

# **Statement on the post-election situation in the country – Uganda Catholic Bishops**

## **1.0 PREAMBLE**

Dear Fellow Citizens, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda I present to you our statement on matters pertaining to the political situation in our country, especially after the general national elections which were held in February 2016. This statement was agreed upon in our plenary meeting, which took place from the 6th to the 10th of June 2016. In our meeting we discussed many issues concerning the Catholic Church in Uganda, including the concerns of our people regarding the political tension in the country.

You will all recall that before the national elections were held, we had a period of campaigns and Ugandans were filled with excitement and enthusiasm as they expressed support for their various political candidates at all levels. During this time, we were honoured with the visit of His Holiness Pope Francis, whose presence saw our political leaders in their diverse political affiliations converge and meet peacefully at Namugongo Catholic shrine to celebrate with the Holy Father and the Catholic faithful the fiftieth anniversary of the canonization of the Uganda Martyrs.

In his address to the Government Authorities and Diplomatic Corps at State House, Entebbe, shortly after his arrival on 27th November 2015, Pope Francis described the Uganda Martyrs, both Catholics and Anglicans, as true national heroes who, among many other things, “remind us that, despite our different beliefs and convictions, all of us are called to seek the truth, to work for justice and reconciliation, and to respect, protect and help one another as members of our one human family”. In fact, the Pope’s words and his presence among us gave us hope that we could go through the incoming elections in a new spirit of unity, mutual respect, freedom and peace.

## **2.0 On the current situation**

In February 2016 before the general elections, we emphasized the need for all eligible voters to exercise their civic rights to vote in a free, secure and peaceful environment that was conducive for a harmonious and thriving nation. And in our two pastoral letters released before elections, we called upon all Ugandans, including state agencies, to work for peace before, during and after elections.

We are however concerned that after the previous various sets of elections in Uganda, despite what appeared to be a generally peaceful electoral environment, it is evident that a situation of uncertainty continues to hover over many parts of our Country. Many people appear to be unhappy, discouraged and bitter, as if hope for a better and a more united country had been lost.

The road towards Uganda’s political and leadership challenges is clearly stipulated in the preamble of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. The preamble underscores our concerted efforts and further commitment to building a better future by establishing a socio-economic and political order through a popular and durable national constitution based on principles of unity, peace, equality, democracy, freedom, social justice and progress.

### **3.0 On the arrest of opposition politicians and supporters**

After the announcement of the presidential election results, the media has been awash with reports about numerous arrests of opposition leaders and supporters and violent clashes among members of the population, especially between the opposition and security agencies. We are concerned that many of these people are not being given the justice that the laws of Uganda prescribe.

The highhanded treatment of political opponents and the arrests of their supporters no doubt breed feelings of injustice and intolerance, especially when Uganda is still grappling with nurturing its young multiparty political system. We would like to emphasize that political parties remain fundamental pillars of democracy and therefore lawful political activities should be respected.

At the same time, we call on the opposition leaders to ensure that they operate within the limits of the law, and to respect the rights of every Ugandan.

### **4.0 On the use of the judiciary to address political disputes**

We have further noted the indirect pressure on the judiciary which is being used to solve disputes that ordinarily require a political solution as opposed to legal interventions. Courts of law remain temples of justice and should be respected as such. The judiciary should be mindful of Article 126 of the Constitution which underscores the fact that judicial power is derived from the people and shall be exercised in the name of the people. Let judges remember the word of God: “You must be impartial in judgment and give an equal hearing to small and great alike”(Deut.1:17) and “You must not pervert the law; you must be impartial; you will take no bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and ruins the cause of the upright” (Deut. 16:19).

### **5.0 On the unsolved post-election grievances among the people and politicians**

From the above, it is evident and clear on the face of it that there are inner grievances amongst the citizens. A number of people continue to live under fear of violence and this makes it incumbent upon the new government to be open to dialogue. This will help to facilitate mutual understanding of one another especially as regards to people’s grievances, with a major purpose of finding consensus on key governance and leadership challenges.

