

FIFTY YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE: CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE

Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda

October 9th, 2012

Preamble

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. *This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice in it and be glad (Ps. 118:24).* As believers in the one God who is guiding the history of humankind, of all nations and of each person, we greet you with this joyful acclamation from the liturgy of Easter, the day of the Resurrection of Jesus our Saviour. We repeat it with renewed joy and gratitude, fifty years later, as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our beloved country, Uganda. We have so many reasons to be grateful to God who has walked with us throughout our long journey of history. Indeed, we are not afraid to use the words of St. Paul:

Let us give thanks to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God from whom all help comes. He helps us in all our troubles, so that we are able to help others who have all kinds of troubles, using the same help that we have ourselves received from God (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

It is obvious that without the help and protection from above, we are powerless. All we have achieved and managed to go through is because of the love that God has bestowed unto us as a nation.

2. The celebration of fifty years of independence should not be simply an event but, rather, an opportunity for us to celebrate the Lord's deliverance and providence (Ex.13:16). Like the servants in the Gospel, we have received a number of talents and gifts (Mt. 25:19) among which are the diversity of our cultures, good climate and weather, hospitable people, and a beautiful country. This is the time for us to give accountability as good stewards, how we have used these talents and gifts for the common good, the growth, development and transformation of our nation.

3. Through all this time, in the events of our history as a nation, God has led and guided us. During the day He walked in front of us in a pillar of clouds to show us the way, and during the night He went in front of us in a pillar of fire to give us light (Ex. 13: 21-22). Through this experience, in many instances our faith in God has grown, but in some others, it has also faltered. As we all are aware, there have been sad moments during the struggle to build our country into a nation (Ex. 15:23-26), but the Lord never abandoned us. In his love and mercy He continues to guide us.

4. It is in the context of our own Exodus as a nation that we, your bishops, considered it worthwhile writing to you this pastoral letter so that we may reflect together on the great wonders the Lord has done for us (Lk. 1: 46-55), and plan together the destiny of our nation. Where we have succeeded, we give glory, honour and praise to Him; where we have failed we ask for his forgiveness.

5. As reflected in our national motto, *For God and my Country*, Uganda is a God-fearing nation. Over 99% of the population subscribe to any of the established religions in our country. Hope and trust in God have kept us going and growing together as a nation for the last fifty years. In many instances, however, our lived experience as a nation has not been in conformity with a truly God-fearing nation.

PART ONE

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

6. Looking at all the struggles, achievements and failures of our country, we, your bishops, invite you to reflect upon the contribution of the Catholic Church to the history and building of our country. It is indeed right for all our faithful to know and own what the Catholic Church has done and is doing for Uganda. We do it not for us to brag about our ability and merits, but for these achievements to be known so that people may give praise to the Heavenly Father (Mt. 5:16) for what He has accomplished through the Church for the sake of His people in Uganda.

The Growth of the Church

7. *Evangelization will never be possible without the action of the Holy Spirit¹*. This proclamation has been truly and affirmatively realized here in our country. Since independence, the Church has not only grown in number but also in her commitment to the service of the entire country. We owe all this, indeed, to the presence of the Holy Spirit who continues to work in His Church, guiding and leading her wherever He wills (Acts 11:47).

8. It is in the ‘consolation of the Holy Spirit’ that the Church has grown. The Spirit has led the Church in Uganda to where and what it is today. He has been at work in every evangelizer, beginning with the first missionaries who brought the Good News to our country a hundred and thirty six years ago. They played a key and sacrificial role in the foundation and growth of the Church in Uganda. In the words of Pope John Paul II:

The splendid growth and achievements of the Church in Africa are due largely to the heroic and selfless dedication of generations of missionaries. This fact is acknowledged by everyone. The hallowed soil of Africa is truly sown with the tombs of courageous heralds of the Gospel².

9. In the words of Tertullian, *The blood of the Martyrs is the seed of Christianity*, the Church in our nation has grown through the intercession of the Martyrs, Charles Lwanga and his Companions, Daudi Okello and Jildo Irwa. We pray that their blood continues to bless our country with many holy men and women.

- 10.** In terms of local Clergy, the first ordination of two Ugandan priests took place in Masaka in 1913. The number of diocesan priests is currently estimated at 1850. In addition, many of our local priests have embraced religious life in both local and international congregations.
- 11.** In 1939, Uganda witnessed the ordination of the first-ever African bishop from the south of the Sahara in the person of Archbishop Joseph Kiwanuka. He was followed by other Ugandan bishops. Uganda has so far been blessed with a good number of her own sons in the hierarchy of the Church: two Cardinals, five Archbishops and twenty four bishops, five among them now deceased.
- 12.** Vocation to religious life continue to grow in both local and international congregations to totalling approximately 3200 men and women. The number of catechists exceeds 13,000. The number of Christians committed to sacramental life increases every year. By 2011, the Catholic population had risen to approximately 42% of the total national population.
- 13.** With the number of personnel available, though not yet sufficient, the Church is slowly becoming self-evangelizing and self-ministering. However, we still have some way to go before we can truly be proud of our self-supporting efforts which we strongly encourage.
- 14.** From being a mission Church, in fulfilment of Pope Paul VI's prophecy in 1969 calling upon Africa to be missionary to herself, the Church in Uganda has moved to become missionary to other lands.
- 15.** We are grateful to God for the vibrant Church with structures comprising of four Ecclesiastical Provinces, 19 dioceses each with its own canonical organization. Our laity is protagonist of integral evangelization. We appreciate the laity's dynamic involvement at both diocesan and parish levels through supporting the Church's efforts for self-reliance, participation in Church events, catechesis, animation of the liturgy and other activities. The laity also provides support for the clergy and the formation of seminarians.
- 16.** Associations and Ecclesial Movements are visible in the day-to-day life of the Church. They are indeed a precious gift for the Church, and we encourage their members to always work hand-in-hand with their bishops and priests for a new and deeper evangelization of our country.
- 17.** Following the guidelines of the Second Vatican Council, the Word of God has been brought closer to the people through the translation of the Bible in local languages. Efforts towards inculturation through the translation of liturgical books, the adaptation of rites and rituals animated by music and songs inspired by and adapted to local cultures foster the active participation of the faithful. Much more is still to be done to deepen and widen inculturation, and we urge theologians and liturgists to pursue this process with courage and prudence under the guidance of the local bishops and the Holy See.

