

OMUKAMA KABALEGA NAMED NATIONAL HERO

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The President greeting the Bunyoro's Omukama (king) and the Omugo (queen) Kajura, Kasirivu Atwoki, Kasajja, Otema among 83 medal winners

BY BARBARA KAIJA AND ANNE MUGISA

KAMPALA - OMUKAMA (King) Kabalega of Bunyoro was yesterday declared a national hero by President Yoweri Museveni and honoured with a three-gun salute for his nine-year resistance against the British colonialists.

Museveni and other dignitaries at the Heroes Day celebrations, who included the chief Justice Benjamin Odoki, laid a wreath on Kabalega's grave in the mausoleum at Mparo Hill, the burial place for the Bunyoro royalty.

Museveni said Kabalega's heroic resistance against colonialism was broken by disunity among Africans after the colonialists pitted them against each other.

The British employed a divide-and-rule strategy which saw Africans fight Kabalega who was trying to fight colonial expansionism, he explained. The NRM fought its war in the footsteps of Kabalega and Mwanga, he added, that is why they named two of their units after them.

Museveni praised Kabalega, calling him far-sighted because he rejected the offer by Sir Samuel Baker to transfer his kingdom to be under Khediv Ismail of Egypt.

A total of 83 veterans and participants of the NRA liberation war were honoured with medals for their "contribution to the political development of the country".

Three types of medals were given out at the celebrations on Boma grounds in Hoima town: the Nalubale Medal, the Luweero Triangle Medal and the Damu (blood) Medal.

Among those awarded were public service minister Henry Kajura, Matayo Kyaligonza, now ambassador to Burundi, former minister Baguma Isoke, presidential adviser Kasirivu Atwoki and Matia Kasajja, the Minister of State for Internal Affairs.

Gen. Elly Tumwine, who read out the names, said others were being compiled for recognition. He asked people to submit the names of those they believe should be awarded to the committee, headed by Prof. Mondo Kagonyera.

In his address, Museveni said the celebrations were meant to demonstrate that it takes heroes to create impact in society.

He stressed that not only the people who fought to liberate the country from tyranny were heroes, but also the peasants who supported them.

"I congratulate you for removing the fascist dictatorships which used the gun to monopolise power over society. Uganda now is no longer a pariah state."

He noted there were many other patriotic Ugandans, such as the late Dr. Matthew Lukwiya who succumbed to Ebola while treating patients.

"We never fought because we loved to fight, but we needed to escape from the death knell in which we were trapped. Fighting was a means of last resort," Museveni stressed.

He defended his patriotism campaign, arguing that the eight million primary school pupils need to be guided to love their country as a way of economic survival.

He scoffed at people who criticise the campaign, saying he was carrying out his constitutional duty.

"It is never too late to be patriotic because we all have a stake. Economic orientation should be regarded as a necessity for development," Museveni said.