

PASTORAL LETTER OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF UGANDA ON GENERAL ELECTIONS IN UGANDA



**Building a Peaceful, United, and Prosperous Uganda
Through Free and Fair Elections:**

Consolidating Electoral Democracy in Uganda

11th June, 2010

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To: All Citizens and People of good will in Uganda

1. Introduction

1.1. We, the Catholic Bishops of Uganda, write this letter out of good will and commitment to ensuring a peaceful and harmonious existence of our mother country Uganda and all people of God who dwell in it. We write with passion and deep concern that the road towards the 2011 general elections is creating a lot of anxiety, doubts, fear and moments of hopelessness among the people of God. Many are already sensing improper handling in the ongoing process and fearing unwanted consequences. We, therefore, call upon every one to take on the responsibility of ensuring that the 2011 general elections are another stage in the country's move towards a true electoral democracy in Uganda.

1.2. We write this letter to provide guidance on how we should avoid what may cause confusion and animosity among our people. We should not wait to enter into the resolving of conflict but rather prevent it thereby minimizing pain, division and social strife. Such conflict prevention is possible, timely and can be successful. We must all remember how easy it is to destroy peace but how restoring tranquility is a difficult and arduous process. This Pastoral Letter is therefore, a call to all to be responsible citizens.

1.3. One of the major pillars and foundations of a democratic society is organizing regular, free and fair elections. This must involve the people themselves. Elections provide the most direct and important means for the people to express their wishes and views regarding their political leaders. Elections by their nature should and must provide our electorate with regular opportunities to peacefully comment, challenge change and review their government. This, in our view, can deter socio-political turmoil by controlling and making regular the struggle for power which has always been identified with our history. Therefore, at this moment when the whole country is preparing for general elections in 2011, we religious leaders cannot ignore Uganda's problems of tyranny, war, violence and fraud. The question of a free and democratic electoral process is inescapable from the agenda of the Catholic Church at this time as we together pursue the consolidation of democracy in our country.

2. The Purpose of this Letter

- 2.1. The letter of the Uganda Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church on the forthcoming elections is meant to offer guidance to all concerned so that the exercise is properly understood and lived as a special moment of coming together for the good of the country and all citizens.
- 2.2. The letter should be available to all so that each category of people may find the guidance that the Catholic Church intends to offer to the electorate irrespective of one's political inclinations.

3. How to use this Letter

- 3.1. Given the great deal of information and issues surrounding the electoral process, this guidance is written to provide the rationale for the faithful to be informed of and involved in the electoral process, with specific recommendations for actions to be taken or positions to be supported. This Letter can serve as a reference point for clergy as they seek to understand the

issues that will shape the electoral process and in turn, will be key factors in whether the outcome will be peaceful or violence-ridden. Therefore, we ask all pastoral workers to keep in mind the following guidelines:

- 3.1.1. Pastoral workers, particularly priests and religious, should study the letter with their close collaborators;
- 3.1.2. They should summarize the main points to give to the public on Sunday celebrations;
- 3.1.3. Choose those issues that are more relevant to your specific situation and present them in a more detailed way;
- 3.1.4. Use the letter as a useful instrument to educate the people to develop their social and political awareness as active members in the development of Ugandan society.

4. Historical Challenges in the Electoral Process

- 4.1. As we look forward to the coming 2011 general elections, let us remind ourselves that the past has an immediate bearing on the present and provides good lessons for the future. Historically, Uganda has lacked a positive culture of elections and has seen the practice of the politics of elimination, resulting in harassment, character assassination, and destruction of life and property especially of the 'opposition'. We are still nursing the wounds of this bitter history.
- 4.2. Election processes in Uganda have been fraught with difficulty. In 1958 the first elections to elect representatives to the legislative council were boycotted in Buganda. The elections of 1961 and 1962 were postponed and those planned for 1971 were pre-empted by Idi Amin's military coup and usurpation of power that year. The 1980 elections which followed the fall of Idi Amin were marked by intrigue and intimidation of opponents and alleged outright rigging, combined with a high degree of electoral violence. The 1996 and 2001 general elections were punctuated with various anomalies and recurring violence which

created hostility among sections of the electorate. The 2006 general elections were no exception, and the whole process was punctuated by electoral violence resulting in a number of deaths and many injuries. There is, therefore, clear evidence that all of our past elections have been accompanied by violence, a loss of confidence in the process and different forms of anomalies despite the effort of both the government and Electoral Commission to conduct free and fair elections.

