

## A CALL TO JUSTICE AND INTEGRITY

An Easter Message from the National Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (NCCJP)

*Good Governance Series No. 1*

April 2009

*"This is what God asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)*

**1.0.** To all the people of Uganda, we send you cordial greetings in the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, who is inviting us to new life in virtue and integrity and to service of one another.

**2.0.** The Lenten season has provided us an opportune moment to reflect critically on our relationships with God and with one another. To each one of us, in our different conditions and status in society, the message of conversion was brought even closer. Indeed, in prayer God received our supplications, in fasting He purified us as His true instruments for His service and in almsgiving He blessed us from His abundance.

**3.0.** Our country, as you very well know, is undergoing a moral and spiritual crisis. We are confronted with threats to human dignity and human life and these are causing untold anxiety in our minds and hearts. It is this phenomenon about which we, in the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, are gravely concerned and to which we want to draw the attention of both citizens and leaders of this country. We do this knowing very well that Jesus Christ died and rose so that his people will be freed from any form of oppression by sin and social injustice. In other words, the Easter event is meant to restore the dignity of the human person disfigured by sin and social injustice.

**4.0.** Among the many social problems affecting our country today, we consider human sacrifice and corruption as some of those which require urgent attention and collective action on our part as citizens and leaders.

### **Human Sacrifice**

**5.0.** We celebrated Easter amidst rising level of human sacrifice in our country. The 2008 Police Crime Report revealed disturbing trends in ritual murders i.e., an 800% increase over a period of only one year. The report further indicates that as many as 100 cases of ritual murders involving mainly children have been reported in different parts of the country<sup>1</sup>. The emergence of this sin in our society is linked to a few senseless and shameless individuals and groups who want to thrive economically on the blood of fellow human beings. This phenomenon cannot be treated merely as crime; it is above all a sin associated with spiritual and moral degeneration

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<sup>1</sup> The Uganda Police, Crime Report. 2008, Kampala Uganda.

within both individuals and society as a whole. Nothing exists in both human reason and in natural law that justify the practice of human sacrifice.

**6.0.** In both the Biblical and Qur'anic traditions such act tantamount to worshipping false gods; it is an act of idolatry which cannot go unpunished unless the perpetrator abandons his sinful way and returns fully to God (Deut 5:7-10; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 10:14-22). People who do such things are detested by God, the Creator of life, because they claim undue authority over life which authority belongs only to Him who created all things for his own Glory. Wealth acquired through such false beliefs and practices, therefore, has no basis in God. Such wealth is only temporary awaiting self-destruction and that of the owner. We appeal to such people to return to their senses, listen to the voice of reason and seek God's enduring mercy. They should not again allow themselves to be deceived that wealth can be acquired through shedding human blood.

**7.0.** As for Government, it should act expeditiously to restore confidence in the parents of our children who are struggling daily to cope with the possibility of losing their beloved ones to such heinous crime and sin against humanity. We welcome the setting up, early in 2008, of an Inter Ministerial Anti-Child Sacrifice/Human Trafficking Task Force to deal with this matter. We urge Government to provide the necessary support to this initiative and the citizens to offer maximum cooperation in order that together we can stamp out this sin and crime from our society.

**8.0.** Furthermore, Government and all concerned stakeholders should investigate the underlying causes of human sacrifice and try to deal with them urgently. We oppose any attempts to use registration of traditional healers as an option for dealing with this matter simply because in the past, such strategies have been abused by the so-called traditional doctors who have successfully disguised their evil activities as legitimate ethnomedical practice. Our view is that any persons who want to administer medicine to the public, including herbal remedies, must be subject to the Public Health Act of 1935 and National Drug Policy and Authority Act of 1993. The role of the Police should be limited to supporting the National Drug Authority (NDA) to clamp down on persons who operate outside the stipulated framework, and to rid the country of witchdoctors. The role of registration of medical practitioners belongs to the National Drug Authority and not to the Police.