In our pastoral letter on elections, we called upon government to address key governance issues which in our view were fundamental for fostering free and fair elections. These included among others:

- a). Restoration of presidential term limits in the Constitution,
- b). Building confidence among people regarding the credibility and independence of the Electoral Commission.
- c). Reasonable intervention of security agencies in the electoral process.

The above and many other proposed electoral reforms were not given due attention by Government. We call upon the new Government to seriously address the issue of electoral reforms in order to realize sustainable democracy in Uganda.

In addition, we urge that National Commissions, like the Human Rights Commission, and the state institutions be strengthened and respected in their constitutional autonomy and role.

## **6.0 On the respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms**

We would like to see that the new government gives priority to creating more opportunities for all people irrespective of their political background as a strategy to promote harmony and co-existence. We are concerned that before, during and after the February 2016 general elections, there was unnecessary clampdown on fundamental human rights and freedoms. This was the case, for instance, of the nationwide shutting down of social media and subsequently banning of the press from reporting certain political activities. We have to keep in mind that, worldwide, the media is key and remains pivotal in enhancing democratic governance. A free media is a sign of free and democratic society, which the government must respect as a partner institution in strengthening democratic governance.

## **7.0 General proposals and recommendations**

From the above we make the following recommendations and proposals.

### *i. To the new Government of Uganda*

Respect the rule of law and constitutionalism as key pillars for democratic governance. The law should not be side-lined in the interest of addressing political differences. Government and the security agencies should not use excessive force while responding to what would appear unpleasant in the eyes of the state. The security agencies are not privy to respecting fundamental human rights and freedoms. As stated in our national constitution, the fundamental human rights are inherent and not granted by the state.

### *ii. To the Judiciary as a temple of justice*

We urge the Judiciary to exercise the independence expected of it under Article 126 of the Constitution and to dispense justice without fear and favour so that justice is not only done but seen to be done.

### *iii. To the Parliament of Uganda*

The new Parliament should consider undertaking the needed constitutional reforms as one of their priority tasks. Consensus building during the process of debates and passing of bills should guide their business in parliament and avoid taking decisions in party caucuses without consulting the people they represent. All business in Parliament must be seen as a national matter and Members of Parliament must not forget the key role of the house as being an institution constitutionally mandated to enact laws which are just and do not undermine or contradict the traditional or Christian values for the protection of life and marriage, as in the case of abortion and divorce.

### *iv. To lead Political players*

All political leaders should explore democratic dialogue for the electorate to discuss their grievances openly at various levels as a strategy to promote political accountability. We continue to call on political leaders to give priority to the politics of inclusion other than politics of exclusion.

### *v. To the people of Uganda*

As we look at the aftermath of the election, we call on all citizens to maintain law and order and desist from any form of violence.

*vi. Dialogue on political reforms.*

We recommend that the various stakeholders start dialogue on some of the key governance questions with a view of arriving at consensus on issues such as:

- The composition of the Electoral Commission;
- Reinstating of the term limits;
- Continuous dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition political parties.

All this can be done where political leaders consider engaging in a genuine National Democratic Dialogue to enhance and deepen democratic governance as a basis for promoting the common good.

## **8.0 General conclusion.**

Uganda is our motherland and we are all brothers and sisters. We should treasure this beautiful country and endeavour to live in peace, unity and love. Let us remember the history of Uganda and avoid going back to our dark past. Let us promote political dialogue, reconciliation, justice and peace at all levels. Let us recover the good spirit of national unity and hope prevailing during the visit of the Pope. Let us remember his words challenging the “heirs of the Uganda Martyrs” to have courage, stand united and turn the negative aspects of our current situation into opportunities for growth, building up together a better, united and peaceful nation for the good of all its citizens.

As leaders of the Catholic Church in Uganda, we remain committed to supporting and advocating for values that uphold constitutionalism and the rule of law. We will work with all stakeholders to ensure that the rule of law, respect for human rights and democratic governance is promoted.  
For God and My Country

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