5. Reasons to be Hopeful

5.1. Dear people of God, while it is true that elections in Uganda are not a new phenomenon, it is very important for all of us to remember that alongside a number of painful electoral **anomalies** there have been a number of successes. You may recall that in our Easter message of April 14th 2004 entitled “*A Concern for Peace, Unity and Harmony in Uganda*”, we pointed out some of the historical successful signs of transition that had raised people’s expectations to greater heights. We again use the same message in this important letter since in the year 1996 the citizens have been promised a ‘fundamental change’. This continues to be a major motivation for the people to participate in local and national elections. This promise of change continues to encourage the participation of our people who still believe in adding to the shaping of the destiny of their country.

5.2. We witnessed with great encouragement the process of the making of the New 1995 Constitution with full participation of all citizens. The Constitutional review, revitalization of the media, introduction of various development initiatives like Universal Primary Education (UPE), Universal Secondary Education (USE), and the Prosperity for All Programme, added value after such a historical process. The opening of the political space in 2005 and the dialogue that went on thereafter between the ruling party and the opposition were all signs that the transition was taking direction **towards political maturity**.

5.3. However, in spite of all the positive gains named above, we should all acknowledge that our country is still in an on-

going transition towards true and sustainable democracy. The promotion, strengthening and consolidation of electoral democracy should take advantage of all the above as a true foundation and vital pillar for building sustainable peace, justice, reconciliation and holistic development in Uganda. While on one hand this is very possible, on the other hand it demands a high degree of maturity from politicians and political leaders who hold the keys to power and leadership in accordance with our Constitution.

6. The Current Situation

6.1. Upon reflection, we, therefore, note with great concern that as we move towards 2011, we see a lot of fear and pessimism in many people's hearts. It is, therefore, paramount that the electoral process leading to the 2011 general elections is handled with the maximum care as a tool towards building long term democracy in our country.

7. Guidance from the Social Teachings of the Church

7.1. "Political parties have the task of fostering widespread participation and making public responsibilities accessible to all. We therefore call upon political parties to ably interpret the aspirations of civil society and orient them towards the common good by offering them effective formulation of political choices. However, internal democracy must first exist in the internal arrangements of the political parties themselves so that they are capable of political synthesis and planning" [*Cf. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church #413*].

7.2. The ruling NRM and all opposition political parties should come to work together through dialogue for the good of the country. This is one of the best ways to end political disputes that arise out of non democratic electoral processes. This will foster confidence, trust and harmony among Ugandans. Such actions could be a step to the furthering of national reconciliation, the building of national unity and the enhancing of tolerance of the different political views and values necessary for free and fair

elections. Therefore, this is the time for the country to discard bad and undemocratic laws for the good of all. Coming up with an agreed electoral system will help the country to avert electoral violence and prevent any potential breakdown into anarchy.

- 7.3. In order to have a peaceful electoral process and peaceful transition of power, we must put aside our different party interests and work to put in place a more credible electoral framework that will work in the best interest of the country. These amendments should not be a preserve for only one group but they must respond and suit the country's current challenges. At this crucial time we remember and echo the Holy Father's message to us in Rome earlier this year. He asks us to struggle against individualism and to be leaders that promote lasting peace based on justice, generosity towards those in need and a spirit of dialogue and reconciliation.

8. The Role of the Church

- 8.1. In our Pastoral Letter: *“With a New Heart and a New Spirit”* written on 29th June 1986, the day of St. Peter and Paul the Apostles, we stated that: “The Church represents the moral conscience of a nation and she is expected to spell out what is good or bad, right or wrong in the political life of a given community. This is her prophetic role and her mandate. However, in this exercise the Church may come into conflict with some political groupings or individuals. Those affected by her criticism will accuse her of meddling in politics while others will congratulate her. In any case, the Church will seek not to allow herself to be dragged into the political arena of any groups but will try to find ways and means of cooperation with all honest and fair political parties. The Church will not hesitate to denounce those politicians or parties which violate human rights and fundamental human freedoms; “to denounce injustices is an integral part of evangelization” (1971 Synod of Bishops). *Our Pastoral letter “With a New Heart and a New Spirit”*. [St Paul Publications, June 1986]. In this Pastoral Letter we re-iterate this position.

