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TRUTH EVERY DAY

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 National

Riots as Makerere students are killed



A student arrested during the riots. PHOTO BY STEPHEN WANDERA.

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 In Summary

- Police to disarm private security guards at Makerere University hostels
- Security around University to be improved
- Guild elections suspended

Kampala

Police on Tuesday moved to disarm private security guards at Makerere University hostels after one of them shot and killed two students on Monday night.

Ignatius Barasa Nyongesa, a third year Bachelor of Commerce student and his colleague Brian Amwoga, who was studying Law, were gunned down at their hostel, God Is Able, in Kikoni – the western neighbourhood of the main campus. The deceased were both Kenyans.

Guards disarmed

Amon Muhwezi, the third victim of the 11:40pm shooting, was by Tuesday evening fighting for his life at the Intensive Care Unit after undergoing “successful surgery”, Mr Eliphaz Ssekabira, Mulago Hospital spokesman, said.

“We have decided to disarm all private security guards at hostels and we shall not allow any untrained person to hold lethal weapons when on guard duty,” Mr Asan Kasingye, the assistant inspector general of police, said while addressing the irate students at the varsity’s Freedom Square.

Mr Richard Kasia, a guard with Snow White Security Company, deployed at the hostel, has been arrested and was, by press time, in custody at Old Kampala Police Station where detectives said they will press murder charges against him.

Running battles

Police, who for half of the day fought running battles with demonstrating students, also announced plans to intensify both foot and motorised patrol to guarantee safety of students and employees at the country’s largest and oldest university.

Daily Monitor has learnt that the detained guard allegedly opened fire to calm rival supporters of Mr John Teira and Mr Simon Peter Kamau, two of the nine contestants for Makerere University Guild Presidency.

Mr Teira is the ruling NRM party’s flag bearer while Mr Kamau and Ms Grace Ruto are two Kenyan candidates, popular with their fellow nationals, in the charged race.

The varsity’s Electoral Commission chairman, Mr Simon Mwesige, said the voting exercise to pick new student

leaders, planned for Wednesday, has, in consultation with all candidates, been deferred indefinitely since the “electorate is mourning”.

“It’s not possible to hold a fair and free ballot in the circumstances,” he said in apparent reference to the tense situation at the main campus besieged by heavily-armed anti-riot personnel.

Mr Joshua Barasa, president of God Is Able Hostel, said agents of Mr Teira had stormed the place at night to drum up support for their candidate when they sparred with Mr Kamua’s supporters in the final lap of the campaigns, triggering the shooting.

“As each rival group shouted slogans of their preferred candidate, Ignatius banged the vehicle of candidate Teira that is when the guard intervened and shot,” he said.

Witnesses, among them Ms Dantie Kaitesi, a Bachelor of Arts (Economics) undergraduate student, said the killer bullet tore through the late Nyongesa’s heart and passed to hit his two colleagues standing behind him.

In the paved portico of the five-storey down-valley hostel, overlooking Kasubi and Kawala, both western suburbs of the city, a three-metre long trail of clotted blood stretching from the gate bore the mark of devastation that survivors, including neighbours, discussed quietly in small groups and hush-hush.

Pieces of window panes and broken wooden parts of a Pool Table, smashed by rowdy students in the wake of the fatal shooting, were strewn on the paved compound. Some students accommodated at the two-year-old hostel, owned by Ms Mariam Obbo, immediately parked their belongings and relocated fearing another round of retaliatory attack by friends and sympathisers of the slain students.

Those who stayed behind worried about what would happen in the night.

As news of the fatal shooting spread around the university yesterday morning, students wearing undergraduate gowns and brandishing tree branches stormed the streets, protesting what they called “senseless loss” of lives on campus.

Riot Police, aboard half a dozen speeding pick-up trucks with blaring sirens, fired teargas to disperse the marauding students and imperil their demonstration.

Tear gas everywhere

Earlier, the students had grabbed a coffin from the neighbouring Wandegeya and headed, while chanting university

slogans, to pick the corpses of their colleagues from Mulago Hospital morgue. But the Police successfully intercepted them at Kubiri Junction.

However, buoyed by arriving colleagues, the protestors were later to re-group at the Freedom Square with another coffin – in which some students lay in mock exercise of corpse placement – and dashed to God Is Able hostel, opening another fighting front with Police in the populated Kikoni suburb.

Bonfires they lit in the neighbourhood to disrupt traffic were quickly put out by police as anti-riot gear, including a pepper sprayer, were stationed at strategic junctions, like the Kasubi-Nanfubambi intersection.

An acrid smell of teargas filled Kikoni, several hours after the operation was halted to enable students assemble for a communal address by Police and university administrators.

The students, however, blocked Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academics), Prof. Lillian Tibatemwa from addressing them and also chased away outgoing Guild President, Mr Robert Okware.

There was drama as the students carried shoulder high Mr Caesar Twisingwire, the Police OC at the University for allowing students residing in Kikoni to access the campus and later successfully pressed Police Spokesperson Judith Nabakooba to address them.

Parents informed

Afterwards, they permitted Prof. Tickodri Togboa, the deputy vice chancellor in charge Finance to speak and he assured them that one of the students, who was critical of lax management would not be expelled as had been speculated.

Prof. Togboa announced that the bodies would be transported for public viewing at Makerere University, probably today.

“The parents of the deceased students have been informed and some are at the Busia border. As soon as they arrive in Kampala, they will have discussions with the university management on whether to hold a requiem mass or not,” he said in an interview last night.

Hallmarks of murder

Both the University and the government committed to meet the burial expenses hours after Mr John Nzube, the second consular at the Kenyan High Commission in Kampala said the shooting bore the hallmarks of “murder”. “It’s

unfortunate but we trust that the police will do a good job,” he told this newspaper, adding: “The suspect has already been arrested and investigations are underway”.