

Uganda vote set to extend Museveni's rule to 30 years



KAMPALA: Voters wait in line at a polling station in Uganda's capital on Friday

By Francois Aousseil

KAMPALA: Ugandans voted on Friday in polls widely expected to extend Yoweri Museveni's rule to 30 years, amid opposition accusations the veteran leader was rigging his way to re-election. Polls closed officially at 5:00 pm (1400 GMT), with some stations recording low turnout.

"The electoral commission is satisfied with things so far. There have been some incidents around the country but we corrected them as we went along," Charles Willy Ochola, electoral commission spokesman, said.

Some 14 million voters, out of a total population of just under 33 million, were to choose their next president and their members of parliament.

The electoral commission must, by law, publish com-

plete results within 48 hours after the close of voting, that is by 1400 GMT on Sunday.

Mary Karoro Okurut, spokeswoman for the ruling National Resistance Movement, also expressed satisfaction.

"I've just heard about a few isolated incidents but otherwise we're happy, we think the elections were as peaceful as the campaign," she said.

But Margaret Wokuri, an opposition spokeswoman saw things differently. "We have serious concerns about what happened today. Many of our people have been harassed," she said.

Voting material was delivered several hours late to some polling stations in Kampala, identified by residents as being in opposition strongholds.

Ochola of the Electoral

Commission blamed "traffic" for the delay, despite the virtual absence of vehicles from the capital's streets.

"It was because of the traffic congestion. The commission decided... to leave the election material in the warehouses during the night. But when we went to move it, the traffic was too much," he said.

Opponents of Museveni have warned that Uganda was ripe for the kind of uprising currently sweeping the Arab world.

Museveni's main challenger Kizza Besigye has claimed only rigging by the regime could deprive him of victory and has pledged to release his own set of results.

Museveni, 66, has been defiant, predicting a landslide victory and promising to crack down on protests.

"There will be no Egypt-

like revolution here... Egypt is a different story.

Tunisia is a different story," he said Wednesday.

The terms "Tunisia", "Egypt" and "Dictator" were nonetheless on a list of potentially explosive terms the Uganda Communications Commission said it had instructed telecom operators to block in text messages.

Museveni has steered Uganda to an average growth rate of five percent since 2004 and proved a key security ally of the West.

While he has been criticised over anti-gay campaigns and human rights, Museveni has won praise for sending 4,000 Ugandans to battle Al Qaeda-linked rebels in Somalia when no Western country was willing to send its own soldiers.—AFP