Social Teaching of the Church

18. The Catholic Social Teaching states clearly that the Church in her mission must reach out to all, especially to the poor and the marginalized, of society so as to proclaim the God of life and build a civilization of love. In the exercise of its pastoral and teaching ministry, the Uganda Episcopal Conference, established in 1960, has accompanied and enlightened the journey of the new nation towards the integral development of a just and peaceful society.

19. Already one year prior to independence (November 1961), Archbishop Joseph Kiwanuka in his pastoral letter, *The Church and State: Guiding Principles*, emphasized the importance of a proper relationship between the Church and the State in the growth and development of our country.

20. Indeed, at some moments in the history of our country, such relationship has not always been clear and smooth. In the struggle for power, political, ethnic and religious affiliations have sometimes been used in turn to create division and fuel conflict at the expense of the common good and the building of a united nation. In some instances, there have been attempts to silence the Church's prophetic role, preventing her from being the "conscience of society". Nevertheless, the Church continued seeking a cordial relationship, collaborating with the State in the effort to foster the common good of all Ugandans without discrimination. By virtue of our calling it is also our duty to remind all those in position of power and leadership that these roles are gifts to be exercised as service to the people, following the example of Jesus our Lord, who came not to be served but rather to serve (Jn. 13: 14-15).

21. In faithfulness to her teaching role, and in the effort to guide and animate the politics and life of our nation, often characterized by conflict and violence, the Uganda Episcopal Conference has published various pastoral letters in response to the challenges and problems facing our country. We invite you to refer to them, as they are still a valid source of inspiration for us today and tomorrow.

Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue

22. The second Vatican Council ushered in a new spirit of relationship between religions. The documents: *The Decree on Ecumenism* and *The Decree on Relationship of the Church with Other Religions* have influenced the position of Catholics towards other Christian believers and other world religions, including African Traditional Religions. In response to this, the Episcopal Conference has established two full-fledged departments for Ecumenism and Inter-Religious Dialogue.

23. In 1963, the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican Churches, through the Archbishops Joseph Kiwanuka, Theodorus Nankyama and Leslie Brown respectively, founded the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC). The Catholic Church has been an active member of this ecumenical organization, whose purpose and focus is to promote peaceful coexistence and collaboration among Christians in Uganda.

24. In the year 2000, following in the footsteps of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and inspired by the *World Council of Religions for Peace*, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) was formed. Its purpose was mainly to promote dialogue and peace among people of different religions. Since its inception, the Catholic Church has been an active member. We have supported its activities intended to promote and safeguard the common good of our people, especially the fight against HIV and AIDS. Several dioceses and Catholic leaders are also members interreligious organizations at local level and they have made big contributions to their growth and activities.

Women's Promotion

25. Women play an important role in God's plan for the family, the church and society at large. This is true also for the African tradition, although in this cultural context women are often subjected to a male-dominated mentality. In an effort to uplift and further empower the position and role of women in society, the Episcopal Conference has established a National Women's Desk and encouraged its formation in all the dioceses.

26. During the past fifty years, Catholic women have contributed a lot to the transformation of our society and in the growth and activities of the Church. Today, they hold various positions of responsibility and leadership in the social, economic and political life of the nation. Particularly relevant is their contribution in the health and education.

Education

27. The Catholic Church is proud of the enormous contribution made in the education sector of our nation. Among the many things to celebrate, we mention the prominent schools and institutions established by the Church and often run by religious congregations. These include approximately 139 Pre-Primary Schools, 4775 Primary Schools, 594 Secondary Schools, 150 Tertiary Institutions among which are 5 Major Seminaries, the Philosophical Centre in Jinja run by the religious congregations, Uganda Martyrs University, Nkozi, with its campuses and centres spread across the country, and Rubaga Catholic Social Training Centre.

28. These and many other Church-founded institutions have formed and trained many people who serve our nation in various capacities, including leaders who hold places and positions of responsibility in the country. In this way, the Church continues, indeed, to be *...the salt of the earth and the light of the world* (Mt. 5:13-16).

Social Communication

29. By its very nature, the Church has the mandate to communicate the Truth revealed by God to his people in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. In the field of social communication, the Church has made tremendous contribution to our country. In the past, newspapers and magazines such as *Munno* and *Leadership* played an important role in the formation of our people through the provision of information, even at times when freedom of expression was at

risk. Today, 13 radio stations spread throughout the country and 1 television station, together with a network of bookshops and diocesan bulletins, continue the same task.

30. We appreciate the role played by the secular media in giving space and voice to the Church's message and activities. Through the qualified work of Catholic media professionals and a more regular exchange of objective information, even the world of secular media can be imbued with the Gospel values of love, justice and respect of the human person, becoming in turn effective instruments of the *New Evangelization* intended to transform in depth the lives of the people.

