



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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### UGA102199.E

Uganda: Strength of political opposition following the February 2006 elections; reports of mistreatment of members and supporters of opposition parties by authorities (November 2005 - January 2007)

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#### Strength of Political Opposition

On 23 February 2006, Uganda held both parliamentary and presidential elections (African Elections Database 15 June 2006; HRW 3 Mar. 2006). The presidential elections were won by Yoweri Museveni, leader of the National Resistance Movement (NRM), who obtained over 59 percent of the vote (ibid.; African Elections Database 15 June 2006). Dr. Kizza Besigye, leader of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC), came in second with approximately 37 percent of the vote (ibid.; HRW 3 Mar. 2006). Compared with the 2001 presidential election outcomes, Besigye's support increased by nearly ten percent, while Museveni's support declined by ten percent (*Africa Confidential* 3 Mar. 2006, 1; African Elections Database 15 June 2006). The other presidential candidates in the 2006 elections, who together obtained just over three percent of the vote, were John Ssebaana Kizito of the Democratic Party (DP), Abed Bwankia, an independent, and Miria Obote of the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) (ibid.).

Uganda's 2006 parliamentary elections were won by the NRM, whose candidates won 191 of 284 directly elected seats in parliament (ibid.). FDC candidates won 37 seats, making the FDC the main opposition party in parliament (ibid.; *Africa Confidential* 3 Mar. 2006, 1).

FDC leader Besigye refused to accept the results of the 2006 elections, claiming that they were rigged (ibid.; see also HRW 3 Mar. 2006). In March 2006, *Africa Confidential* reported that FDC officials believed "widespread rigging, ballot-stuffing, intimidation and human rights violations" took place during the elections (3 Mar. 2006, 1).

#### Treatment of members and supporters of opposition parties

According to the Human Rights Watch (HRW) *World Report 2007*, in 2006, "prosecutions were brought or threatened against opposition leaders" (Jan. 2007, 3). In November 2005, FDC leader and presidential candidate Dr. Kizza Besigye was arrested and charged with rape and treason (AI 23 May 2006; ibid. 21 Feb. 2006; *Daily Monitor* 29 Aug. 2006). The capital offences for which he was charged reportedly carry a maximum penalty of death (ibid.).

In a 21 February 2006 public statement, Amnesty International (AI) expressed concern that the charges brought against Besigye "may be politically motivated." HRW similarly notes in its *World Report 2007* that prosecutions were brought against the FDC leader "in a clear attempt to undermine his presidential campaign" (Jan. 2007, 3). Other sources consulted indicate that Besigye's "numerous" court appearances prior to the elections hampered his campaign (EU 24 Feb. 2006; *Africa Confidential* 3 Mar. 2006).

In March 2006, Besigye was acquitted of the rape charges brought against him (*Daily Monitor* 29 Aug. 2006; UN 7 Mar. 2006). A 12 January 2007 Reuters article reports that Besigye remains out on bail on charges of treason.

In its *World Report 2007*, HRW indicates that Uganda's 2006 presidential and parliamentary elections were "marred by intimidation of the opposition" (Jan. 2007, 1). According to the report, in January 2006, the Ugandan police force's Electoral Offences Squad received reports of "election-related intimidation and assault" (HRW Jan. 2007, 3). The majority of the claims were reportedly against the NRM and government officials (ibid.; see also *Africa Confidential* 17 Feb. 2006). A 3 March 2006 article in the Kampala-based newspaper *The Monitor* reports that the FDC alleged that some police officers in charge of providing security on Election Day "harassed, intimidated and tortured" members of the party.

Human rights and media sources consulted by the Research Directorate report the use of violence against

publicly gathered FDC supporters (*The Monitor* 26 Feb. 2006; AI 23 May 2006; IPS 21 Feb. 2006; UN 17 Feb. 2006; *Africa Confidential* 17 Feb. 2006). According to AI's *Report 2006*, in November 2005, riot police in Kampala "used live ammunition, tear gas and water cannons" against FDC supporters who had gathered in Kampala to protest the arrest of Besigye (23 May 2006). A January 2006 *Africa Research Bulletin* article reports that, following Besigye's release from prison in January 2006, some celebrating FDC supporters in Kampala had tear gas fired at them by riot police, while others were "beat[en] up ... as they chanted and sang " (16515).

During the election period, media sources also reported incidents of violence against FDC supporters (UN 17 Feb. 2006; IPS 21 Feb. 2006; *New Vision* 22 Feb. 2006; *The Monitor* 18 Feb. 2006). On 15 February 2006, a soldier opened fire into a crowd of FDC supporters in a suburb of Kampala (*ibid.*; IPS 21 Feb. 2006). Three FDC supporters were killed and several others were injured in the incident (*The Monitor* 18 Feb. 2006; see also IPS 21 Feb. 2006 and UN 17 Feb. 2006). On 20 February 2006, several people were injured in Mukono when soldiers drove seven armoured trucks into a group of FDC supporters (*The Nation* 20 Feb. 2006; IPS 21 Feb. 2006). Two days later, police reportedly fired tear gas to disperse a crowd of FDC supporters in Jinja (*New Vision* 22 Feb. 2006). According to an article in *The Monitor*, on 25 February 2006, tear gas was also used to disperse FDC supporters gathered at the party's headquarters to protest the outcome of the elections (26 Feb. 2006). On 26 February 2006, the Ugandan army allegedly held two FDC supporters at gunpoint in Kitgum [northern Uganda (Kitgum District n.d.)], and "beat up several others" who protested the incident (*The Monitor* 2 Mar. 2006).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including:** AllAfrica, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Europa World Plus, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), Freedom House, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Kingdom Home Office, United States Department of State.

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