

**A COMMUNIQUE OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS
OF UGANDA ON THE CURRENT
SITUATION IN THE COUNTRY
Post-2011 Elections**

9th June 2011

We, the Catholic Bishops of Uganda, united and exercising our pastoral guidance over the faithful and people of good will in Uganda,

Mindful of our apostolic mission to promote the greater common good which the Church offers to all humanity,

Exercising the authority of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, vested in our annual plenary assembly,

We are deeply concerned about the unfolding economic and political scenarios, which if not handled well, might lead our country into a worse situation than the one we are experiencing now.

After an intense reflection and prayer on the current political-economic dynamics in our beloved country, we hereby issue this Communiqué as a guide for all leaders and the people of Uganda which our country is likely to face. We, therefore, address ourselves on the following issues:

1. On the 2011 General Elections:

We noted with great concern that despite the general peaceful atmosphere during the elections, the polls were marred by a number of identifiable, avoidable administrative and logistical shortfalls which the Electoral Commission as the constitutionally mandated body to manage national polls would have addressed early enough.

Such irregularities could have affected, to some extent, the outcome of the election and have definitely left a trail of suspicion, outrage and resentment. The commercialization of all political campaigns throughout the country in favour of certain candidates, especially the incumbents. This compromised some of the cardinal principles necessary for a free, fair, secure and democratic election.

Further, it also created room for lack of a levelled playing ground during most of the political campaigns. We also noted with regret that our call in the June 2010 Pastoral Letter on elections for relevant electoral law reforms was not given adequate attention as many proposals by the Church, Political Parties, and Civil Society were deliberately ignored and the electoral laws remained inadequate to address the rampant cases of election malpractices experienced in the recent vote.

We now believe that the new parliament has enough time to amend the current electoral laws and provide for stringent measures which are both punitive and deterrent to curb electoral malpractices.

2. On the Collision between Security Agencies and some Members of Political Pressure Groups:

In the recent past we have witnessed collision between security agencies and some sections of members of the opposition and other Political Pressure Groups, resulting into loss of lives and destruction of property. This situation creates opportunities for people with ill motives to cause unnecessary suffering to innocent Ugandans. This should be avoided.

We reiterate our cherished position as the Catholic Church that, use of excessive force should never be a choice. We, therefore, condemn all unlawful actions, the unprofessional conduct and excessive force used against unarmed civilians. Many innocent Ugandans especially children in schools and patients in hospitals were unexpectedly caught up in the recent standoff between security agencies and some sections of the general public.

3. On Security Agencies and Protection of the Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms:

Although Article 43(1) of the Constitution provides for general limitation on fundamental and other human rights and freedoms in public interest, we also need to appreciate the subsequent provisions under the same Article 43(2)(a) and(c) which assert that "*public interest under the Article shall not permit political persecution and any limitation of the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms prescribed by the same Chapter beyond what is acceptable and demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society, or what is provided in the Constitution*".

The unlawful restrictions on people's constitutional rights and freedoms to free speech, peaceful assembly and demonstration, are in direct conflict with both national and international human rights principles and standards. Article 20(1) of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda provides that fundamental human rights and freedoms of an individual are inherent and not granted by the State.

Further, Article 20(2) of the same Constitution states that the rights and freedoms of the individual and groups enshrined in Chapter (4) shall be respected, upheld, and promoted by all

organs and agencies of Government and by all persons. It should, therefore, be understood that most of these fundamental human rights and freedoms are clearly protected under Article 29 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda.

Our point of view is that Government should uphold the constitutional and birth rights of the people of Uganda. Further, government should quickly enter into a constructive dialogue with the members of the opposition to come out with a lasting solution to the current economic and political situation. This is necessary to enhance mutual understanding, respect, and trust. We need a sober relationship between government and the opposition as they work for the common good.

4. On the Members of the Opposition:

As key players in the country's social, political, and economic system, it is imperative that members of the opposition understand and work within the confines of the 1995 Constitution and other relevant lawful and legitimate regulations aimed at consensus building. We ask the Opposition to avoid provocative approaches and confrontations as ways of expressing their dissatisfaction. We recommend that members of the opposition should all the time desist from acts that can cause violence. We should remember that the role of

the opposition is per se not only to oppose bad policies, but also to try as much as possible to provide practical policy alternatives to the ruling party, suggesting constructive solutions to the problems of the country.