Health

31. The Church continues the healing mission of Jesus. Right from the beginning of evangelization in Uganda, the Church has invested in health services with a holistic approach to the healing of the human person. Today, we have the largest non-state network of health service providers in the country, comprising of 30 hospitals (23% of the total number), 252 health centres (13%), 28% of total hospital beds, and 13 institutions training nurses and midwives (39%), while providing clinical services (outpatient) to between 15-17% of the total population of the country. We employ 7,500 health workers, representing 20% of all health workers in the country.

32. The Church has always defended the value of life at all stages of its development by taking a firm position against abortion. We appreciate the collaboration and the common stand of the Uganda Government on some bioethical issues, especially by remaining steadfast in defending the right to life of every human being, including the unborn.

HIV and AIDS

33. For the last 30 years now, Uganda like any other country in Africa, has been struggling with the devastation caused by HIV and AIDS. The disease has brought about untold suffering to thousands of our people. Since its detection, over 2.5 million people have died of HIV and AIDS. Currently, it is estimated that more than 1.2 million Ugandans are infected with the disease. This situation has badly affected the development of our nation.

34. In our Pastoral Letter, *The AIDS Epidemic: Message of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda*, published in 1989, we advised that HIV and AIDS should not be looked at in isolation, but rather in relation to many changes in people's attitude towards family life and the loss of moral values. This still remains our position. Nevertheless, as shepherds of God's people, we have preached against the temptation of being judgmental and we have instead advocated a Christian attitude of compassion towards those who have been affected and infected by the disease (Lk. 6: 36-37). Many of those who have died actually experienced the loving care and welcoming attitude of our Church personnel and structures. Many more have been helped, and our faithful are continually urged to remove from their minds and hearts the moral stigma which often accompanies the victims of the disease.

35. Right from the early days of the epidemic, the Catholic Church sought ways and methods to prevent new infections, enhance the treatment and care for those infected and affected by the epidemic and ensure that they may be empowered to live their condition positively. Today, 28 of our 30 hospitals and 7 health centres provide antiretroviral therapy while all the rest of the health facilities provide care and support, to varying levels, to persons living with HIV and AIDS.

36. The Church's concern about HIV and AIDS cuts across all our pastoral programmes. Through these efforts, various initiatives targeting in and out-of-school youth, women, men and their families have been launched and are running throughout our Church structures.

37. As bishops, we have also laid strategies to attract resources from various partners of like minds for a wide range of HIV and AIDS responses. Some of these resources have been channeled through intermediary organizations such as the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, USAID and PEPFAR. This and other partnerships with various government and international agencies have enabled our Conference to directly provide HIV prevention, care and treatment services through Church facilities and community-based systems.

Development

38. In the area of human integral development we, the Catholic Bishops, have spearheaded improvement of household income, sustainable agriculture and food security. The work of Caritas-Uganda, formerly known as the Catholic Social Service Department is widely spread and known in all our dioceses.

39. Through our emergency relief programmes, challenged by our Christian call to be hospitable, we have also assisted people affected by calamities and disasters. We are helping refugees from neighboring countries to resettle, mindful of the fact that we ourselves have been or can become refugees.

Environment

40. Uganda is known as the "Pearl of Africa". Yet, environmental degradation and uncontrolled pollution are affecting our climate very fast and causing unprecedented desertification. It is estimated that every year the country loses 90,000 hectares of forest cover through forest clearance for agriculture, overharvesting and degradation, encroachment of forest reserves, and degazetting of reserves for alternative use.

41. In an effort to restore the country's forest cover, the Church has embarked on tree planting. During the year 2011, 538,339 trees were planted throughout the country with the support of our development partners. In all our dioceses, communities are sensitized about the duty and responsibility of every faithful person to care for our natural environment as a responsible steward and custodian of the gift of creation.³

Justice and Peace

42. The Church has tirelessly contributed towards reconciliation, justice and peace in our country. The first fifty years in the life of our country have unfortunately been marred by many challenges; political, ethnic and even religious division, deep and unbalanced sharing of resources and opportunities, violence suffered and meted out to others. In turn, this has affected various parts of our country. Special mention should be made of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency which has raged for over 20 years in the northern part of our country, leaving behind a trail of suffering and destruction, and a population deeply wounded and traumatized.

43. Throughout all these past and more recent events, the Church, as a Good Samaritan, has always tried to be close to those who suffered, through the exercise of her compassionate charity in all its expressions. At the same time, together as Episcopal Conference and through the initiatives of individual bishops and leaders, the Church has insisted on dialogue between conflicting parties for peaceful resolution of conflicts, reconciliation and restoration of justice and peace among all the citizens of Uganda. Sharing in the life and difficulties of our people, Church personnel have actually kept alive the hope and struggle for a better future and a truly democratic Uganda. The participation of Church leaders in the peace talks to end the LRA rebellion is just one sign of this involvement.

44. Programmes of civic education, to make all the citizens aware of their rights and duties, have been carried out in all corners of the country. For a more effective and systematic education of our people to their duty to participate in the social, economic and political life of the nation, and in response to the call made by Pope Paul VI in 1968, the Uganda Episcopal Conference has established the Commission for Justice and Peace at national level, and in all 19 dioceses.

Our repeated and ongoing national campaign against domestic violence is another sign of our commitment to making sure that each of our families becomes what it is supposed to be, a "domestic church", the first place where peace and reconciliation is taught and lived.

