

Political Maturity: Consolidating Peace and National Unity in Uganda

A Message of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda

13 April 1995

To all people of good will in Uganda,

1. Expression of gratitude

Six years ago, we published a pastoral letter entitled "Towards a New National Constitution", in which we gave some guidelines concerning the process of making a constitution. We are happy to note that since then, the Constitution Commission has made consultations and collected the views of the population about the constitution, and have published their report. Elections to the Constituent Assembly (CA) were held in March 1994, after which it started its deliberations in May of the same year.

For all this, we are grateful to God who has guided us and is still guiding us through this important period of our history. We are also grateful to all those both within and outside Uganda who have, in one way or another, contributed to the success of these important exercises.

2. The Church and the political community

The principles of the social teaching of the Church concerning the Church's mission in political matters, were well explained in our 1989 Letter and will not be repeated here. However, there is one point we want to emphasize. Vatican Council II, in one of its documents states:

The role and competence of the Church being what it is, she must in no way be confused with the political community, nor bound to any political system. [...] In their proper spheres, the political community and the Church are mutually independent and self-governing. Yet, by a different title, each serves the personal and social vocation of the same human beings. This service can be more effectively rendered for the good of all, if each works better for wholesome mutual cooperation, depending on the circumstances of time and place (Gaudium et Spes, no. 76).

It is in the light of this principle and others that we publish this message recognizing the mutual respect that has characterized the state's relations with the Church. In the spirit of recognizing the competence and autonomy of each other, government has sometimes directly asked religious organizations to contribute their part towards the rebuilding of our country. We recognize the importance of the historical period through which Uganda is passing. We would therefore like to contribute to and reinforce the consolidation of the positive elements in the political evolution of our country. We are convinced that our actions

must be inspired by the Gospel values of charity, justice and mutual respect. In doing this, we particularly have in mind all the people of Uganda, those who are entrusted with the responsibility of leading us politically, our delegates in the CA, and those who will eventually be elected to facilitate the implementation of the new constitution.

As we look forward to and await the completion of the work of the CA, we would now like to address ourselves to all Ugandans on the on-going constitution-making process and on the implementation of the constitution which begins with the awaited elections and also consists in choosing a political and economic system adapted to our situation.

PART I: On-going Constitution making. The supremacy of the people of Uganda.

3. Spirit of Patriotism

Since the Constituent Assembly started its deliberations, we have observed that the process of democratization, encouraged and promoted by the government, is taking root. We hope that this will lead to complete recognition of rights for groups and individuals. Although some debates have been characterized by acrimony and recrimination both inside and outside the CA, on the whole, disagreements have been accepted and have not been detrimental to personal relationships. We encourage the constant search for consensus with respect of other people's opinions, even if we do not agree with them. Our CA delegates should be guided by the good of our country and not by personal political gain.

It is in this spirit of mutual respect and tolerance that we can produce a constitution that can stand the test of time. Polarising issues and positions based on tribal, regional or religious sentiments must be avoided. Patriotism should guide us, well aware of the cultural, political and religious pluralistic nature of our country.

4. Power and Sovereignty of the People

The Draft Constitution stipulates and recognizes that all power in the state and government emanates from the people of Uganda, and that the people shall be governed through their will and consent. This constitutional supremacy of the people should not remain on paper, but should be politically and legally translated in reality. Moreover, it is this same people who have the right and obligation to defend the constitution at all times. Those who hold public offices are accountable to the people administratively. The people of Uganda, therefore, have the right to demand explanation from those who are acting on their behalf.

Some of the CA delegates tend to forget that they are delegates and not representatives. They have to discuss issues taking into account the opinions of the people who elected them. Delegates are reminded to carry out their duties so that the constitution making exercise ends within the scheduled time. Uncalled for absenteeism from sessions, is time and money wasting and should be discouraged.

All Ugandans are anxiously and legitimately waiting for the new constitution. We should, however, remember that the more demanding task of implementing and defending the constitution lies ahead of us. This is why the coming elections assume a particular importance, for through them, we are going to elect leaders who will be responsible for enacting laws that will make the constitution a reality.

PART II: The scheduled elections. An opportunity to strengthen human rights.

5. Need for Total National Reconciliation

As we prepare ourselves for national elections, we need to realize that these will not have any meaning if there is no total national reconciliation.