5. On the 9th Parliament and people's Representations:

We congratulate all Members of the 9th Parliament for having been successfully elected and sworn in as official voices of the people. However, we ask them to remember that it was through the power of the people that they managed to make it to the national assembly. Members of Parliament must continuously educate themselves so as to do the will of the people. Personal advantages and Party interests must not override Parliament as a people-based institution.

Despite Party affiliations, Members of Parliament should always seek consensus on key national issues with an aim of promoting the common good. Therefore, for whatever reason, numerical strength should not compromise substantial debates especially on matters of public interest. We call for rational deliberations on all matters, especially those that affect the common person they represent. Constant consultation with the electorate remains central and paramount. Balanced debate and the independency of Parliament are key to democracy and good governance. The Parliament' must show continued commitment to use the House to enhance the culture of constitutionalism, democracy and rule of law in Uganda.

6. On Cases of Corruption:

We note with sadness that Government did not act as expected to ensure that all those individuals implicated by reports of misuse of public funds were brought to book. By the closure of the 8th Parliament, many suspects had been exonerated of any wrong doing. Such acts of impropriety, if not acted upon directly, impact on the very poor of our society, who are in most cases affected by the poor service delivery resulting from misappropriation of tax payers' money. The hope now remains that the Office of the Inspector General of Government may use its constitutional powers which guarantee independence to gather the necessary evidence and prosecute all those implicated—be they in power or not—without any fear or favour. We need to see justice done in public interest.

7. On the Marriage and Divorce Bill:

Any Bill on this matter should aim at strengthening the family institution, which is of paramount importance for the well-being of the entire society. This principle should be kept in mind when dealing with the various issues regarding the family. The title of the Bill seems to forget it, putting Marriage and Divorce on the same level!

Although the Bill aims at addressing some of the outstanding marriage challenges, we should also (know that it has loopholes which not only threaten the stability of Christian marriages but would also render the entire institution of marriage meaningless. The Catholic Church maintains the position taken by all Churches under the Uganda Joint Christian Council to remain opposed to some provisions of the Bill, like the one on cohabitation.

We also strongly object to the provision that ignores the power of the Church to announce marriage banns. All these and other provisions are directly contrary to our family values as enshrined in the teachings of the Christian faith.

Our point of view is that, the family should continue to be looked at as a sacred institution worthy of respect and protection. We recommend that more consultations be carried out with Churches and other Faith-Based Organizations on many other contentious issues in the proposed Family Law, before it is tabled again for debate to the 9th Parliament.

8. On the Delivery of Services:

We appreciate all efforts government has taken to address the challenge. However, we need to point out that despite such efforts and political will, poverty levels in the country are still very alarming, especially in Karamoja. The social service delivery system leaves a lot to be desired, particularly in the sectors of health, education, medical, and infrastructural services like roads. We therefore recommend that the newly created Ministry of Karamoja Affairs seriously looks at those

sectors as key priority in the next five years.

Nationwide, the Government also needs to continue recognizing the complementary role of the Church and other Faith-Based Organizations, and offer the necessary support to the already existing Church institutions, which in some areas are the only ones offering services to the people. We particularly appeal for an urgent and meaningful financial support from the Government to improve the salaries of the personnel working in our hospitals and Health Centres.

9. Genera Conclusion

a. Government should avoid taking a defensive attitude on some issue but undertake practical, immediate, and long-term measures to address the legitimate and genuine concerns of the citizens of Uganda.

b. Issues such as increasing food and fuel prices and the general cost of living have become concerns which should not be ignored.

c. The security personnel and others who committed outright offences during the May demonstrations be personally held criminally liable. The culprit should not be defended on the ground that he/she was acting under orders from above.

d. There is also need for proper prioritization in the allocation of the meagre resources, to avoid current crisis to reoccur.

e. Finally, we all need to work together to promote the vision of a peaceful, liberated, unified and dignified Uganda. Both Government and Members of the Opposition should persevere in their consensus building efforts which is even more vital during this post-election period.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY

On Behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda

**+John Baptist Odam,
A r c h b i s h o p o f G u l u & Chairman of Uganda Episcopal Conference**

Kampala - Thursday, June 09, 2011