PART TWO

SHORTCOMINGS AND CHALLENGES

45. As the 50th Anniversary of independence was approaching, some people, looking at all the troubles, suffering, division and problems which have marked this first period of our modern history, think there is nothing or little worth celebrating. We strongly disagree with such a point of view. Since October 9, 1962, Uganda has gone a long way in her journey as a country. There is plenty for us to be grateful to God and to all those who contributed to this. We have just mentioned some of the contributions of the Catholic Church to the growth and development of our country. Together with us, outside our Church, many other believers and citizens have also worked and succeeded in making Uganda what it is today. Yes, there is a lot to celebrate!

46. At the same time, like any other country, ours is a history of both success and failure, a history of joy but also of tears. There have been mistakes and shortcomings. Some wounds are still open and hurting, and other challenges too need to be addressed. We would now like to turn to some of them, starting from the very ones we quoted on the positive side of our own contribution to Uganda in the fields of ecumenism, women's promotion, education, social communication, health, HIV and AIDS, development, environmental protection, and justice and peace.

Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue

47. Notwithstanding all the efforts in this field, we sadly note, especially at grassroots, that there still exists a strained relationship among followers of various religions as a result of mutual suspicion and mistrust. This jeopardizes sustainable peace and development of our nation.

Women Promotion

48. Regardless of what we have achieved as a nation, it is painful to note that there are still many women oppressed by the sociocultural structures and practices. Among the challenges affecting the dignity of women which need urgent attention is gender based violence. As we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of our nation, we call upon everyone to join the fight against any form of injustice that dehumanizes women in our society.

Education

49. Despite all the educational achievements we have attained as a nation, we observe that there is an urgent need to reform our education system. We need to produce job-makers instead of job-seekers. Our nation is in need of professional technicians and scientists who will enhance the process of industrialization so as to match the increasing number of unemployed Ugandans. We cannot afford to let our people lag behind the rest of the world.

Social Communication

50. The media is a powerful means which affects the masses for good or bad. The proper use of media remains a challenge in our country. We deplore the spreading misuse of the press, radio and television which undermines the fundamental rights and values and dignity of the human person and society. We strongly condemn incidents of violence, including mob justice, instigated by some irresponsible media houses and journalists, the promotion of sexual promiscuity and pornography, and internet and mobile phone frauds. Such abuses need to be checked by appropriate laws and moral guidance. At the same time, in keeping with the Social Teaching of the Church, we stand for the fundamental right to freedom of expression by which every person or group in Uganda should be allowed to express their beliefs and convictions, as long as they do not infringe on the common good. This general principle becomes even more imperative for us, Church, as we use mass media for proclamation of the Gospel.

51. The tremendous speed of technological development in the world of communication poses a big challenge and offers a great opportunity to the Church in Uganda. A wide range of new means of communication is becoming available to more and more people in our country, especially among the professionals and the youth. Internet, Face-book, Twitter and other social networks, increasingly sophisticated gadgets, computers and phones, ipod and iphones, e-books, new digital and virtual technologies open new horizons and challenges. The new media has become the highway for proclamation of the Good News in our world today. This innovative way of spreading the Gospel is in line with the “New Evangelization” intended to transform the lives of the people. For our Catholic media in Uganda faced with an increasingly stiffer competition, this challenge calls for networking, new skills, more creativity, courage and discernment in the use of these media.

Health

52. We note with concern that many of the diseases affecting our country can be prevented. Unfortunately less attention is paid by both government and citizens to preventive measures. Furthermore, the escalating cost in our medical units, coupled with reduced government spending on the health sector, affect the poor most. The higher salaries paid by government to health workers also directly affect the staffing in our health units since we cannot afford such salaries.

53. The increasing voices calling for legalization of abortion and prevention of procreation, often proposed and spearheaded by human rights organizations, are a threat to humanity. Our stand on this subject was reaffirmed in our Pastoral Letter, *The Evil of Abortion*, of April 1998.

54. We appeal to the Government and development partners to continue standing by our side, as we search for improved health service delivery. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Health, the whole health sector should be run with more professionalism, transparency and accountability. It is incumbent upon every Ugandan to work towards the attainment of a better quality of life for all, through adequate and equitable distribution of affordable health services in the country.

HIV and AIDS

55. Official government statistics (Sero-status Report 2011) show that in Uganda there are well over 100,000 new infections of HIV annually. Taking into account that close to 80% of all new infections occur through sexual encounters, and many of them within married couples, we urge all the partners to commit more energy to ensuring stability and fidelity in their relationships.

56. In spite of all the achievements in the fight against HIV and AIDS, we point out some of the challenges that still hamper our effort:

- Complacency due to the good results from our past national efforts, while the enthusiasm and voluntarism of early response to the epidemic is slowly fading away.

- Cultural and social behaviour such as polygamy, alcohol and substance abuse continue to unnecessarily put our people at risk of contracting the disease.
- Infidelity even among married couples.
- Inadequate coverage of HIV and AIDS services in the country.

Development and Poverty Alleviation

57. There is still poverty galore in our country. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening as a result of inequitable resource distribution. Even the forecast expectations of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are far from being fully realized. While we appeal to the Government, Development Partners and other stakeholders to commit more resources to poverty alleviation programmes, we challenge ourselves to join and supplement such efforts aimed at transforming people's lives in order to liberate them from the scourge of poverty.

Oil

58. The recent discovery of oil in our country is, definitely, a precious gift of God to Uganda, for which we must be grateful. But the way to use this gift for the common good of all Ugandans remains an open challenge. Proper and clear steps must be taken:

- The process of oil production, right from inception to the final product, should be carried out in a transparent manner. This will in the long run prevent suspicion and mistrust which can easily lead to conflict and violence.
- Proceeds generated from oil should be equitably shared by way of improved social services across the country.
- The delicate environment in the oil-producing areas should be safeguarded against pollution; water, soil and air should be protected in the interest of the lives of the people and other biodiversities in these areas.

