on the Nile, and lashed out at foreign aid donors for meddling in the internal affairs of Uganda.

The Democracy Monitoring Group, a consortium of Ugandan non-government and religious groups that deployed nearly 20,000 election observers, said that generally the election was free and fair.

Likewise, Max Van Den Berg, the head of European Union Election Observer Mission, said that the election had gone well. Van Den Berg is a member of the European Parliament and heads a team of 200 election observers.

This report is taken from IWPR's weekly summary of material produced by the Uganda Radio Network, a news service for local broadcasters and publishers.

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