

Veteran Ugandan opposition leader Dr. Kizza Besigye is in intensive care after collapsing during a court hearing on Wednesday, with his wife, Winnie Byanyima, saying he is unconscious and fighting for his life.

Besigye, 70, who is facing treason charges, was rushed to Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala after collapsing inside the courtroom while appearing before the High Court.

In a series of posts on X on Thursday, Byanyima, who also serves as Executive Director of the United Nations AIDS programme (UNAIDS), said her husband remains in critical condition.

“Dr. Besigye is unconscious, unable to speak, and unresponsive even to a pain stimulus. He has been admitted to the Intensive Care Unit at Mulago National Referral Hospital,” she wrote.

She appealed to authorities to allow Besigye to be transferred to a private medical facility where he can receive treatment from his personal doctor, saying the family has lost confidence in the government-run hospital.

“Our family is asking that he be immediately transferred to a private hospital under the care of his own physician,” Byanyima said, arguing that his condition requires specialised medical attention.

According to Byanyima, Besigye collapsed shortly after protesting the court’s decision to proceed with the trial without lawyers of his choice. She said he cried out that he was “being injured” moments before falling in the dock.

Close family ally Ingrid Turinawe told international media that friends and relatives were initially denied access to Besigye at Mulago Hospital, although his personal physician was later allowed to examine him. She described his condition as critical, saying he was “not responding to anything.”

Besigye has been in detention since November 2024 after he and his aide, Obeid Lutale, were arrested in neighbouring Kenya and taken back to Uganda, where both were charged with treason. They deny the accusations.

His lawyers, supporters and human rights organisations have consistently argued that the charges are politically motivated and form part of a wider crackdown on opposition figures ahead of Uganda’s elections. The government has repeatedly

denied targeting political opponents.

Besigye, once a close ally and personal doctor to President Yoweri Museveni, later became one of his fiercest critics and has unsuccessfully challenged him in several presidential elections. His detention has drawn concern from regional and international rights groups, especially following reports of his deteriorating health in recent months.

The case has also attracted attention because of comments from senior government figures. President Museveni has previously insisted Besigye must answer the treason charges, describing them as “very serious offences.” Meanwhile, the President’s son and Uganda’s military chief, Gen. Muhoozi Kainerugaba, has publicly accused Besigye of plotting to assassinate his father and previously referred to him as “a dead man walking.”

Prosecutors have recently intensified efforts to present evidence they say links Besigye and his co-accused to an alleged plot to overthrow the government.

As of Thursday afternoon, Ugandan authorities had not issued an official statement on Besigye’s medical condition.