Reconciliation, Justice and Peace

59. Much has been achieved in this field, yet much more remains to be done. The Catholic Church in Uganda, in line with the Post- Synodal Exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus (Africa's Commitment)*, intends to double her effort in promoting reconciliation, justice and peace.

National challenges: Signs of the times

60. Despite our contributions to the nation, we recognize that the Catholic Church is just one of the many stakeholders involved in shaping the destiny of our nation. We, therefore, turn to ongoing problems and challenges which call for common action and collaboration of all

stakeholders, especially those exercising the executive, legislative and judicial powers in our country.

- Proceeds generated from oil should be equitably shared by way of improved social services across the country.
- The delicate environment in the oil-producing areas should be safeguarded against pollution; water, soil and air should be protected in the interest of the lives of the people and other biodiversities in these areas.

Political Struggles

61. The struggle for power is a constant characteristic in the history of our country. We have observed over the years that those who are in power tend to keep it at all cost, while the ones who are outside it, want to get it by all means. There is no doubt that this attitude has always been and continues to be the source of conflict and violence since independence. But the past strife and anguish of our country's history cannot be judged based on the struggle for power alone. In the section below we would like to outline other factors that have greatly contributed and can still cause instability in our country.

Social Inequalities

61.1 Uganda is gifted by nature both in terms of natural and human resources. We are convinced that if the resources in our country were evenly and justly distributed, no individual or groups would be living in abject poverty. The increasing gap between the rich and poor, if not urgently addressed, will continue to ferment a form of resentment between the two social classes.

We have realized that the poor are not necessarily poor because they do not work, but because, in most cases, the systems, policies and institutions in place greatly diminish their choices and opportunities. We, therefore, call upon all religious and civic leaders to include poverty alleviation as a priority in our plans, and ensure that economic decisions lead to greater benefits for all the people of Uganda.

Throughout the history of humanity, God has always identified Himself with the poor and the marginalized of society. He is the defender, protector and liberator of the poor (Ex. 22: 21-22; Deut. 15: 7; Mt. 5:3; 6:19-21). We would be failing in our responsibility as bishops and leaders of God's people, if we simply watched the rights and dignity of the poor trampled upon.

The celebration of the 50th Anniversary should mark the beginning of a new era, a fresh start and a golden opportunity for all Ugandans to enjoy the resources of their country (Deut. 15: 1-5).⁴

Idolatry of Wealth

61.2 We are concerned about the attitude of excessive love for wealth and money, which is spreading rapidly in our country. This greed or attitude is driving many of our people more and

more away from God. Excessive love for wealth and money led the people of Israel into dishonesty, corruption in all its forms, murder and other sins against God and humanity (Amos 2: 6-8). Today, lust for quick and easy money is at the root of many evils in our society: the superstitious and unfounded belief that some people go under the lake in search of wealth, the abomination of devil worship, human sacrifice, human trafficking, conflicts and tension breaking up families, and many other ungodly vices that throw back our nation into unchristian ways of life.

Wealth in itself is not bad. What is evil is the self-serving accumulation of wealth that excludes and alienates others, condemning them to abject poverty and denying them their full dignity as human beings. This is what in the last fifty years has contributed to civil strife, including armed conflicts and violence in our country.

As we celebrate and plan our destiny together as a nation, St. Paul warns us about excessive love of money and wealth as “a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6: 8-10). Freedom from excessive attachment to wealth is the condition that Christ gave to the young rich man in the Gospel (Mt. 19: 21) and which He still puts today to anyone who wants to follow Him.

The Scourge and evil of corruption

61.3 In a number of our Pastoral Letters and Statements, we have always denounced the evil of corruption in public offices which deprive the citizens of their basic rights to services. No doubt, corruption has taken many forms in all walks of life, to the extent that some people are entangled in the vice without fully realizing it.

We shall never get tired of condemning corruption through which our country is losing billions of shillings every year. We continue to appeal to the conscience of our leaders and the general public to do all we can to uproot this evil from our midst. We call for repentance and radical change of attitude and ways of witnessing the Gospel of Christ.

Instigated conflict and violence

61.4 As we have noted already, our history as a nation has been tainted by conflict and violence. Recently, our country experienced waves of violence which led to loss of life and property. We remind all the sides involved in such forms of violence that one can never bring about sustainable peace through violence and injustice. On the contrary, such approach perpetuates violence and division.

Indeed, in the words of Vatican II, *One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth.*⁵ We all, therefore, form one human family, called to promote, protect and defend the cause of humanity. Moreover, as Christians, we wish to strongly reaffirm and testify with St. Paul that, *there is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28).

Peace is a collective responsibility and no form of violence brings about true peace. Conflict can and must be solved through dialogue and negotiation for it is only those who work for peace who will truly be children of God (Mt. 5:9). Peace is the first gift of the risen Lord, who calls us all to be his true ambassadors of peace (Jn. 20:21).

Tribalism and other sectarian tendencies

61.5 *One* of the gifts that God in his goodness has given to Uganda is the diversity of tribes and cultures. Unfortunately, for the last fifty years, instead of using this great gift to foster our country's growth and transformation, we have often turned it into a liability. Some groups have tended to consider themselves more important and entitled than the others. Such attitude has often resulted in tension, mutual hatred and resentment. This is not only a crime against our fellow human beings, but also against the Creator who made us all in his own image (Gen. 2: 26-28).

While we appreciate decentralization in a bid to bring services nearer to the people, we also note that if implemented without discernment, can work against the dream of realizing true nationalism and patriotism.

