



# Eight vie for UPC presidency

Publication date: Thursday, 11th March, 2010

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THE battle for the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) presidency kicks off today with eight people vying for the party's top position.

Party president Miria Obote is set to hand over leadership to the newly-elected leader on Saturday.

In the race is former UN official Olara Otunnu, Lira Municipality MP Jimmy Akena, East African legislator Yona Kanyomozi, party adviser Henry Mayiga and Joseph Ochieno, the chairman of the party's London branch.

Other candidates are Sospater Akwenyu, Fred Samuel Luwero and businessman Dickson Opol. The annual delegates' conference, which has drawn 105 participants from different parts of Uganda, starts with the registration of members today at Namboole Stadium. Elections will be held tomorrow.

Chris Opoka, the party secretary general, yesterday said sh137m has been set aside for the function.

An electoral committee headed by former World Bank consultant Joseph Ofwono has been constituted. The conference was set to take place last November but it was postponed after four senior UPC officials sued the party over their illegal suspension.

UPC has been engulfed in internal squabbles since the 2006 elections.

When Miria was elected president in November 2005, critics were skeptical about her leadership credentials. In her speech then, Miria termed her election as a demonstration that the party was democratic and would readily pass on the mantle of leadership to another person.

Events over the last years have, however, put UPC in the limelight over internal wrangles and disagreements on how to manage the affairs of the party.

Miria has put up with a lot of opposition from within the party, including attempts by some members to oust her.

Those opposed to Miria's leadership argue that the person who is elected president should be able to make the party a force to reckon with in the 2011 elections.

The new leader will also have the task of strengthening the party structures, setting up new branches and winning over voters.

In the last five years, UPC won only in the constituency of Oyam South out of the many byelections held in different areas.

The party has the highest number of independent MPs among the opposition.

The elected candidate also faces the challenge of bringing back its former stalwarts who left the party under Miria's rule.

Tomorrow's winner must also revamp the youth wing that is in limbo, with former foot soldiers shunning party activities and distancing themselves from the top leadership.

UPC, in the last five years, failed to capitalise on its self-created dilemma. It is perceived as a party for people from the north because it has not appointed popular leaders from other regions in its top ranks.

Yona Kanyomozi, the former member of the East African Legislative Assembly, and currently the party's national chairman, is seen as one of the longest-serving party stalwarts. He brings into the party the much-needed organisational and political experience.

The 68-year-old Kanyomozi joined UPC as a 17-year-old youth winger. He served as minister for co-operatives in the Obote II government from 1981 to 1985.

He is one of the few members who defended the party at the time when party activities were banned.

Henry Mayiga and Joseph Ochieno are portraying themselves as young blood. Ochieno joined UPC in 1987 while at Makerere University.

He was the general secretary of the UPC external bureau in 1995. He later became its chairman in 1997 up-to-date. He has promised to revive the party.

Mayiga is UPC's former vice-chairman and currently an adviser to Miria.

The main competition is between Otunnu and Akena. Otunnu is seen as a reconciliatory figure and a person with international credentials.

Akena, on the other hand, has over the years built support within the party structure, from the headquarters to the grassroots level.

He is, however, disadvantaged by virtue of being the son of outgoing UPC president Miria and former Ugandan President Apollo Milton Obote, who died in exile in 2006. Akena's election would be seen as an extension of the family grip on the party.

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