

UGANDA EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE

**FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS: OUR COMMON MISSION  
TO CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRATIC GAINS IN UGANDA**

*“...they Cast lots to choose between the two men”* (Acts 1:26)  
August, 2015

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*“...they Cast lots to choose between the two men” (Acts 1:26)*

To: The Clergy,  
Religious Men and Women,  
The Lay Faithful,  
Fellow Citizens and People of Good Will

**A. Salutation**

1. We send you our greetings and blessings. In the words of St. Paul we too, *give thanks to God for you because of the grace he has given you through Christ Jesus.* (1 Cor. 1: 4-8).

**B. Preamble**

2. Inspired by the Apostles and the prophets of old, we feel obliged to guide the nation as it prepares for the 2016 elections. In Acts of the Apostles (1:23-26) we read: *So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas ... and Matthias .... Then they prayed.... they gave lots to them, and the lot fell upon Matthias ....* In other words, the Apostles sought God’s intervention so that the right leader might be elected between the two. It is in this same spirit that we write to you this letter.

3. In our previous letters *A Call for Sustainable Constitutionalism and Rule of Law in Uganda* (November, 2009) and *Consolidating Electoral Democracy in Uganda* (June, 2010), we highlighted the critical challenges regarding multiparty democracy in our country. In this one, we pay more attention to the critical issues in the journey towards the 2016 elections; in particular, how citizens and various institutions concerned with this process should conduct themselves during this period. We do this fully aware of the fact that elections in our country raise a lot of expectations and anxiety which call for effective management of the entire process and a high sense of responsibility on the part of all stakeholders.

4. We are also aware of the fact that efforts have been made over the years to improve our country’s electoral system, an indication that we have learnt something from our past. Today our electoral system, for example, provides opportunity for citizens to elect leaders periodically through adult suffrage and in full view of election officials and candidates’ agents. Furthermore, votes are tallied and announced at each polling station immediately after close of polls. These participatory aspects of our electoral system are supported by various laws, which include the Political Parties and Organizations Act 2005, The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda 1995, and the Electoral Commission Act 1997. These are important gains that must be safeguarded and improved for political posterity.

5. It is clear that elections are an important aspect of democracy because they provide the most direct and important means for the citizens to express their wishes and views regarding political leadership and governance (*Consolidating Electoral Democracy in Uganda* No 1.3). It is a way of ensuring active participation of all citizens in the affairs that directly affect their temporal

well-being and happiness. Furthermore, elections guarantee peace, stability and prosperity as they offer avenues for alternative ideas and approaches for the development of society. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all citizens of our country to ensure that elections reflect these important fundamental values.

### **C. Specific Concerns**

#### *Conflicts within Political Parties*

6. For some time now, a number of political parties have been bogged by internal strife, largely, arising from weak internal democratic processes. We are concerned that the gains in our democracy could be undermined by such undemocratic and conflict-prone overtones that seem to characterize the conduct of business in some political parties. Furthermore, history teaches us some important lesson, namely, internal political strife often leads to some major political crisis in young states such as ours. In Uganda, the violence that characterized change of governments in 1966, 1971, 1979, 1985 and 1986 had their origins in the greed and dictatorial tendencies within and among various political actors. We believe these unfortunate incidents are still fresh in the minds of some of our current political players, yet they have continued to ignore what could soon become an explosive political situation which could be avoided.

#### *Lack of Trust in the Electoral Process*

7. As we go into the third round of elections since the return to multiparty politics, the seemingly mistrust in electoral processes continue to persist. For close to a decade now, there have been calls from different actors for comprehensive reforms of the electoral system in a bid to make it more credible, free and fair. Unfortunately, each time attempts are made to effect such reforms, political and personal considerations tend to over-ride the common good. On many occasions, views of minority groups and the wider public have been ignored. Yet, again, history comes with some important lessons for us. Bad elections anywhere can be a recipe for political crisis. This was the case in Uganda in 1980 which we must work hard to avoid.

#### *Commercialization of elections*

8. In the previous years we observed the persistent abuse of money and other resources during elections. While we are in support of legitimate use of money for the conduct of the polls, as well as activities of various political actors, we are disturbed by its use to compromise and cloud decisions of voters. In the past, indeed today, a number of politicians, in their desperate search for votes, have put away their moral responsibility and instead, taken the path of personal, as well as collective moral destruction.

9. The effects of such malpractices on our growing democracy can be dire. For example, the electoral process risks giving rise to leaders whose primary objective is self-aggrandisement. Instead of leaders serving the common good, they are likely to be preoccupied with recovering from public coffers what they will have illegitimately spent on campaigns. This way, corruption will be entrenched, public institutions such as Parliament and Local Councils compromised. It is, therefore, crucial that drastic measures are put in place to prevent and remedy such situations.

