Ugandan Opposition Stirs Concern After Besigye Hospitalized During Detention

Veteran Ugandan opposition figure Dr. Kizza Besigye was rushed overnight to a Kampala clinic after his health sharply deteriorated, his party and family said on Tuesday, prompting renewed concern over his treatment in custody.

The People's Front for Freedom (PFF), which Besigye once led, said his condition "has reached a critical and deteriorating state" and demanded unrestricted access for his personal doctors and family.

Besigye, who has been held on treason charges since November 2024, was returned to a maximum-security prison late at night after treatment, the PFF and his spouse said.

In a detailed personal statement, Besigye's spouse, Winnie Byanyima, said she learned of his worsening condition through others and found him "extremely weak, shaking, running a high temperature, and suffering from severe abdominal pain." Byanyima said

Besigye was treated at his personal doctor's clinic while guarded by prison officers and a plainclothes military intelligence officer. She said prison authorities then escorted him to a basement car park and returned him to custody in a prison vehicle, and that she was warned not to publicize his illness.

"We have been kept in the dark about his condition," Byanyima said in the statement, which described restrictions on his medical care and alleged intimidation of family members. The statement called for his immediate release so family and doctors could provide proper care.

Prison officials disputed the account. Frank Baine, a spokesman for Uganda's prison service, described the overnight trip as "a general check-up" and said Besigye was "doing his exercises" the following morning. The Commissioner of

Prisons has since, according to the family, limited Besigye's access to a fully equipped medical facility and allowed only his personal doctor to see him at the prison sick bay.

Besigye, a retired physician and former military officer who has long been a leading critic of President Yoweri Museveni, is accused by authorities of plotting to

overthrow the government; allegations he and his supporters have rejected as politically motivated. Museveni, who has ruled since 1986, was declared the winner of last week’s presidential election, with official results giving him 71.6% of the vote and his main challenger, Bobi Wine, 24.7%.

Wine has rejected the results as fraudulent. The election was accompanied by an internet shutdown and problems with voter identification machines, actions criticized by opposition groups and rights advocates.

The treatment of Besigye has drawn public attention because of his stature in Uganda’s long-running political opposition. He has been held on remand for more than a year and, according to his spouse and party, has faced periods of solitary confinement and restrictions on visits, worship and exercise. The family and PFF say those conditions contributed to his decline.

The government has come under international scrutiny in recent years over its handling of critics and political opponents. Museveni’s removal of presidential term and age limits and the jailing or sidelining of potential rivals have raised concerns among human rights groups about shrinking political space.

The PFF and Besigye’s family said they would pursue all avenues to secure proper medical treatment. Prison authorities have urged the public to rely on official updates. Independent verification of Besigye’s medical condition was not immediately available.