While most of Uganda is enjoying peace, we are saddened to note that some areas, especially the north, are still experiencing insecurity. We repeat and renew our plea that all those tempted to solve problems through violent means, should come to the negotiating table and solve problems through dialogue. Uganda cannot afford to endure further violence! We consider it a duty for Government to protect innocent lives wherever they are. No efforts should be spared to achieve this goal as without it no real unity will be achieved in our country. Reconciliation cannot remain mere words, it has to be visible in concrete actions where the Government has to show the way.

We commend all the steps taken by government to bring about national reconciliation especially by facilitating the return of exiles. They should be given a chance to be reintegrated into their country as citizens willing to contribute to the growth of Uganda. However, in some cases the way of welcoming some returnees and the favours they are given have raised questions in the minds of some Ugandans. There should be no practice to create grounds for suspicion and questions about the intentions of the government in this area. We call upon all Ugandans to see to it that we all promote and enjoy peace.

Recent acts of insurgency and banditry, particularly aimed at police stations, must be condemned. The government security organs and the people of Uganda have a grave responsibility of protecting and fostering peace. No efforts should be spared to find the causes of this insurgency and banditry in view of finding a remedy.

6. Need to Empower the People

We are convinced that the majority of the Ugandans are good and God-fearing people. Our history shows that problems usually arise because misguided politicians misuse their power and offices. Ugandans should, therefore, be educated to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' politicians, and should be particularly empowered to resist politicians who want to manipulate and deceive them. The population should also be initiated in legitimate and non-violent methods of defending their rights. In building democracy our politicians have to accept to be good losers and put more efforts into creating a real spirit of national unity. They are role models who will, through their example and discourse, educate our people.

For this reason also no votes should be given for money, food or other material benefits. The

right to vote for whom one wishes should not in any case be sold. Each one of us has the right and duty to express his/her opinion through the ballot paper. We must be guided by the sole objective of choosing those who will have as their aim the good of all people in Uganda and thus ensure the observance of human rights to all. It is imperative, therefore, that we remind ourselves briefly about some basic human rights.

Therefore, we call upon the relevant government organs, religious organisations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to carry out more civic education to enlighten Ugandans on their constitutional and political rights and obligations, without forgetting, however, that many of our people need guidance through appropriate channels of information. Our plea is that all Ugandan citizens who have the right to vote should be encouraged to do so.

7. Enjoying and promoting Human Rights

The Draft Constitution stipulates that every person in Uganda shall enjoy the fundamental rights and freedoms which include right to life, liberty, dignity, education, culture and security. These have already been elaborated upon in the CA's deliberations, but we would like to single out some which we think need special attention in the concrete situation of our country. Elections and what follows afterwards is a unique opportunity to strengthen human rights. Equal opportunities for all, male and female, should be safeguarded in our society.

a. Right to Life

It is obvious that life is basic and fundamental to the enjoyment of other rights. Human life is sacred and we reiterate our position in asking that life be respected right from the moment of its conception. Only very serious medical reasons could permit a human intervention, to heal not to harm. If life is not respected from its first moment, the foundations of our society are tampered with. It does not lie in the powers of any human being to decide or legislate on the fate of another human being. In this regard, we would like to highlight some areas which need special attention in order to promote full enjoyment of this right. We hope that subsequent legislation will address some of these points.

i. Lack of Sufficient Accessible Health Facilities

Our health system has a good infrastructure, and in some places this has been rehabilitated. But the cry of our people is that in many medical units, patients are not well received and attended to, and in some cases they have to search for drugs and equipment outside the establishment which should be providing them. One can appreciate the health hazards to which such actions and treatment expose our people. A number of these health services are not properly run and are not operating legally. The Ministry of Health must apply and implement the existing law and where legislation is lacking, proper laws should be enacted to protect the people. Here, mention should be made of the need to control and

check drugs imported or made locally for human use. When we know the extent to which human life is threatened from different angles in our country, no effort should be spared to defend and protect it.

ii. Extended medical services.