8.2. The Church is an institution outside government that gives voice to members of the society by raising their concerns. Like its founder, Jesus Christ, the Church leads the people of God, sanctifies them and encourages them to use their prophetic witness in the world. Among many other duties, the Church owes its existence to provide services which are essential to the people. The Church has, therefore, always played a prominent role in pressing for positive change. It works and acts in the name of God and on behalf of the people of God. Therefore, every Ugandan (male, female, adult and child) has a right to be heard in the Constitutional and other electoral process debates. All people in the country must freely and through Constitutional means share their ideas on what they would like to see in the country's electoral process.

8.3. "It is vital at this moment to make it clear to every Ugandan that politics for good governance must be perceived as faith in God put into action so as to erase the language of 'dirty politics' from our daily vocabulary. It should be understood from the beginning that when paganism is at work then bad governance which is a child of 'dirty politics' takes precedence. In such a case any political system of governance that contradicts the kingdom values is not acceptable to the Christian faith. Therefore, the Church has a right by virtue of her mission to remain critical of all social order to ensure that the dignity of the human person is respected and defended at every moment in time. Needless to say, the promotion of the human dignity and equality of people's human rights and participation is not interference in politics, as many politicians do think, but an integral part of the mission of the Church. It should further be well understood that whenever any system of governance goes against the kingdom values and violates the rights and dignity of the human person, Church has all rights to intervene." [Cf. NCCJP Publications "***A Call to Constitutionalism and Rule of Law in Uganda: Promoting the Common Good for all***, Good Governance issue No. 2, November 2009".

Recommendations:

9. The Electoral Commission

- 9.1. The Electoral Commission must exhibit a high degree of impartiality necessary to win the people's confidence that they can organize free and fair elections, including showing a clear road map to democratic reforms and vow to hold free and fair elections devoid of violence and intimidation.
- 9.2. The Electoral Commission as the body responsible for the management of elections in the country should make sure that a well updated voters register is available and that voters are in position to crosscheck their names, which will guarantee their participation in forthcoming elections. We need this time to have clean registers in order to avoid electoral fraud.
- 9.3. An effective and accountable Electoral Commission is required to guarantee free and fair elections. There is therefore a pressing need to tackle areas where the Electoral Commission has been inefficient. However, this requires a strict review of the appointment and management of the Electoral Commission.

10. The Electoral Law Reforms

- 10.1. About the political community and the human person, the social teaching of the Church reminds us that the human person is the foundation and purpose of political life. He or she is endowed with a rational nature and is responsible for his or her own choices and able to pursue projects that give meaning to life at the individual and social level. Representative bodies must be subjected to effective social control through electoral laws that can regulate the powers of those in politics, those managing and conducting the exercise of voting, while at the same time guiding the electorate participating in the voting before, during and after elections.
- 10.2. We note with deep concern the failure to reach necessary consensus to effect the key amendments on a number of

electoral laws that were presented to the Uganda Law Reform Commission. This lack of consensus occurred despite a clear government pledge to bring such into the satisfaction of all stake holders. It is not very clear to the public whether this was deliberate or not. In 2005, the electoral laws that were amended came into operation towards the end of November 2005. In our opinion this was very late and this could not give stakeholders enough time to internalize them and sufficiently organize themselves for the elections.

10.3. Taking into consideration the time remaining before national elections, we are very much concerned about the slow speed at which this process of education and dissemination of the new amendments is being handled. We also note with concern that the laws may not be comprehensive enough to meet the demands of a free and fair election in a multiparty political system. We believe that the whole process of electoral law reforms should be executed in a timely manner and capture the genuine demands of people and their participation in the process.

10.4. To ensure free and fair elections, the election laws and guidelines for those participating in the elections should be published and made available to the public in good time. Meaningful change must involve the people in the process. If these reforms were done and affected in the appropriate timeframes, we believe Ugandans would not hold regrets after the 2011 elections.

