

## **2009 Kabale Homecoming**

The first convention of the International Community of Banyakigezi to be held in our home land took place in Kabale December 27-29, 2009. The convention, which was attended by over 450 delegates, almost overwhelmed the White Horse Inn which had been expecting about 300 participants.

The Convention Masters of Ceremony, Mr. Johnson Mujungu and Dr. Abel Rwendeire, did an outstanding job throughout and were able to keep the delegates focused and entertained. They also ensured that Banyakigezi had plenty of opportunities to renew friendships and form new ones; to set aside political differences and focus on their common interests; and to engage in serious dialogue about Kigezi's renewal and development. It was a great success by any measure.

The delegates represented a large cross-section of political, religious, generational and professional groups. The young and old; religious leaders (including Catholic and Protestant bishops and Muslim Khadis); virtually all local political leaders including MPs; key leaders from the Banyakigezi communities in Toro and Bunyoro; Theodore Sekikuubo, MP from Sembabule; Dr. Kizza Besigye, President of the Forum for Democratic Change, the largest opposition party; and President Yoweri K. Museveni of Uganda attended. Dr. Kizza Besigye made very well-received contributions to the deliberations during different sessions on both days.

Members of the International Board [along with their families] who attended included Frank Byamugisha [President], Muniini K. Mulera [Vice-President], Henry Bagazonzya [General Secretary], Ruth Ndyabahika [Asst. General Secretary], Johnson Mujungu [Member/Chair, ICOB-UK], Eustacius Betubiza [Coordinator-KEF], Elvis Muhaabwa [Coordinator, KEF] and Judie Nkusi [Member].

The keynote speech was delivered by Dr. William Kalema, a respected Ugandan businessman whose distinguished record of service includes membership on the Blair Commission for Africa. Dr. Kalema spoke on the theme of "trust" as the foundation of business and organizational success.

To underscore the non-partisan principle upon which ICOB was founded, Dr. Mulera, Vice-President of ICOB, successfully asked Mrs. Hope Mwesigye, the NRM Minister of Agriculture, to publicly embrace Dr. Kizza Besigye. He also invited former parliamentary contestants and religious leaders to embrace and hug. The only ones that he did not get an opportunity to ask to embrace were President Museveni and Dr. Besigye.

The Besigye/Mwesigye embrace, captured on camera and published in newspapers in Uganda and on the Internet, summed up the spirit of the Kabale convention - and of ICOB itself. We are one people, united in a common vision and effort to build a vibrant community of Banyakigezi. Ugandan national politics must never be allowed to distract us from our common goal.

The second day's program was considerably changed due to President Museveni's unscheduled participation. With President Museveni's anticipated arrival, discussions on the draft constitution of ICOB-Uganda were brought to close with a decision that a legal committee should continue to work on the draft, along with the Interim Executive Committee, and have it adopted during the General Meeting/National Convention in one year's time.

Similarly, a decision was made to extend the term of the Interim Executive Committee for one year. The Committee, led by Bank of Uganda Governor Tumusiime Mutebile, was empowered to restructure itself and co-opt more members to form an Executive Management (called a Management Bureau in the Draft Constitution).

In the course of ensuring that the Uganda chapter is truly non-partisan, Mr. Athanasius Rutaroh, whose work has been central to the establishment of ICOB in Uganda and the success of the convention, resigned his position as Coordinator and member of the Executive Committee after disclosing that he holds a position on the National Executive Committee of the FDC. Mr. Mutebile was urged to ensure that his Committee a capable and non-partisan person to replace Mr. Rutaroh. The Interim Committee will also establish an office in Uganda, and coordinate efforts to grow the organization in Uganda.

After welcoming President Museveni to the convention, Dr. Frank Byamugisha briefed him on our organization's past resolutions, including: (i) tarmacking of key roads - Rukungiri-Kihiihi-Ishasha-Kanungu-Nyakishenyi Road; (ii) facilitating private/public partnership for processing Emondi [Irish potatoes], tea, coffee etc.; (iii) increasing funding for primary and secondary education to improve education standards; and (iv) improving quality of health services.

The President, who declared that he too was a Munyakigezi, informed the convention that he had decided to attend after hearing that Banyakigezi from abroad were attending. He felt that it was important for him to bring them up to speed, and did so in a speech

that gave a background to the challenges his government had faced in developing Kigezi; the successful projects that had been undertaken; and his plans for the region's future.

A very good time was had by all. It was evident that the Banyakigezi were energized to build their homeland and to strengthen their community in Kigezi and in the Diaspora, and to seek opportunities for friendship and peaceful co-existence with all the other communities in Uganda.