

THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA
THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Telephone: +256-41-337500/337508-11
Fax: +256-31-262207/41-337595/6
E-mail: secretary@ec.or.ug



Plot 55 Jinja Road
P. O. Box 22678 Kampala, Uganda
Website: www.ec.or.ug

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PRESS STATEMENT

SUSPENSION OF GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN MEETINGS IN SPECIFIED AREAS OF THE COUNTRY

Following the outbreak of the Corona Virus (COVID-19), the Government, in March 2020, announced a package of measures to fight and contain the spread of corona virus in the country. The measures included closing of educational institutions, places of worship, banning of large political gatherings, cultural groups, large wedding ceremonies and burials, etc.

The lockdown led to the suspension of electoral related activities as scheduled by the Electoral Commission.

However, upon resumption of the scheduled electoral activities, the Commission, in an effort to determine the manner in which the election activities, campaigns inclusive, ought to be conducted given the COVID-19 pandemic, issued guidelines aligned to the Ministry of Health Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), aimed at prevention of the spread of the virus. The Commission also engaged with several stakeholders and actors in a bid to agree on how best to drive the electoral process forward.

Under the campaign guidelines, campaigns were to be conducted between 7.00 am and 6.00 pm; and in accordance with the harmonized candidates' campaign programmes.

Further, the conduct of campaigns was to be done in accordance with the measures and guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) put in place by the Ministry of Health to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and the Standard Operating Procedures issued by the Electoral Commission to prevent and combat person-to-person, person-to-object and object-to-person spread of the COVID-19 during the conduct of election activities. Accordingly, processions and public/mass rallies were banned.

Candidates were allowed to organise/hold campaign meetings, in a regulated manner, preferably outdoors, with limited attendance of a maximum of seventy (70) persons, to enable the observance of the 2-meters social distancing rule for the persons attending the meeting. However, the maximum number of persons attending campaign meetings was later revised to 200.

Candidates and their agents were further advised to use non-contact means of communication to interact with the electorate. These included fliers, leaflets, brochures,

posters, billboards and banners; radio and television programmes and talk shows; short messaging services (SMS), voice messaging, and digital media platforms and websites.

Candidates were also allowed to use the community-based Public Address Systems (*kizindaalo*) between 7:00am-9:00am and 4:00pm-6:00pm, as per the campaign programmes harmonised with the respective Electoral District Returning Officers.

When campaigns kicked off, the Commission noted with concern the non-compliance by some of the candidates with the said guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures, while conducting campaigns. Although several engagements have been made with the said candidates and/or their agents/representatives, there has been no improvement as far as compliance with the SOPs are concerned.

Following a meeting with the Ministry of Health experts on Wednesday 23rd December, 2020, where they expressed great concern over the manner political actors/candidates and their supporters were conducting themselves during campaigns, coupled with an upsurge in transmission of the virus and resultant deaths, the Commission has deemed it necessary to suspend campaign meetings of all categories of elections for the 2020/2021 General Elections in specified districts/cities.

Guided by Section 12 (1)(h) of the Electoral Commission Act; Section 21 (1) and (2) of the Presidential Elections Act, 2005; Section 20(1) of the Parliamentary Elections Act, 2005; and Section 172 of the Local Governments Act, campaign meetings for all elective offices are suspended with immediate effect, in the Districts/Cities of Jinja (Jinja City inclusive), Kabale, Kalungu, Masaka (Masaka City inclusive), Tororo, Kampala, Luwero, Wakiso, Greater Mukono (Buikwe, Buvuma, Mukono, Kayunga), Mbarara District (Mbarara City inclusive), Kabarole District (Fort Portal City inclusive), Kasese and Kazo, which have been categorized by the Health Experts as high, sustained and diffuse transmission districts/areas.

According to the said Health Experts, the transmission of the COVID-19 is being exacerbated by mass gatherings.

All candidates' meetings in these areas are hereby suspended until further notice and candidates are advised to restrict themselves to virtual campaigns – radios, televisions, social media, community-based Public Address Systems (*kizindaalo*) and other online platforms.

These measures are necessitated by the prevailing COVID-19 situation in the country and the need to preserve the health of the Citizens vis- a-vis their constitutional and democratic right to elect leaders of their choice as guaranteed under the Constitution.

All candidates are strongly warned to adhere to these changes, the SOPs and guidelines in general, and any defiant/non-compliant candidate stands the risk of a total ban of his or her campaigns.

The Uganda Police Force is directed to enforce the suspension in the electoral areas mentioned above, save for the virtual campaigns, i.e. radio, television, etc.

Finally, I call upon all Ugandans to work together to ensure safe and healthy participation in the elections.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mugenyi Simon', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Justice Byabakama Mugenyi Simon
Chairperson, Electoral Commission