10.5. The electoral Law systems must belong to the people. The purpose of electoral reforms is to enable the people to participate in their own governance through free and fair elections, which is a foundation for peace and freedom. Like the Constitution, electoral laws constitute a contract between the citizens and their leaders. They are not a mere body of rules and regulations that leaders use to tell their citizens what they should or should not do. Rather they are a set of electoral principles that the people create in order to foster a peaceful and transparent electoral process.

10.6. It is very important that the intended electoral reforms would be in position in time, so as to enable the holding of free and fair elections in 2011. We, however, continue to remain hopeful of seeing a comprehensive electoral reform process which can guarantee free and fair elections. The laws should create a favorable environment for all stakeholders to comprehensively meet democratic bench marks necessary for organizing free and fair elections come 2011.

10.7. It is our duty to work towards ensuring an electoral regime that will pave the way for free and fair elections in a multiparty political dispensation such as Uganda. Therefore, government as the lead stakeholder should look at all the electoral law reform proposals comprehensively to avoid the continuous culture of amending laws every time the country is going for elections.

11. Voter Education

11.1. Article 61(g) of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda empowers the Electoral Commission to formulate and implement civic education programmes relating to elections in the country. This is further re echoed by Section 12(1)(g) of the Electoral Commission Act which asserts that the Commission shall promote and regulate through appropriate means civic education of the citizens of Uganda for the purpose of voting in any language including, where practicable, the use of sign language. We note that previous general elections and by-elections were routinely characterized by low levels of voter education resulting in various electoral discrepancies and confusion in many polling stations both in rural and urban areas. This explains a number of cases where the total number of invalid votes superseded the total numbers of votes received by candidates. We are also still concerned about the low levels of voter education which is likely to bring about negative impacts in the electoral process.

11.2. There is need to find ways of sensitizing the masses as to how to value their vote in preparation for the general elections. Political parties should put their differences aside when it comes to the issue of sensitizing the people about democracy and

human rights. Citizens need to be educated on the democratic process and of the importance to participate in the political life of Uganda by voting in elections. It is also important for voters that they clearly understand how to vote, where to vote and how to ensure their voting choice is honoured. We all agree that voter education increases the participation of citizens in the democratic process.

12. Election Management

12.1. Electoral Management is essentially about the administration and infrastructure required to support the democratic process of elections. Successful elections do not happen without preparation and planning. Elections are managed by an independent electoral body to guarantee the transparency and impartiality of the process beginning from voter education, registration, and management of the electoral register, issue of voters' cards, management of polling stations, vote counting and proclamation of results. Therefore, we call for the creation and strengthening of the capacity of an independent Electoral Commission to serve as the electoral management body in which all people can have trust and confidence for their ability and competence to organize free and fair elections. However, from various past elections we note with regret that the Electoral Commission has had a number of shortcomings.

12.2. It was evident in some parts of the country especially in the local council elections that the Electoral Commission did not make adequate preparations as seen from several weaknesses such as the failure to deliver election materials on time. Shortcomings have also been witnessed in the previous updating of voter registers and voter registration where the staff lacked capacity in terms of equipment. Because of this, many people are likely not to exercise their right to vote. The numbers of people turning up for voting have been reducing every time we have an election. Inadequate preparation for elections is one way of compromising some of the principles of free and fair elections. It is therefore important for us to note that looking at the way the Electoral Commission has been doing its work

we cannot hide away from the fact that there is currently a very negative public perception of this electoral body. It is clear to us that the loss of public confidence, if serious improvements are not undertaken, may lead to a situation where the Commission will not be in position to organize free and fair elections.

13. Election Supervision and Monitoring

13.1. This is the process of supervising the entire electoral process to ensure that the electoral Law that governs the elections is observed: ensuring regular, impartial, objective elections, guaranteeing voters and candidates the free exercise of their rights. Therefore, there must be safeguards during elections by the body in charge of election supervision to establish in a timely manner the revision of voters' lists, the distribution of voters' cards, the timely printing of electoral materials, the publication of the list of polling stations on time, the composition of members of polling stations, thereby ensuring the smooth conduct of elections campaigns.

