

**MESSAGE FROM THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS
OF UGANDA TO
THE GOVERNMENT AND PEOPLE
OF UGANDA**

8th June, 1985

The Catholic Bishops of Uganda have several times made public pronouncements on matters affecting the welfare of the country. They have done so because they consider it their manifest duty. They must go on doing so even now because otherwise they might seem to be condoning existing serious evils in our society. They cannot condone them, neither may they give the impression of being resigned to them with no hope of overcoming them. This is why Paul ordered Timothy to "preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke and exhort" (2 Tim. 4,2).

We cannot deny that in the last few years there has been in several respects a notable improvement in the state of the country and in the restoration of the rule of law. In particular we are grateful for the existing freedom of speech without which we could not even make this present statement. There also is undeniable freedom for people to preach and practice their religion. Essential commodities which some years ago were nowhere to be seen have become generally available once again. Courts of law are functioning somehow. These are no small benefits. It is from a genuine desire to preserve_ and enhance them for the well-being of all the people of our country that we draw attention to a number of evils and abuses that threaten to undo them. Commodities which have become available are in many cases far beyond the means of ordinary people. Unscrupulous dealers seem to be free to ask any price they want and the incomes of most people have become entirely inadequate.

Corruption and graft are practised at all levels. The Courts of Law may be functioning somehow, but their verdicts are held in contempt and are over-ruled arbitrarily by members of Government. Magistrates are being threatened and attacked. Detention without trial has been practised for so long in Uganda that to many it must by now look like the normal thing. All the more reason for us to raise our voices and proclaim that it is and remains an evil. It is a bad thing in itself and it opens the door to quite arbitrary arrests, long detentions and extortion at all levels. Violence is a world-wide phenomenon, but this does not make it any the less evil. If Uganda is riddled with it we must condemn it and call for it to cease. Violence is being perpetrated by the security forces upon a defenceless population. The acts of violence committed by bandits are given as an excuse.

We have to condemn it irrespective of whoever commits it and we deeply deplore the suffering which simple men and women and children are subjected to without fault of their own. There also is the trend of giving fire-arms to young people and encourage them to bully and terrorise the population.

There are fears abroad of mysterious bands of armed individuals who are free to commit any act of cruelty they like. The prevalent lack of enforcement of the law has turned not a few citizens into lawless people who murder and maim out of greed and envy or for revenge.

The evils besetting us are so grave and so numerous that one might be tempted to despair of ever overcoming them. However, we must not give into despair and we must go on trying to discuss with each other and together seek for solutions. As far as we are concerned we have the following suggestions to make: Let all the people of our country and especially our Christians resolve to work together for the salvation of our country. In particular, this means: do not practice revenge but forgive one another; be zealous in doing whatever work you have been given to do and do not accept payment for work you have not done; fight corruption by refusing to give bribes as well as by accepting them; let at least your own homes be dwelling places of peace and charity; do not be jealous of others and deliberately banish greed from your hearts.

We beg our Government to do everything possible to protect our precarious and fragile liberties. Be determineck on your part to serve your country and your people rather than look upon your position as a means of enriching yourselves. Let the means of communication be fostered and be sure that the truth will ultimately serve you better than the lies which may seem so convenient now.

Try to establish and enforce a price control on essential commodities. Let appointments to managerial positions be made on merit rather than on political or religious or tribal grounds. Let the armed forces fulfil their role of protecting our people rather than looting and terrorising them.

With regard to the forthcoming elections we ask the Government to ensure that they will be free and fair. Let the Police Force be the only ones to keep the order during the exercise and keep all soldiers far away from it. And to all people we say: vote for candidates not because of the words they speak and the promises they make but rather because they have shown by their actions that they care for the well-being of others. We promise you all that we shall go on praying that God may bless you and keep you, that He may let His face shine upon you and give you peace.

The Catholic Bishops of Uganda.

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