### **Persistence of Corruption**

**9.0.** The Easter celebration also got us as a country grappling with what has become a normal phenomenon in our society, namely corruption. The Catholic Bishops have, in their different pastoral letters, stressed the evil of corruption and its adverse effects on the quality of lives of the poor and on the moral fibre of society as a whole. This agitation, combined with voices from other stakeholders, Civil Society Organizations (CSO), Faith Based Organizations (FBO), the citizens and the donor community has led Government to focus more attention on the need to fight the plague. This is shown in the formulation, within the last one decade, of several anticorruption laws and the setting up of relevant anticorruption institutions.

**10.0.** Unfortunately, although there seems to be a phenomenal growth in awareness of the dangers of corruption within both the populace and the leadership of the country, the vice

continues to ravage our society with a vengeance never witnessed before. We are concerned that not even such level of awareness and the proliferation of anticorruption laws and institutions could stop Uganda from slipping 15 positions down the Corruption Index, i.e., from 111 to 126 among 180 countries (Transparency International 2008)<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the World Bank Report 2005 indicates that corruption costs Uganda a staggering 510 billion shillings annually.<sup>3</sup>

**11.0.** Both grand and petty corruption remains a huge challenge to poverty reduction efforts in our country. Corruption continues to manifest in absence of basic drugs in virtually all government health units and hospitals partly because someone has stolen the drugs or money meant to procure such facilities; in shoddy roads, and public and private buildings because someone or some groups have been paid bribes; in road carnage as vehicles in poor mechanical conditions are allowed to operate simply because the owners can offer bribes to law enforcement officers; in electoral violence and loss of public resources to election petitions simply because the right procedures for the election of leaders has not been followed by bodies such as the Electoral Commission, security apparatus and political parties; and in the manufacture and importation of fake and harmful goods because some business person is protected by a big politician or bureaucrat. The list is endless.

**12.0.** During this Easter season, we continue to raise our voice and reiterate that corruption, like human sacrifice and other forms of homicide, is equally sinful, is a result of aberration of the human mind and of spiritual and moral bankruptcy. Corruption undermines the dignity of the person involved in the act and of the victim of his act who, usually, are the poor and the voiceless. Fortunately for us, Christ died and rose so that we may be renewed and have life in its fullness (Jn. I 0: 10). It is, thus, not late for individuals and groups involved in corrupt practices to abandon their sinful ways and return to God. They must not allow sin to define their character and way of life, lest the wrath of the Lord will catch up with them.

**13. 0.** We recognize what Government has so far done in its effort to weed out corruption in our country. The latest initiative to set up a special court to try cases of corruption is among such positive developments which we urge the people .of Uganda to support. It is our deep conviction that if such court is allowed to operate without undue political interference, it will deliver on the beautiful promises of our future which we echo each time we sing the National Anthem; that promise is freedom and happiness for all. Both Government and the citizens of Uganda must not allow this white collar impunity and greed to undermine the attainment of our common destiny which is the total enjoyment of the common good by all. Government should, among other things, continue to specifically take stem action against perpetrators of corruption in the famous Global Fund scandal and initiate thorough investigations into any possible criminal conduct in the Temangalo land deal. Ugandans deserve not just political answers to these national phenomena but stem action and justice befitting a dignified and civilized country.

**14. 0.** We are also of the view that the current standoff between Parliament and the Inspector General of Government (IGG) does not augur well for the overall war against corruption, hence the need to deal with the impasse as expeditiously as possible. Parliament should include a

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<sup>2</sup> Transparency-International, Annual Corruption Index. 2008.

<sup>3</sup> The World Bank Report, 2005.

specific clause(s) in the IGG Act to fill the procedural gaps in the reappointment of the IGG. Without compromising the independence of the IGG, a clear mechanism should be set up to ensure a binding and constructive relationship between the office of the IGG and all other organs tasked with the responsibility of fighting corruption in the country. We say this because corruption has become a complex reality which requires not only a multifaceted solution but also combined effort by all stakeholders and citizens of Uganda. We need to get to the bottom of the vice and together work to address the root causes which include: moral decadence, spiritual bankruptcy, greed, low remuneration to civil servants, unpredictable social security, rising unemployment among young people, political sycophancy and patronage, and deepening poverty among Ugandans.

