

## **PRESS STATEMENT**

JUNE 9, 2017

### **STATEMENT OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF UGANDA ON SOME MATTERS OF CONCERN AFFECTING THE PEOPLE OF UGANDA**

We, the Catholic Bishops of Uganda, gathered at St. Augustine Institute in Nsambya, Kampala, for our Plenary Assembly of June 5 - 9, 2017, spent time discussing and reflecting on various issues affecting our Church and country. We therefore share with all our people the following matters of concern.

#### **1.0. On the situation of refugees**

We note with deep concern the growing influx of refugees into Uganda following conflicts and economic hardship in some of our neighbouring countries, especially South Sudan. We are grateful to our government for its open policy on refugees, and to Ugandans for the hospitality they have accorded to them for several decades now.

For us Christians, refugees present an opportunity to witness to the love of Christ, who was himself a refugee in Egypt. We, therefore, encourage all Catholics and local communities in refugee host districts to continue embracing refugees and providing them the solace they need to live dignified lives. We urge the local churches in those areas to put in place effective pastoral programmes that will enable refugees to draw strength and hope from the living Word of God and the Sacraments. The Clergy of refugee host parishes should ensure a proper integration of refugee Catholics into the Parish Christian Community at all levels. Unfortunately, the growing number of refugees in Arua Diocese is overwhelming for the pastoral possibilities of the local Church. We, therefore, launch an appeal to all our priests from other dioceses to consider volunteering to go and provide pastoral care to the people in the refugee camps.

In view of recent news reports, we urge families and parish communities in the affected areas to do all possible to discourage young Ugandan men from joining the military forces of any of the factions involved in the South Sudanese conflict.

Lastly, we call on the parties to the conflict in South Sudan in particular to stop the senseless violence that has led to mass displacement of people, and to the regional bodies, such as Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD) and African Union (AU) to do more to support a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

On our part we will continue to provide services to refugees through our local churches and various agencies such as Caritas that is already on the ground. We also commit to praying for the various actors involved in refugee response and for refugees themselves so that together we can find a lasting solution to the refugee phenomenon in the region.

## 2.0. On torture and increasing violation of human rights by security agencies.

We note with great concern that in the recent past, cases of torture by some security agencies have been reported in our country, which is a grave violation of human rights guaranteed by our constitution. It has been further brought to our attention that some suspects especially under both police and military detention are subjected to all forms of torture under the guise of eliciting information from them.

Many suspects have remained under police and military detention beyond the mandatory constitutional 48 hours and those who get a chance to be taken to courts of law have been subjected to long periods of remand with clear instances of delayed trial. This in itself is a stumbling block to true justice since justice delayed is Justice denied.

We, therefore, condemn any forms of torture, unlawful detentions, and long periods of remand for those who are under prosecution.

We should be mindful of Article 24 and 44(a) of our national Constitution which mandate all people including security personnel to respect human dignity. The same constitutional provisions guarantee the right to protection from inhuman and degrading treatment by prohibiting any forms of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

We call upon government to bring to book all perpetrators especially within security agencies and the outcome of any disciplinary measures taken be made public.

We further call upon government to consider undertaking special investigations aimed at finding a long-term solution to the problem in the Rwenzori region to avoid a repetition of the November 2016 Kasese killings and destruction of property.

As a Catholic Church in Uganda, we have undertaken strategies of laying a sustainable foundation for peaceful conflict resolution in the Rwenzori region through our national Department of Justice and Peace and its sister office in the Diocese of Kasese.

## **3.0. On the proposal for compulsory acquisition of land by Government**

Article 26 of the 1995 Constitution guarantees the right to own property either individually or in association with others. It prohibits compulsory deprivation of property, except when such acquisition is necessary for public use or national security, public safety, public order, public morality or public health. The acquisition must also be made under a law which makes provision for prompt payment of fair and adequate compensation, prior to such acquisition.

We are concerned that instead of honouring citizen's right to own property, the government is proposing to amend Article 26 in a way that will deprive people of their means to live. The proposed amendment seeks to take over private property before payment of a prompt and fair compensation to the owners.

We call upon government to undertake a wide national consultation before the above proposal is considered.

We also call upon government to urgently look into the rampant land conflicts in the country that have already caused a great loss of lives and property. We appeal to the various individuals and communities that have land issues to seek peaceful ways of resolving conflicts and to always respect the dignity of human life.

#### **4.0. On the proposed law to introduce contraceptives for children in schools**

It has come to our attention that the East African Legislative Assembly is seeking to adopt and pass a law introducing contraceptives for children in member states. The danger with this law if passed at the regional level is that it automatically binds the East African Community member states to provide contraceptives and abortion, among others, to all EAC citizens, including children.

The issue is more than that of immoral means to control the dramatic problem of teenage pregnancies. It is also about the lack of cultural and moral formation of too many men, who, taking advantage of condoms and contraceptives, use women and young girls and throw them away when convenient, satisfied that they probably will not get pregnant. They have no consideration of the personal tragedy of those they use as sex toys. As contraceptives often fail, the next demand will be for abortion. How this situation can be associated with the freedom of women is beyond comprehension, for women and girls are the first victims. The proposals of law are really about encouraging male irresponsibility.

We, as leaders of the Catholic Church in Uganda, opposed and continue to oppose any attempts by the government or the regional parliament to introduce a law or a policy that provides contraceptives to children. We, therefore, call upon Uganda's representatives in the East African Legislative Assembly to ensure that the aforementioned law is not passed since it will have lasting effects to the future generation.

#### **5.0. On drug and alcohol abuse among the young people**

As we prepare for the 2018 Synod of Bishops at the Vatican on youth, faith and vocational discernment, the Catholic Church in Uganda is carrying out consultations to establish the pastoral needs of our youth. Among the issues of concern that we have noted is the increasing abuse of drugs and alcohol among the young people in the country due to factors such as unemployment, domestic violence and breakup of families. This indeed is a great challenge and a call for action to ensure that our children grow up as responsible, healthy, and productive citizens.

Our pastoral experience has showed that many young people face various challenges that sometimes drive them into hopelessness and self-destructive behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse. We call upon our fellow pastoral agents and the heads of families to pay attention to the needs of our young ones and endeavour to provide the necessary guidance and support. We also

urge the children and the youth to always seek guidance and strive to face difficult situations in life with a positive mind and above all with trust in God.

## **6. Remembering the Visit of Pope Francis**

In all these new challenges, we should be pondering the words Pope Francis spoke to us during his 2015 visit to Uganda: “Remembrance amid new challenges,” he said in the last talk of his visit, “fidelity to memory, and fidelity to prayer ... With these three pillars, the ‘Pearl of Africa’ will continue to be a pearl and not just an empty word.”

We, your Bishops, have listed some new challenges that require pastoral action and new initiatives of all of us to be closer to youth and families. Do not lock up the faith in Church houses and institutions. Go out, as Pope Francis so often says, to these existential peripheries of our country. Otherwise we will not be faithful to Christ’s mandate to preach, to announce the Gospel to all, far and wide. May clergy, religious, lay faithful, and educational institutes meet and act, to courageously shine Christ’s light and joy on these new challenges. We urge Catholic families to understand that these problems will be faced successfully only with their involvement in them. “May the Uganda martyrs, together with Mary, Mother of the Church, intercede for us, and may the Holy Spirit kindle within us the fire of his divine love!” (Pope Francis, Homily, Namugongo, 2015).

On behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda,

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Archbishop of Gulu, and  
Chairman of Uganda Episcopal Conference  
Kampala