### *Voter apathy*

**10.** When we look at the results of the past four general elections, we notice a decline in voter turn up on the actual polling day. For instance, in 1996 presidential elections, 72% of the registered voters cast their votes, in 2001 we had 70.3%, in 2006 we had 69% and in 2011 we had only 59%. (*International Institute for Democratic and Electoral Assistance*). A similar trend was observed in parliamentary and local government elections. It is likely that, unless something drastic is done, the situation could be worse in 2016. The result might be leaders emerging without endorsement of a large section of the voting population; a serious threat to leadership credibility, accountability and democratic maturation.

### *Intolerance*

**11.** We have over and over again stressed the danger of intolerance in our country's politics. While we take note of the fact that politics by its nature may breed conflict, there is no justification whatsoever for individuals or groups preventing others from freely exercising their political rights. In our view, intolerance is driven by lack of confidence in oneself, greed and a conformist mindset which has no place in a civilized political system. We wish to reiterate the fact that opposition, whether within or outside a political party, is an essential aspect of political reality that has its basis in our diverse and individualized existence as humans, itself a divine design. Intolerance and suppression of persons who are different only negate this very inevitable truth, hence is immoral.

### *The role of Police*

**12.** The Uganda Police has come under intense scrutiny from the public and a cross section of political leaders, both within the ruling party and the opposition, for its role in the management of public order. This follows the acrimonious passing of the Public Order Management Act in 2012, which effectively gave powers to the Inspector General of Police to regulate public assembly. For the reason that the law does not provide a clear distinction between 'authorizing' (Article 3) and 'granting permission', interventions by Police in peaceful assemblies have been greeted with great suspicion and anger, and interpreted as outright interference with the right to assemble which is enshrined in Chapter 4 of our national Constitution.

**13.** The indiscriminate use of force and preventive interventions in oppositional political activities has particularly created an impression of a Police Force determined to protect and promote the agenda of the ruling party. This kind of perception coming from the very people for whom the police exists is unfortunate. It calls for demonstration of impartiality and maximum restraint on the part of Police in the face of the current heightened political environment. We would like to emphasize here that a good public-police relation is key in the fight against crime. For this to happen, the police must be seen to account to the people, not to any political clique. It must serve all groups and individuals irrespective of political, social and economic divides (Cf. Article 211 (3) of the Constitution).

**14.** In addition to the above, concerns have been raised, since the 2011 elections, over the emergence of paramilitary groups in the country. Of particular concern to the population is the

recruitment and training of what Police has dubbed Crime Preventers. It seems that the role of such groups is not clear to the public. Even more confusing is the fact that the groups operate under a registered Non-Government Organization aligned to the Police Force, called National Crime Preventers Platform. We are afraid if this trend continues, it could give way to violence during and beyond the 2016 elections.

#### *Additional challenges*

**15.** There are many other challenges we are aware of which we have not mentioned in our letter. That does not mean they are insignificant. Rather, we have chosen what we consider more contextual and pressing, requiring urgent action if peace and harmony is to prevail before, during and after the 2016 general elections. We have, for example, not spoken about intimidation of opponents, use of abusive language and vote stealing, which too are rife during internal party and general election campaigns and polling. As political parties prepare for their primaries and the whole country for the general elections, it is important for all stakeholders not to lose sight of these issues, but, together, eliminate them. As a country, we must not be found wanting in our pursuit for peaceful, free and fair elections in both the primary and general elections.

#### **D. Guiding Principles**

16. We have considered it important to provide you and all other parties interested in peaceful, free and fair elections in 2016 a set of guiding principles. These principles have strong basis in our own conscience, the scriptures, our cultures, and the national Constitution and other laws governing the conduct of elections in Uganda. We encourage you to look at them objectively and prayerfully.

#### *Reverence and Humility*

**17.** God is the author of leadership. Despite their human limitations, Abraham, Moses, Joshua and many other leaders of Israel were chosen by God and given a special mission, namely, the liberation, at different times, of His people from oppression (Gen 12:1-10; Ex 3:7-15 and Jos. 1:1-9). Leadership, thus, is for a purpose, namely, the common good of the people who are led. It was for this reason the prophets and Jesus denounced selfish leadership. In Jesus' own teaching (Mark 9:35; John 13:1-17; Matthew 20:28) leadership is service, a radical departure from the powerful and omnipotent notion that characterized leadership during his time. A servant leader is defined on the basis of the passion he/ she demonstrates in spearheading the crusade for *the dignity of every human person... commitment to the common good as the purpose and guiding criterion for political life. If there is no general consensus on these values, the deepest meaning of democracy is lost and its stability is compromised* (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church No. 407).