### **The Global Economic Crisis and the Rising Cost of Living**

**15.0.** We have also followed keenly the current global economic crisis and the soaring cost of living in our country. We are particularly concerned about the impact of these developments on the most vulnerable, many of whom live in the rural areas. The Global Monitoring Report from UNESCO reveals a 20% drop in the income of close to 390 million poorest people in Africa as a result of the credit crunch.<sup>4</sup> If these projections are true, then there is real cause for worry especially in our country where more than 40% of the population is already plagued by abject poverty with many more living on the edge of poverty. When this income regression is considered together with the high cost of living, then we are likely to see a situation where the poor in this country will simply succumb to worse forms of deprivation and suffering.

**16.0.** Government should, therefore, pay special attention to the needs of the poor especially at this crucial moment. We are of the view that Government should exercise humility and admit the problem instead of spending too much time on meaningless economic figures which paint a rosy picture of the economy, yet the benefits are not reflected in the lives of ordinary Ugandans. We stand with Pope Benedict XVI to stress the need to give the poor priority in planning and all political considerations, hence the need for an ethical approach to economics on the part of those active in economic planning and in trade, an ethical approach to politics on the part of those in public office and an ethical approach to participation capable of harnessing the contributions of all stakeholders.<sup>5</sup>

**17.0.** We urge Government to invest more resources in programs that will cushion the poor from the adverse effects of the global credit crunch and rising cost of essential commodities including foodstuff. This will require, among other things, fiscal discipline and a drastic reduction in public spending which has continued to put unbearable strains on the economy. It is in this spirit that we question the superfluous bureaucracy that serves little or no meaningful purpose, yet predates on the hard-earned incomes of Ugandans through taxation. We need to review the current administrative set up in the country and raise hard questions concerning numbers and quality of Presidential Advisers, Cabinet Ministers, Resident District Commissioners, Presidential Aides and Members of Parliament required for effective governance of our country, and whether we even need some of these structures at all. It beats

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<sup>4</sup> UNESCO, The Global Monitoring Report. 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Message of His Holiness. Pope Benedict XVI on the World Day of Peace, 2009.

common sense to see huge sums of money being spent on non-essentials and very little on key sectors such as agriculture and health. This is the kind of structural injustice which the Catholic Church has throughout its existence protested and which we too detest in the strongest terms possible.

### **Other Pressing Issues**

**18.0.** While we reflect on the above, we would like to draw the attention of Ugandans to other pressing issues which too require urgent action. They include the need to embark fully on the preparation for the 2011 elections by addressing loopholes that have consistently rendered the electoral process inadequate. Electoral reforms and other preliminary processes such as updating of voters' registers need to start early and should involve all stakeholders.

**19.0.** We also appeal to Government to remain committed to the resettlement and reconstruction of Northern Uganda. Government should fulfil its part of the bargain by providing the resources required for effective implementation of the Peace Development and Recovery Programme (PDRP). In a similar vein, more effort should be placed on addressing the problems in Karamoja region. We are dismayed to learn that the Karamoja Integrated Development and Disarmament Programme (KIDDP) is due to expire this year yet, apart from improved security, there is very little to show for its economic impact on the lives of the people. Chronic food shortage and poverty continue to characterize the lives of the people in Karamoja. This is an unacceptable situation which should be reversed as a matter of urgency. The international community, the donors in particular, need to support the efforts of Government and Civil Society Organizations to reverse the persistent food crisis, insecurity and poverty in the region.

### **Conclusion**

**20.0.** In conclusion, we wish to reiterate our commitment to being the voice of the poor and to cooperate with all stakeholders, both Government and Civil Society Organizations, in the bid to find lasting solutions to the many social problems afflicting our country. In so doing we draw our inspiration from the life of Jesus Christ who died so that the poor may find home in Him, and in the wealth of Catholic Social Doctrine passed on by the Apostles through the history of the Church. Armed with the Hope given to humanity by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, the Ultimate Leader and Citizen, we ask Him to give you the courage to confront the challenges in your midst and in our country as a whole.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord let His face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord uncover His face to you and bring you peace [Numbers 6: 24-26]

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