14. Media Freedom

14.1. "Information is among the principal instruments of democratic participation. Participation without an understanding of the situation of the political community, the facts and the proposed solutions to problems is unthinkable. It is necessary to facilitate conditions of equality in the possession and use of the instruments of information and communications. Special attention must be given to the phenomenon of the news media to be controlled by just a few people or groups". [*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church # 414*].

14.2. We note with great concern that media freedom globally is under threat. In Uganda this pressure on media is also present. Yet we recognize that freedom of expression is a vital key to achieving participatory democracy. It involves the right to voice peoples' opinions, have access to information and free exchange of ideas. This right is protected by the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 19 (i) without any

exception or restriction. Therefore, this includes the freedom of the press which facilitates the flow of information among people. Of late there has been a noticeable crack down on media freedom, contrary to the press rights protected and recognized both under international law and the 1995 Constitution. We should understand that free media plays an indispensable role in the proper functioning of a democracy.

14.3. Particularly, the media function as a “watch dog”. By scrutinizing and discussing the successes and failures of governments, the media can inform the public of how effectively its representatives have performed and help to hold them to account. The media are very important in enabling full public participation in elections, not only by reporting on the performance of government, but also in a number of other ways: for instance, educating voters on how to exercise their democratic rights, reporting on the development of the election campaign, providing a platform for political parties to communicate their message to the electorate, allowing the parties to debate with each other and reporting results and monitoring vote counting. The notion that democracy works better when the people know what their government is doing should be respected.

14.4. However, while the above is true, we would like also to caution the people of Uganda that media freedom is not in any way a ticket to abuse that freedom. Freedom must go with responsibility. We strongly desire to see free, independent and responsible journalism that works to promote the common good for all. It is very crucial to note that free and fair elections will thrive well when there is an independent, mature and responsible media. “The media must be used to build up and sustain the human community in its different sectors: economic, political, cultural, educational and religious. The information provided by the media should be at the service of the common good. Society has a right to information based on truth, freedom, justice and solidarity.” [*The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church # 415*]. Our expectations of the media are that it should be educative, informative, balanced, constructive and responsible.

15. The Security Agencies and Elections

- 15.1. The army and Police force should be restored to their proper roles and responsibilities: the protection and defense of the people's lives and their property. Misplacement of security forces may bring back the memories of a past history that still lingers in the minds of the people where such forces were used in harassing civilians, destroying property and killing. As a result people lost all confidence in the armed forces and the police.
- 15.2. We appreciate government efforts to restore the trust and dignity of the armed forces and the police who can now be among the people and work amicably with them. However, what we see now is that there is a tendency of repeating the mistakes of the past and the result is a diminishing trend of trust and respect of both the police and the army. Involving them in partisan politics is a danger that is developing and yet they need to remain forces by the people and for the people and must NOT be for individuals or the ruling authority.
- 15.3. Article 208(2) of the Constitution provides that the UPDF shall be non partisan, national in character, patriotic, professional, disciplined, and productive and subordinate to the civilian authority as established by the Constitution. It should be noted that the army contributes to democracy as a state organ. It protects the territorial integrity and security from internal and external subversion. Therefore, the army should hold the responsibility for the protection and the creation of a peaceful atmosphere necessary for democratic activities. In past elections, the army has been identified with harassment, intimidation and violence during campaigns and during voting, which in many cases subverted the will of the people.
- 15.4. Having seen the numerous atrocities committed by the army since independence, a new face of the army is being advocated for, especially during this period of preparation for elections. In order to have a disciplined army and to safeguard the Constitution we must develop a literate and political force which can preserve the Constitution. The army must not get involved

in political organs but must serve the interests of the nation as opposed to group or individual interests.

15.5. We cannot develop a democratic free and fair electoral system that can ensure people's true participation and representation unless there exist a disciplined and professional army. We are very much aware of the historical role the army has played in destabilization and destruction of rule of law and Constitutionalism in this country. This calls for proper streamlining and identification of an agreeable and Constitutional role for the army in the electoral process.

15.6. The continued alliance of the army with politicians must be checked because it will result in the destruction of this country and the continued violation of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the electorate. The army must resist individual domination. Therefore, the role of the army in the electoral process must be constitutionally constituted, non partisan and non sectarian. This will help the country to overcome the bad history of electoral chaos, violence and intimidation contrary to the will of the people.