While we recognize the importance of the threat of AIDS, we also stress the importance of fighting this disease alongside efforts to treat and prevent other diseases which are claiming thousands of lives in our country. Equipping the already existing health facilities with qualified and committed personnel, drugs and some basic equipment, would go a long way towards solving some of these problems. More funds should be made available for this purpose and an incentive given to medical people by giving appropriate wages. We commend efforts by government and non-government organisations to spread education on preventive medicine, which is, in fact, cheaper and more effective in combating diseases. Religious organizations are already trying to render commendable services in this area and we would like to reiterate our willingness to continue collaborating with the government and other organisations so that together we can provide what is necessary to save and protect life.

iii. Road Accidents

Among the anti-life elements in our country, we would like to mention road accidents which have become a common feature, as press reports regularly attest. This is a case where concerted action needs to be taken immediately. The police have to do their job, but this in itself is not enough, because practically speaking police cannot be everywhere. Passengers who use public means of transport and owners of vehicles must also assume their responsibilities. Accidents can and must be reduced to the strict minimum, even be totally eradicated. The police and drivers have a responsibility to see to it that regulations about standards of the vehicles and traffic regulations are observed. We request that the practice of selling or issuing driving permits to people who have not passed a driving test be stopped. A popular non-violent protest or demonstration can be effective in checking and eventually reducing accidents from our roads.

iv. Security and Freedom for All

In a free and democratic Uganda every citizen should be and feel free to move without fear of being harassed by people in authority. It is the freedom of the individual which will be the sure indicator of a growing and strengthening democracy. Free press and freedom of speech are necessary components of stability. But freedom should not be used as an instrument of destabilisation of the country and its laws. Government security organs must refrain from practices which seem to perpetuate the culture of violence.

b. Right to Education

Obstacles to enjoying the right to education in our country are well known and centre mainly on the exorbitant costs of education which prevent most parents from fulfilling the obligation to educate their children. Some of these costs could easily be brought down if measures were taken to streamline and rationalise the system of education. The recent steps taken by the Ministry of Education and Sports to control and check school fees are a first step in the line desired. Education should receive funding from public funds if really we wish to offer every Ugandan a chance of a better life through education. Not every citizen is in a position to see to his/her education because of meagre resources. The Government has a duty to assist wherever possible.

The Uganda Episcopal Conference is willing to continue working with the government in looking for ways of reinforcing supervision and administration of schools and improving upon the quality of educational institutions. Given the turbulent history of our country and the need for moral rehabilitation to redress the situation, we would like to suggest that ethics be taught in all schools at all levels. This does not mean that religious education should become optional, on the contrary. But the two subjects have to be considered as complimentary for the education of young ones. Our education institutions which are competent in this area would be willing to contribute towards designing relevant programs to assist in this area.

Proposals given in the White Paper should be properly studied and debated upon so that Uganda can develop an education system which is suited to the needs of our country. Taking into account the economic situation of Uganda, we recommend that to institute free and compulsory primary education, the process be stepped up. Women's right to education is equal to that of men. Parents and government should therefore work hand in hand to see to it that this right is equally enjoyed.

c. Right to Justice

The adoption of a new constitution as our fundamental law must be accompanied by measures to ensure that justice is rendered at a lower cost and promptly. The present judicial system is in some cases too expensive and foreign to our people in its conception. Judicial procedures should be simplified and cases which are not difficult to judge should be handled by structures nearer to the people. Failure to render justice will lead to frustration and acts of violence, as we have sometimes unfortunately witnessed in incidents of mob justice.

d. Rights of the disadvantaged

The level of development and concern of a country is also measured by the attention given to people who are in any way disadvantaged. The government and people of Uganda have the responsibility and obligation to make sure that our brothers and sisters who are socially, physically or mentally handicapped, are cared for and not

discriminated against. It is the right of those disadvantaged to have a real share in the social, physical and material well-being of the country. Care should be taken to empower these people so that they can realize their mental and physical potential. All positive actions by government, the Church and NGOs in this regard must be encouraged, but one should refrain from making these people objects of pity and exploitation. They should not be regarded as a special class but should be integrated as much as possible into society.

Among the disadvantaged people, one should mention refugees who have to be given a sincere and honest welcome in our country. It is their right to have a place to live and our duty to assist them to achieve this.

Among the poor in our country, orphans, widows and widowers also need special mention. In the context of the terrible effects of AIDS their plea is urgent. They have an original right to fully participate in the life of our society. Only a proper management of public funds will enable them to be so.

PART III: Choosing an appropriate political and economic system

8. Political system and structure

We affirm Uganda's right to evolve and look for a political system that is best suited to our needs. This can only be done if Ugandans are not pressurized from inside or outside the country to choose one or other system. We know that in this area there have been heated debates inside and outside the CA, although sometimes not in relation to the history and nature of our country. The Church can, and indeed, must advise on the life style of society. Its members, whoever they are, have an obligation to contribute to the growth of their country. This obligation pertains not only to words, but includes positive steps towards promoting unity, stability, peace, economic and social development, in short, the common good.