Credible mechanisms should be put in place to nurture and promote nationalism and patriotism. We do not support those who invoke tribal and regional tendencies to fragment our country for political and other reasons. We are called to work together to build a Uganda that will stand the test of times because it is a pleasant, peaceful and prosperous nation for its entire people.

PART THREE

RECONSTRUCTING OUR RUINS: PERSONAL AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

"Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in... Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.... They replied: 'Let us start rebuilding' (Neh. 2:17-18).

62. Mistakes are part of human experience and history. They are surely part of the first 50 years of independence of our country. Fortunately, our own mistakes can help us to appreciate where we have come from in order to understand where we are and forge a better future. For this to happen, we must first acknowledge our own mistakes. For us, shepherds of the Catholic Church, to be honest and credible in our appeal to conversion and change, we humbly acknowledge our responsibility both as individuals and as a Christian community, in the evil which befell our country and the problems and threats which still affect its well-being and development.

63. When we speak and talk about division, corruption, injustice, violence, tribalism, etc., we do not, and, we should never, forget that those responsible for these evils and for the suffering inflicted on our people were and are Christians. This is unfortunate!

64. While celebrating the Eucharist, each one of us is called upon to acknowledge and ask for forgiveness for all sins committed. We share in the guilt and responsibility of the division, injustice and corruption which befell and still affect Uganda because of our own mistakes. Some of these mistakes have come by way of omission expressed at times by our silence and passivism in the political arena.

65. After a season of passionate and active participation of Catholic politicians who contributed greatly to the achievement of independence and the early journey of a free Uganda, at a certain stage it looks as if, for different reasons, we have fallen or withdrawn to the background of public life and leadership of our country. We would like, therefore, to call upon all Catholics, and, indeed, all Ugandans to engage more actively and constructively in the politics and administration of our country to ensure unity and development.

66. Government on its part should endeavour to ensure that representation in the executive, legislative and judicial arms of government reflects and expresses adequately the needs and aspirations of the people of Uganda. There is no doubt that there have been times in the history of our country when the common good of the people has been ignored in favour of ideologies and interests of particular political, economic and social groups.

67. We share these reflections not to launch any political campaign or competition, but to invite everybody to a greater sense and practice of responsibility through active and positive participation in the life of our country, at all levels. The great commandment to love God and neighbour, summarizing all the law, includes indeed a positive and concrete love and concern for all people, shown in action. It challenges us to be good citizens, law abiding, and to contribute to the common good of all our brothers and sisters in Uganda.

68. We observe with concern that one of the main reasons that our country has gone through years of dictatorship, turmoil and anarchy is that the destiny of our nation had been left in the hands of a few privileged individuals or groups. Our stand therefore, is that building a nation is a collective responsibility that calls for the participation of every citizen. This ideal is deeply entrenched in the African philosophy and way of life, as well as in the vision of the Church.

69. In the African lived experience, no individual exists for himself or herself. Every member of the community lives and exists for the survival of the community, and the community too takes full responsibility for the individual. Thus the traditional African way of life prepares and opens the way to the much deeper and stronger relationship which as Christians we are called to live as members of the one Body of Christ, the Family of God, which is the Church, where brothers and sisters care for one another, united by the Blood of Christ in the communion and love of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 42-46).

70. As we celebrate and plan for our country's future, we call upon every Catholic and every citizen of this country to appreciate and embrace his/her own duties and responsibilities towards our nation. As the prophet Nehemiah invited the people of God to rebuild the walls of

Jerusalem, we would like to share some recommendations concerning our various roles in shaping the destiny of our country.

Bishops

70.1 Bishops, as shepherds of God's people, are by virtue of their office, charged with the duty and responsibility to teach, sanctify and lead the people of God in the ways of God (Deut. 6:4). Whenever the people turn away from the Truth, bishops are tasked to call them back. Their primary role is to lead the people by their example (1 Pt. 5:3) and to be the "conscience" of society, pointing out and correcting any behaviour that is contrary to the law of God. That is why, from time to time, bishops come up to guide and advise leaders to follow God's wisdom in their work.

Sadly this role is often misunderstood by many people leading to unfounded criticism. It is not our intention to get involved in partisan politics. At the same time we cannot in conscience renounce this prophetic dimension of our ministry. If our nation is going to be a better and peaceful place for everyone to live in, we all need to listen attentively and discern the voice of God calling us all to live and walk by his law:

If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you (Exodus 15:26).

The prosperity of our nation and its people will depend on how obedient we are to the ways and law of God, which is proposed to us also through the "magisterium" (teaching authority) and ministry of the bishops God has chosen as ministers and leaders of his people.

Clergy and Religious

70.2 *All presbyters, both diocesan and religious, participate in and exercise with the bishop the one priesthood of Christ and are there by constituted prudent co-operators of the Episcopal order.*⁶ Priests partake of the priesthood of the bishops and have received the power to bless, teach and sanctify. Both Priests and Religious, by virtue of their calling, are expected to live exemplary life worthy of their vocation (1 Tim. 3: 1-6) for they too share in the prophetic mission of the Church.

Civic leaders

70.3 Every authority comes from God (Rom. 13:1-3). Therefore, in their decisions and actions leaders must be motivated by the love of those put under their care and must seek to promote the common good. Indeed, in their leadership, they must consider themselves as custodians of God's authority to whom at the end they must be ready to give accountability (Mt. 24:45).

Family

70.4 According to the Word of God in the Holy Scriptures and the teaching of the Church, in the beginning God created man and woman and blessed them with children to live together happily in the institution of the family (Gen. 2:7-25). The family, referred to by the Vatican II as the domestic Church, is the very first gift God gave to humanity, for God saw that it was not good for a person to live alone. The quality of any society and nation depends on the quality of family life.