**18.** We would like, therefore, that persons offering themselves for elections cultivate a sense of dependence on God and allow themselves to be guided by Him in their journeys to leadership, for without Him we are bound to indulge in dismeaners that can sink our country into violence and injustice. We encourage voters to look out for these qualities (humility, love, respect) in the candidates and, bound by their Christian conscience, to elect people who demonstrate

commitment to our common aspirations, namely, restoring our country to the divine path and a life of respect and dignity.

### *Active citizenship*

**19.** There can be no meaningful election without full participation of citizens. The citizenry in our case is empowered by Article 1 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, which vests power in the people. We, therefore, appeal to the citizens of our country to cultivate a strong interest in the forthcoming elections and urge the State to provide an enabling environment for the citizens to exercise their right to freely assemble and choose their leaders.

**20.** Similarly, in the teaching of the Catholic Church the participation of the laity has strong basis in various documents and guidelines. For example, according to the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (par 5) “Christ’s redemptive work, while essentially concerned with the salvation of men, includes also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the Christian laity exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders. These orders, although distinct, are so connected in the singular plan of God that He Himself intends to raise up the whole world again in Christ... In both orders the layman, being simultaneously a believer and a citizen, should be continuously led by the same Christian conscience”.

### *Unity in diversity*

**21.** We would like to remind the people of Uganda that we are in a multiparty political dispensation, characterized by divergent political ideologies and agenda. We are aware of the fact that many of you are already actively involved as members of political parties. Yet we are all called to one mission, to make our country a place befitting all its citizens. For us to succeed, we will need to appreciate this diversity and focus more on our common mission than the agenda of our individual parties and candidates. We will be required, in the spirit of the Scriptures (Eph. 4:1-2, Heb.13:1, 1 Thes.4:9, 1 Pet. 1:22), to cultivate a spirit of unity, tolerance and coexistence in order that every Ugandan will have an opportunity to express himself or herself without fear of reprisal.

### *Love and respect*

**22.** As we approach the 2016 elections, we should keep in mind the need to remain patriotic. We have to love our country and our fellow citizens. St Paul teaches us that love for one another is above everything and without it we are as empty as a noisy gong: *Love is patient and kind; it is not jealous or conceitedness or proud; love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable. Love does not keep a record of wrongs. Love is not happy with evil but is happy with the truth.* (1Cor.13:4-6). Regardless of the outcome, both losers and winners should work together in the interest of peace and prosperity of our country.

### *Justice and fairness*

**23.** We have taken note of the growing suspicion regarding the conduct of the forthcoming elections. The rejection of some of the views of the key actors on relevant electoral reforms has worsened this situation. It now remains to be seen whether the Independent Electoral Commission will rise to the occasion and conduct an election whose integrity will be accepted by all. This is applicable also to persons handling primary elections within individual political parties. There is need to ensure that winners emerge out of credible and just processes as this will help the country to solve some of the sticky issues such as election petitions, the phenomenon of independents and violence.

## **E. General Recommendations**

As we conclude, we make the following particular recommendations to the various stakeholders that we believe will make our 2016 elections free, fair and credible:

### *Government*

**24.** Government, through its various organs, shoulders the greatest responsibility for promoting democratic governance. Through the National Electoral Commission, it is mandated to organize regular, free and fair elections; through Parliament to put in place necessary laws and institutions to facilitate full participation of citizens in democratic processes; and through the police and other security agencies to protect the people and property. Therefore, all organs of government should perform their duties with utmost diligence and fairness, and ensure no public resources and powers are misused to the detriment of other players and our country's development. Furthermore, we ask Government to allay the fears of the population regarding Crime Preventers and other pseudo-security agencies. The public needs to know the criteria for recruiting them, their mandate under the various laws and the role they will play during and after the 2016 elections.

### *Political parties and organizations*

**25.** Political parties are the vanguards of democracy, for they provide the alternative platforms through which people express themselves on policies and leadership of their country. It is, thus, crucial that in the conduct of their affairs they should demonstrate democratic practice and allow their members the freedom to express themselves and participate in all activities. Parties must demonstrate unity of purpose and avoid behaviour, such as anarchy, intrigue and violence that can undermine their survival and erode trust among their members and the wider public. We also encourage parties to cooperate on matters of common good, thus, underscoring the need to fully utilize platforms such as the Inter- Party Organization for Dialogue (IPOD) and the Inter-Party Forum (IPF) to deal with contentions that might arise among them. We do not condone the formation of any form of paramilitary groups by political parties and organizations that may undermine peace during and after the elections.