16.The Electorate

16.1. We call upon the electorate to be very critical of those vying for political office. Is their language a language of peace, unity, reconciliation and hope? Do they respect the views of others? How does he or she answer questions from the people? "A true leader is one who accepts victory or defeat according to the free choice of the majority of the people. He is ready to exercise the power for the good of the people and not just for his own good or that of his party. He educates his followers along the same pattern of morality."["*I have heard the Cry of My People*" Message from the Catholic Bishops of Uganda, 11th November 1980]. Be aware of those with followers that are ready to destroy people's lives and property. You will know them from their language and actions

- 16.2. Active participation of our citizens is expected. Those who do not vote are responsible for the leadership we all elect. We also call upon the voters to reject unrealistic promises made by the aspirants at all levels of leadership. Voters should make informed demands considering someone's manifesto and the position he/she is aspiring for.
- 16.3. It is also our responsibility as voters to ensure a free, peaceful and smooth electoral process devoid of fraud and manipulation. Our action or inaction will determine the election results. We must take part in a responsible and informed manner to ensure that the electoral process is managed in a transparent way.
- 16.4. The leaders of the different political parties should abandon their differences and unite in tackling the challenges within their political parties and other challenges facing the country.
- 16.5. Freedom of expression and the freedom of the media, being a Constitutional right throughout the electoral process, should be respected to allow the free flow of information and exchange of ideas during the forthcoming electoral period.
- 16.6. All people aspiring for different political positions should develop a culture of respecting election results. We should avoid participating in elections in bad faith. Instead, if we are not satisfied with results, there are clear legal mechanisms and procedures we should exploit to challenge the outcomes.

17. Political Parties and Internal Democracy

- 17.1. Article 71 of the 1995 Constitution provides inter alia that internal organization of the political party shall conform to the democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution. However, of recent we have witnessed a number of challenges as far as management and organization of some political parties are concerned. There is a visible lack of a culture of political tolerance. There has been a lot of inter and intra party friction which threatens this new system of multiparty political dispensation. Individuals and groups are intolerant to people

having divergent political views. We are very much concerned with the deteriorating internal democracy within political parties and the lack of openness and transparency in the conduct of party affairs.

17.2. There has been limited transparency in the elections of the party leadership both at local and national levels which has led to bitter infighting. Such events bring shame to our country and threaten democracy. There is still therefore a lack of a clear understanding of the operation of a multiparty political system. We, however, commend the positive step taken by some parties to come together for the good of the country to form the inter-party dialogue. This we believe is one of the best ways to end political disputes that arise out of undemocratic tendencies. This will foster unity and harmony, build national reconciliation and tolerance among the parties. We need to put party interests aside and act in the best interest of the country.

18. The Role of Parliament

18.1. We applaud parliament for some positive steps to address issues of national concern such as the plight of corruption and enacting some people oriented legislations. However the concern of coming up with special legislation on elections is still wanting. As the supreme organ of the state we urge parliament, to ensure the cry of the people to have proper and genuine electoral legislations in place is urgently addressed. This should be done in the name of the people and for the common good for all.

19. The Executive

19.1. While we recognize the continued government effort to improve and strengthen electoral democracy under a multiparty political dispensation, there is much more that needs to be done. The gaps left behind by the Presidential election (Amendment) Bill 2009, Parliamentary elections (Amendment) Bill 2009 and the Electoral Commission Amendment Bill 2009 should be accorded urgent attention in order to guarantee a peaceful electoral process.

- 19.2. The state should come out and punish groups and individuals who violate electoral laws. This must be made abundantly clear in the proposed electoral law reforms. There should be clear and identifiable enforcement mechanisms to avoid a continuation of a culture of impunity whereby many offenders have in the past contested in elections and even been declared victorious.
- 19.3. The Government has full responsibility to ensure that the electoral process is undertaken in a democratic, transparent and accountable way. This process should guarantee a free and fair environment according active and informed participation of the people of Uganda.
- 19.4. The people of Uganda would like to see an improved legal environment for electoral activities. We should apply the law in a manner that is impartial and just. This will encourage our people to trust the leadership of the country and abandon temptations to look externally for solutions that can easily be found in the ballot box. The electoral legal framework should provide a linkage.
- 19.5. Media freedom is a preserve of Article 29.1 of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda and therefore requires that government deals with the media appropriately and fairly. Government should make use of available legal mechanisms instead of resorting to abrupt closure and suspension of radio stations or print media outlets. This is detrimental to the free flow, exchange and access to information as a fundamental human right provided under Article 41 of the 1995 Constitution and the Right to access to information Act of 2005.
- 19.6. The legitimate concern of the people about the electoral system should be given adequate attention. If not addressed, this will mostly likely frustrate all efforts to ensure an open and democratic electoral process.
- 19.7. The poor financial position of the Electoral Commission has in the past disabled and limited its ability to properly execute its Constitutional functions. We, therefore, call for timely and