Today, family life in Uganda is facing a lot of challenges. Some of these challenges are due to foreign influence and cultures undermining the cultural and Christian values which used to hold our families together. We can mention here individualism, consumerism, homosexuality, lesbianism, materialism, religious relativism, syncretism and other tendencies. Other challenges are the heritage of our own traditional cultures, such as polygamy, cohabitation, elopement, excessive bridal wealth and witchcraft. These trends and tendencies undermine the dignity and purpose of the family.

It is our call, therefore, to all parents to ensure that their children are nurtured with Godly values. Personal prayer and praying together as a family is a secure way of bringing up good Christians, and responsible citizens and leaders on whom the future of our nation can safely rest. Our prayer for all the families in our country is that God and his Word find a place in everyone's heart and in our homes.

Youth

70.5 The future of every nation depends on the quality of its young people. If we want leaders who will drive our country to its pride, each one of us and all our institutions must fulfil their duties and responsibilities to instill in the youth the values of love, respect, justice, forgiveness, peace, hospitality, reconciliation and concern for others, especially the least and marginalized (Mt. 25:40). These are values of the children of the Kingdom of God. If we do not take proper care of young people, we cannot expect to enjoy good fruits from the tree of their adulthood (Mt. 7:17).

The youth should also be formed to live and socialize globally, without necessarily losing their identity as Ugandans. The world today needs leaders and people who think globally, but at the same time live and act locally. We should therefore form young people who are global citizens striving to consolidate.

The universal human family, starting from their own family and homeland. Let them ask themselves not only what Uganda can do for them, but first of all what they can and are ready to do for the welfare of Uganda.

The future of our nation depends on how ably we can compete and survive in a world that is fast becoming a global village. Aware of the wider horizon in which we are all interconnected and interdependent, young people must be driven and motivated by a strong sense of justice as one of

the conditions for the establishment of the kingdom of God in the world. They can only do so if sustained by a deeper Christian and human formation, catechesis and renewed personal faith.

PART FOUR

LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE WITH HOPE: OUR ASPIRATIONS

71. *I have heard the cry of my people (Ex. 3:7).* These words addressed by God through Moses to the people of Israel oppressed in Egypt, summarize and express the intervention of God in the history of our country. Half a century ago, God heard and answered the cry of our people longing for independence. A few years down the road, at a difficult juncture in our journey, we used the same expression as a title of our Pastoral Letter.⁷ Indeed, God has always listened to his people in Uganda and has intervened and assisted them. His faithfulness is the basis of our confidence that even for the future of our country we can count on his love and caring presence.

72. After this reflection on our past and present situation and looking ahead to the future of our country, we now share with all the people of Uganda our aspirations of the “Uganda we Want” to see in the coming years:

- A God-loving and God-fearing people and nation.
- Peace, reconciliation and harmonious dialogue among all religious, political, social and ethnic groups in our country.
- Freedom of worship and expression, with respect for other people’s rights.
- Thriving democracy and good governance.
- Special care and support of the vulnerable members of our society.
- Transparent and accountable leadership at all levels.
- A just nation where resources are equitably shared.
- A peaceful, secure and stable country.
- Empowered and informed citizens participating effectively in the governance of the country.
- Quality education for all.
- Dialogue prevails as means to resolving differences and conflicts.
- A united country where the people identify with our national values.
- Quality health care for all.
- Adequate and effective infrastructures.
- Affordable electricity and clean water for all.
- A healthy environment capable of sustaining all forms of life.

73. We are, of course, aware that the full realization of these aspirations will take time and may actually be beyond our reach. Therefore, this list is meant to act as:

- reminder and pointer of targets to be achieved and goals to work towards;
- points on which to keep pushing our leaders for accountability and effective delivery of services; and,
- intentions of prayer, gifts for which to ask God’s help and assistance.

PART FIVE

CONCLUSION

74. Celebrating the “Golden Jubilee” of our nation is both an opportunity and a challenge for all of us individually and collectively. The shared reflections in this Pastoral Letter have led us to thank God for all the gifts bestowed on us during these first fifty years, to acknowledge and ask forgiveness for our mistakes, but above all to face and welcome the challenges and our responsibilities in building a more united, peaceful and prosperous Uganda. The question for each one of us is the same: What can I do, and what am I going to do for my country?

75. We are in fact at the same time heirs of the past and people who can shape the future of our nation. Learning from our past mistakes, we want to build a better Uganda than we are in now. This calls for a collective and participatory engagement of every citizen in the affairs of our nation, a commitment to the common good, especially the empowering of the less privileged and marginalized of our society, and a sincere search and pursuit of justice and peace.

We thank God for all the efforts of individual citizens and the positive initiatives of the various groups, governments and parliaments who, during these past fifty years, have contributed to building our country.

We now specially pray that all our political leaders, regardless of their affiliation, may join hands and learn to collaborate even more for the common good of all the citizens of Uganda. Nevertheless, we are fully aware that the destiny of Uganda is in the hands of all of us, citizens of this country. It is our common responsibility to discern and bring to fulfilment the plan that God has for our nation. As Catholics, we have further and stronger reasons to commit ourselves to this task.

76. The celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Uganda’s independence is marked by the happy and providential coincidence of three important events in the life of the Catholic Church:

- the pastoral implementation of the guidelines handed down to us from the Second Special Assembly of the Synod of the Bishops on Africa through the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* (Africa’s Commitment) of Pope Benedict XVI;
- the celebration of the Synod of Bishops on the New Evangelization, in Rome from 7th – 28th October, 2012;
- Fifty years since opening of Vatican Council II; and
- the beginning of a special “Year of the Faith” on October 11th, 2012.