### *Candidates*

**26.** We are happy that many Ugandans have expressed interest in standing for various political positions. This to us is sign that overall, the current environment is facilitating rather than

constraining political freedoms. Our counsel to all candidates is to observe the highest moral standards possible during this period. We appeal for high sense of responsibility in the way we use our words, always ensuring they do not arouse hatred and violence. Our understanding is that if you have a good manifesto that addresses the real needs of the electorate they will cast their votes for you. Vote rigging and intimidation manifest a high sense of greed and disrespect for the voters. It shows that you cannot be trusted in both small and big things (Lk.16-11).

#### *Media*

**27.** The media is expected to play a critical role in shaping opinion and decision of the electorate during this period. We appeal to all media houses to feed the public on accurate and researched information and not sensationalism. We, on the other hand, recommend that all media houses open their doors to all candidates irrespective of their political affiliations. They should also mobilize the people to participate actively in all activities leading to the elections, including those taking place within individual political parties.

#### *The Electorate*

**28.** In section ten, we decried the waning interest in elections by many of our people and the consequence of this omission for our growing democracy. To this effect, we encourage all registered voters to turn up on polling day and cast their votes for leaders of their choice. As voters, we have an equal responsibility of rejecting any form of intimidation, vote rigging, use of bad language and violence. We have the duty to always protect and promote our national motto '*For God and my Country.*'

#### *The Clergy, Religious and Lay Leaders*

**29.** We invite the clergy, religious, lay leaders and all specialized agencies of the Catholic Church throughout the country to be non-partisan but make themselves available, to provide guidance and support to all candidates. At same time, we urge you not to allow candidates to use churches as platforms for political campaigns. Churches are houses of prayer and meditation and, so, ought to be kept as places of spiritual nourishment for all persons. We ask you to work with your Ordinaries to organize special prayers for the elections and encourage the people to participate actively in the different activities leading to the general elections.

### **F. Concluding Remarks**

**30.** In conclusion, we reiterate the fact that elections come with great opportunities and challenges for our country. We, therefore, encourage all actors to work for peace and ensure the process widens the options for democratic choices for our young nation. On our part we promise to journey with you in prayer.

#### *For God and My Country*

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

H.E. Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala: Archbishop Emeritus of Kampala



His Grace John Baptist Odama : Archbishop of Gulu & Chairman UEC  
Rt. Rev. Joseph Antony Zziwa : Bshp of Kiyinda-Mityana & V. C/man UEC  
His Grace Paul Bakyenga : Archbishop of Mbarara  
His Grace Cyprian Kizito Lwanga: Archbishop of Kampala  
His Grace Emmanuel Obbo :Apost. Admin. of Soroti & Archbip. of Tororo  
His Grace Denis Kiwanuka Lote : Archbishop Emeritus of Tororo  
His Grace Rev. James Odongo : Archbishop Emeritus of Tororo  
Rt. Rev. Sabino Ocan Odoki : Bishop of Arua  
Rt. Rev. Frederick Drandua : Bishop Emeritus of Arua  
Rt. Rev. Robert Muhiirwa : Bishop of Fort Portal  
Rt. Rev. Joseph Mugenyi Sabiiti : Auxiliary Bishop of Fort-Portal  
Rt. Rev. Paul Kalanda : Bishop Emeritus of Fort-Portal **(R.I.P.)**  
Rt. Rev. Lambert Bainomugisha : Auxiliary Bshp of Mbarara &  
Apostolic Administrator of Hoima  
Rt. Rev. Edward Baharagate : Bishop Emeritus of Hoima  
Rt. Rev. Charles M. Wamika : Bishop of Jinja  
Rt. Rev. Barnabas R. Halem'Imana : Bishop Emeritus of Kabale  
Rt. Rev. Robert M. Gay : Bishop Emeritus of Kabale  
Rt. Rev. Callistus Rubaramira : Bishop of Kabale  
Rt. Rev. Francis Aquirinus Kibira: Bishop of Kasese  
Rt. Rev. Egidio Nkaijanabwo : Bishop Emeritus of Kasese  
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Rt. Rev. Joseph Franzelli : Bishop of Lira  
Rt. Rev. Christopher Kakooza : Bishop of Lugazi  
Rt. Rev. Matthias Ssekamanya : Bishop Emeritus of Lugazi  
Rt. Rev. Paul Ssemogerere : Bishop of Kasana-Luweero  
Rt. Rev. John Baptist Kaggwa : Bishop of Masaka  
Rt. Rev. John Baptist Kakubi : Bishop Emeritus of Mbarara  
Rt. Rev. Damiano G. Guzzetti : Bishop of Moroto  
Rt. Rev. Henry Ssentongo : Bishop Emeritus of Moroto  
Rt. Rev. Santos Lino Wanok : Bishop of Nebbi  
Rt. Rev. Martin Luluga : Bishop Emeritus of Nebbi