adequate funding of the Electoral Commission to enable it to play its role in a satisfactory manner.

19.8. We would like to see a conducive and smooth electoral process free from all forms of fear, threats and intimidation of both the voters and candidates.

20. The Role of the State

20.1. Government should recognize the fact that “authentic democracy is not merely the result of a formal observation of a set of rules but is the fruit of a convinced acceptance of the values that inspire democratic procedures: the dignity of every human person, the respect of human rights, commitment to the common good as the purpose and guiding criterion for political life”. If there is no consensus on these values, the deepest meaning of democracy is lost and its stability is compromised. *[Cf. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church # 407].*

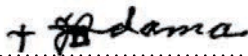
20.2. The role of the state in improving the human rights record of Uganda before, during and after elections must be seen targeting security agencies, whose image has been tarnished according to the findings in the various elections reports for the past electoral periods. We must seriously look to our record on protection of civil and political rights here in our country. We should understand that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Although there are a number of electoral reforms in place, people are still skeptical on the state commitment to enforcing the electoral laws equally and fairly without discrimination. As we move towards general elections we should not be advocates of violence, hatred, subversion or terrorism but of sustainable peace and reconciliation, free and fair elections.

21. Conclusion

21.1. In conclusion, the rulers and the ruled must have a commitment to protect the Constitution. It is, therefore, very,

important that the people of Uganda are closely involved in the process to improve our electoral system so that we all can regard the system as our own and be ready to defend and protect it.

21.2. We, the Catholic Bishops of Uganda, would like to reaffirm the Catholic Church's commitment to work with all peace loving Ugandans in the struggle to pursue a clean and clear path towards sustainable, democratic free and fair elections in our country. We need to identify a common ground for a common good. By acknowledging our differences we can find common ground on which together we can work for democratic changes and participation. Only when we perceive human dignity as the foundation of all human existence can we fully understand the need to struggle for a common good. As we move towards 2011, national unity is paramount and must override all other interests. We would like to see an open, free, peaceful and democratic electoral process where all people and most especially leaders reach out with one message of unity, justice, peace and reconciliation.



† **John Baptist Odama,**
Archbishop of Gulu and Chairman of Uganda Episcopal Conference

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Rt. Rev. Deogratias Muganwa Byabazaire	-	Ordinary of Hoima
Rt. Rev. Charles Martin Wamika	-	Ordinary of Jinja
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Rt. Rev John Baptist Kakubi	-	Bishop Emeritus of Mbarara
Rt. Rev Erasmus Wandera	-	Bishop Emeritus of Soroti

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1. Church and State Guiding Principles, 1961
2. Shaping our National Destiny, 1962
3. Reshaping our Nation, 1979
4. I Have Heard The Cry of My People, 30th October, 1980
5. Be Converted and Live, 14th March, 1981
6. In God We Trust, 1982
7. Celebrating Our Ancestors in the Faith, 14th November, 1984
8. With a New Heart and a New Spirit, 29th June 1986
9. Towards A New National Constitution, 26th March, 1989
10. The AIDS Epidemic, 8th September, 1989
11. Let your Light Shine, 18th October, 1992
12. Political Maturity: Constitution Peace and National Unity in Uganda, 13th April 1995
13. Be My Witnesses, August 1996
14. The Evil of Abortion, April 1998
15. True Peace Comes from Respect for Human Rights, January 1999
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19. Towards a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda based on Common Good,
November 2005
20. Building a Peaceful, United and Prosperous Uganda through Free and
Fair Elections: Consolidating Electoral Democracy in Uganda,
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