It is not just a chronological coincidence. All these events are a reminder of the renewed call of God for us, his people, at this crucial moment in the history of our country.

Like the universal Church throughout the world, we are called to be “the salt” and “light” of Uganda (Mt. 5:13-14). Our mission is to be “at the service of reconciliation, justice and peace” in our nation. We are called to renew and deepen our faith in order to be messengers and

instruments of a “new evangelization” of our people and cultures. This is the best gift and contribution we can give to our country.

77. We are, of course, aware that; *if the Lord does not build the house, its builders labour in vain...* (Ps. 127:1). That is why we turn to God in prayer. Praying for our country is an act of love, a concrete sign of authentic patriotism, a duty for every Christian. We, therefore, invite all of you to join us in prayer. We can do this in our own words, personally, in our families, communities and churches. The liturgy offers us this invocation which we invite you to share:

*God our Father,
You guide everything in wisdom and love.
Accept the prayers we offer for our nation, Uganda;
by the wisdom of our leaders and the integrity of our citizens,
may harmony and justice be secured and may there
be lasting prosperity and peace. Amen.*

As we sing together with all our people: “Oh Uganda, may God uphold Thee”, we hear the echo of the words of Jesus to the man who had been paralyzed for thirty eight years (Jn. 5:8) and addressed by the Second Synod for Africa to the whole continent.

Today, the same words apply to our country, now fifty years young: “Uganda, get up... and walk!” In freedom, peace and unity, let us keep walking towards the future God has in store for us!

We commend you and our country to Mary, our Mother, Queen of Africa, and to the intercession of Uganda Martyrs.

May God bless you, as we all stand together “for God and Our Country”.



Most Rev. John Baptist Odama
Archbishop of Gulu and Chairman
Uganda Episcopal Conference

And your shepherds and servants in Christ:

1. H. E. Emmanuel Card. Wamala - Archbishop Emeritus of Kampala, Patron of UEC
2. Rt. Rev. Joseph A. Zziwa - Bishop of Kiyinda-Mityana, V-C/man UEC
3. The Most Rev. Paul K. Bakyenga - Archbishop of Mbarara
4. The Most Rev. Cyprian K. Lwanga - Archbishop of Kampala
5. The Most Rev. Denis Kiwanuka Lote - Archbishop of Tororo
6. The Most Rev. James Odongo - Archbishop Emeritus of Tororo
7. Rt. Rev. Henry Ssentongo - Bishop of Moroto
8. Rt. Rev. Matthias Ssekamanya - Bishop of Lugazi

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| 9. | Rt. Rev. Deogratias Byabazaire | - Bishop of Hoima |
| 10. | Rt. Rev. Egidio Nkaijanabwo | - Bishop of Kasese |
| 11. | Rt. Rev. John Baptist Kaggwa | - Bishop of Masaka |
| 12. | Rt. Rev. Robert Muhiirwa | - Bishop of Fort-Portal |
| 13. | Rt. Rev. Callistus Rubaramira | - Bishop of Kabale |
| 14. | Rt. Rev. Charles M. Wamika | - Bishop of Jinja |
| 15. | Rt. Rev. Giuseppe Franzelli | - Bishop of Lira |
| 16. | Rt. Rev. Sabino Odoki | - Bishop of Arua |
| 17. | Rt. Rev. Emmanuel Obbo | - Bishop of Soroti |
| 18. | Rt. Rev. Paul Ssemogerere | - Bishop of Kasana-Luweero |
| 19. | Rt. Rev. Giuseppe Filippi | - Bishop of Kotido |
| 20. | Rt. Rev. Sanctus Linus Wanok | - Bishop of Nebbi |
| 21. | Rt. Rev. Lambert Bainomugisha | - Auxiliary Bp of Mbarara, Apost. Admin. of Hoima |
| 22. | Rt. Rev. Christopher Kakooza | - Auxiliary Bishop of Kampala |
| 23. | Rt. Rev. Joseph Mugenyi Sabiiti | - Auxiliary Bp of Fort-Portal |
| 24. | Rt. Rev. Edward M. Baharagate | - Bishop Emeritus of Hoima |
| 25. | Rt. Rev. John B. Kakubi | - Bishop Emeritus of Mbarara |
| 26. | Rt. Rev. Barnabas R. Halem’Imana | - Bishop Emeritus of Kabale |
| 27. | Rt. Rev. Paul Kalanda | - Bishop Emeritus of Fort-Portal |
| 28. | Rt. Rev. Robert Gay | - Bishop Emeritus of Kabale |
| 29. | Rt. Rev. Erasmus D. Wandera | - Bishop Emeritus of Soroti |
| 30. | Rt. Rev. Joseph Oyanga | - Bishop Emeritus of Lira |
| 31. | Rt. Rev. Frederick Drandua | - Bishop Emeritus of Arua |
| 33. | Rt. Rev. Martin Luluga | - Bishop Emeritus of Nebbi |

Given at Nsambya, Kampala

On 9th Day of October, 2012

Footnotes:

¹ Pope Paul VI, encyclical letter “On Evangelization in the Modern World”, no.75.

² Pope John Paul II, “*Ecclesia in Africa*” no.35.

³ See Gn. Chap. 1-2.

⁴ See the Year for cancelling debts in Deut. 15:1-5

⁵ Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, no.1.

⁶ Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, no.28

⁷ UEC, Pastoral letter “I have heard the cry of my people”, 30th October 1980