

## **WINNIE BYANYIMA; AFROAMERICA NETWORK WOMAN OF THE YEAR 2005.**

**AfroAmerica Network, November 2005.**

### **AN ENGINEERED POLITICIAN.**

If she had followed her training and early childhood ambitions, Winnie Byanyima would now be a mechanical engineer or flying planes, being the first African woman to win the Zonta International's Amelia Earhart Fellowship and having worked as the first and only female flight Engineer for Ugandan airlines, in 1981-1985. If she was an African-American woman, she would be somewhere in New Mexico, Arizona or Texas, working on our nuclear shield program. Instead, she chose politics, or maybe politics chose her.



### **WHAT'S NEXT for Winnie Byanyima**

In 2004, fed up with the political harassment and after spending months of exile in South Africa with her husband and son, WINNIE Byanyima quit local politics to take over as Director of Women, Gender and Development at the African Union Commission. However, she remains very much involved in Ugandan politics, and one of the most recognizable female figures in Uganda and the Great Lakes Region of Africa.

She joined the NRM/A bush war in the early 1980s and became instrumental in raising funds for Museveni's rebel group, the NRM.

After the NRM took power, Byanyima went on to pursue her master's degree. Between 1989 and 1993 she worked as Uganda's deputy representative to UNESCO in Rome. Between 1994 and 1995, she was Constituent Assembly delegate for Mbarara Municipality. It was around this time that she founded the Forum for Women in Development, a Women's Rights non government organization and advocacy group, which she used as a launch pad for her activism in women issues.

Winnie Byanyima was a Member of Parliament in Uganda (elected three times) and the Chairperson of the Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE), a Ugandan non-governmental organization that promotes gender equality in decision-making. She trained politicians, civil society activists and government officials in more than 20 African and Asian countries and served on several expert and advisory panels of the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Fund for Women among others.

### **FALLING OFF WITH THE FIRST PASSION.**

Her training programs for Uganda and other African countries aimed at increasing women politicians' access to and effectiveness in local and national legislatures. In

Parliament, she mainly focused on issues of transparency and accountability and gender equality.

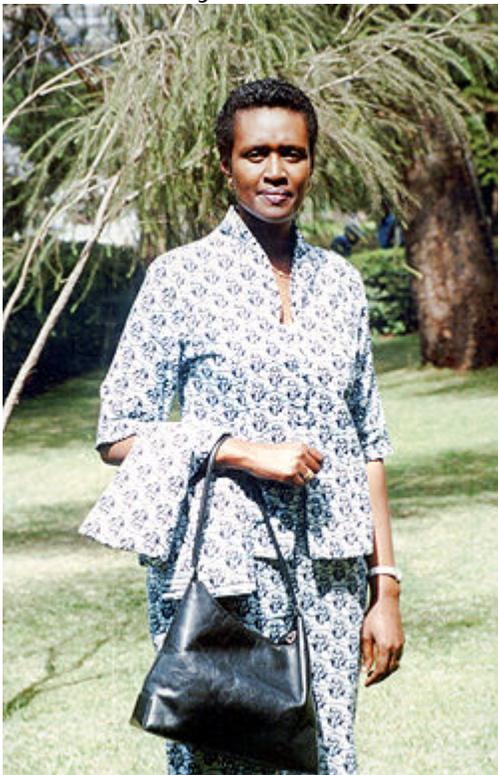
In 1996, Ms. Byanyima, again into the Parliament, became instrumental in the censure of two ministers, Brigadier General Jim Muhwezi and Sam Kuteesa, accused of influence-peddling.

In 1998, she was appointed director of information at the Movement Secretariat and in February 1999 she was sacked from the post. When she married Dr. Kizza Besigye later in 1999, she emerged from the sacking politically stronger.

Between September 2000 and March 2001, Byanyima campaigned for Besigye in a bid to unseat President Museveni, but lost the 2001 presidential polls.

She and the current President of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni were close since childhood. They started out as friends growing up in their native Mbarara District, fought side by side in the National Resistance Army - which she joined in 1982 - and elected leaders under the National Resistance Movement.

In May 2001, she retook her Parliament seat after defeating Museveni's favorite,



Mbarara RDC Ngoma Ngime. In the aftermath of that election, Byanyima's life took a turn for the worse with the harassment from the security apparatus that led to the flight of her husband, in August 2001 to the United States and later to South Africa.

On September 10, 2001, Byanyima was arrested for illegal possession of an unlicensed firearm, but was released thereafter, after it emerged that the weapon legally belonged to her husband.

#### **ACHIEVEMENTS OF A WHO'S WHO.**

Ms. Byanyima was an elected delegate to the Constituent Assembly, which deliberated a new constitution in 1995, and was also elected Chair of the Assembly's Women's Caucus. She was Uganda's Deputy Permanent Delegate to the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for five years. She was named by the World Economic Forum as a "Global Leader of Tomorrow" in 1995 and was voted "Woman of the Year" in 1997 and 1998 by the Ugandan press. Ms.

Byanyima has been a member of the executive board of the UN University's Institute for New Technologies, and on the African Capacity-Building Foundation executive board and the Gender Advisory Board of the U.N Commission on Science and Technology for Development (UNCSTD). She is also a member of the Advisory Council of Equality now an international women's human rights NGO.

Ms. Byanyima was appointed to the UNDP's Independent Commission for the Africa Millennium Project.

She holds an M.Sc in Mechanical Engineering and a B.Sc in Aeronautical Engineering from Manchester University (UK).

Although instrumental in the transformation of the National Resistance Movement into the government following years of civil war in the 1980s, she has since become a leader of the opposition Reform Agenda and a staunch opponent to Museveni.

As third vice-chair of the Reform Agenda, Byanyima kept the pressure group alive with weekly press briefings. She took a break from politics in 2004 and spent the better part of the year in South Africa with her husband and their son Anselm before calling it quits this year.

Recently, the husband has come back to campaign for the presidential elections of 2006. Although it is still too early to gauge their combined chances of coming back and influencing once again the Ugandan politics, there is no doubt, the former Guerrilla Fighter and Engineer turned politician, Ms. Winnie Byanyima, has already carved her place in history as one of the most influential black woman.

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