Political involvement is not reserved to a few, but constitutes for all a major component of growth to social and political maturity. This maturity will be achieved only when each citizen finds in his/her country the freedom to be and to live fully. No political system can be said to be the final one and it is through the process of constant adjustment that a continuously stable and open system can develop. Every nation has to find what it considers to be the best possible system as the proper answer to the concrete situation of its people.

9. Economic System

It should be obvious that human rights cannot be fully enjoyed unless women and men have the material means to earn their livelihood. Uganda is endowed with immense human and material resources. From this point of view, therefore, Uganda is not a poor country. Hard work and less indulging in drinking are positive factors towards the growth of our country. The real problem lies in how the resources are exploited,

managed and distributed. It will take some time before the effects of the move towards economic liberalization, which is beginning to bear tangible fruits, are felt in rural areas. This move needs to be accompanied with economic reforms in order to empower people at grass-root level. The *Entandikwa* project recently launched by government could be a start in the good direction if it is well managed and explained. Public assistance can and must be given where resources are scarce. In this regard, land and agriculture, as the basis of our economy, must receive special attention. The government must continue to address the question of economic justice in different regional and international fora so that the rural population can get fair prices for what they produce through so much labour.

It is the responsibility of government, particularly of our legislators, to put in place laws, especially those concerning taxation, so that there is an equitable sharing in the resources of the country. Extreme differences in standards of living among citizens and regions in the same country can lead to other social problems and should, therefore, be avoided. An effective social welfare system is needed in order to bring assistance to those who might find themselves unable to provide for their own needs effectively.

Ugandans are beginning to become impatient with the government's apparent incapacity to deal with, fight and eventually eliminate corruption. It is believed that millions of shillings of public funds end up in the pockets of individuals, and this creates frustration and erosion of confidence in public authorities. Legislation which exists to ensure proper accountability and transparency in the use and administration of public funds, must be enforced; where it is lacking, new laws should be enacted to stamp out the evil practice of corruption.

We commend the efforts of Ugandans and others who are setting up factories in our country in order to contribute to the improvement and growth of the economy. Industrialization, however, must be accompanied with sufficient safeguards which must be put in place to regulate the placing of factories and the disposal of industrial wastes, so as to avoid the eventual, and sometimes irreversible harmful- effects on people and on the environment by some industrial wastes. Information and laws concerning its handling and disposal should be made known and accessible to the general public. Let us not repeat some mistakes of industrialized countries.

Conclusion

Dear brothers and sisters, our task as citizens and Christians is indeed great. We have to be participants in the process of constitution making, we cannot remain disinterested or indifferent. We are convinced that the forthcoming elections cannot be regarded as a process one is free to participate in or not. We are all duty bound to contribute to this important task of shaping the future of our country. We have a duty to see to it that our future constitution be implemented properly not forgetting the right each citizen has to make known his/her view point. Only with freedom of expression and good action can Uganda grow to full maturity. Polarization of positions, sectarian approaches, tribal

rivalry, regional isolation, political and economic exploitation are all factors which hamper the process of real democratization. We are duty bound to make positive contributions to the growth of our country. Our future has to be built now and we cannot wait till tomorrow to start thinking and acting. Our duty as citizens of Uganda and as Christians is to be peace makers and builders of society.

We entrust all our efforts to God, asking Him to guide our actions.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY.

+ Paul Kalanda	Chairman, Bishop of Fort Portal
+ Paul K. Bakyenga	Vice-Chairman, Bishop of Mbarara
+ Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala,	Archbishop of Kampala
+ Adrian K. Ddungu,	Bishop of Masaka
+ Joseph Willigers,	Bishop of Jinja
+ John Baptist Kakubi,	Bishop Emeritus of Mbarara
+ Edward A. Baharagate,	Bishop Emeritus of Hoima
+ James Odongo,	Bishop of Tororo
+ Barnabas Halent'hnana,	Bishop Emeritus of Kabale
+ Erasmus Wandera,	Bishop of Soroti
+ Joseph Mukwaya,	Bishop of Kiyinda-Mityana
+ Martin Luluga,	Bishop of Gult
+ Frederick Drandua,	Bishop of Arua
+ Henry Ssentongo,	Bishop of Moroto
+ Egidio Nkaijanabwo	Bishop of Kasese
+ Joseph Oyanga,	Bishop of Lira

+ Denis
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+ Deogratias
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