TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC AND PEACEFUL UGANDA BASED ON THE COMMON GOOD

The Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter
On the Transition from the Movement System
of Governance to Multiparty Politics

THE 19 CATHOLIC DIOCESES IN UGANDA

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To the Catholic Clergy, Religious, Lay Men and Women,
Our Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,
All believers and all Ugandans of Good will.

1.0 Greetings of peace:

"May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May the Lord let His Face shine on you and be Gracious to you.
May the Lord uncover His Face to you and bring you peace."

2.0 Introduction:

On our way to the important days of elections which are ahead, we shall once more live the preparation and the celebration of the feast of the Birth of Jesus, Christmas Day. We shall then celebrate the light that "shines in darkness which darkness could not overcome" ***(Jn. 1:15).*** This light has been confided in us and it "should not be hidden ... it should shine for every one in the house" ***(Mt. 5:15).***

And so, enlightened by the Good News of Jesus as described in the Social Doctrine of our Church, we invite all who seek a democratic and peaceful Uganda, to take time and consider some recommendations that could make this period of transition a time of growth and Peace offered for all of us by God.

In addition, we express our gratitude to the Lord for bringing you this far in His service and service to humanity. We equally thank God for taking us as a country through several challenges into a promising future. There is need for us to sustain these prospects by being vigilant and ensuring that nothing derails our determination to build a country "... befitting mankind because it befits Christ..." which in the words of the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church ".... means building a city of man that is more human because it is in greater conformity with the Kingdom of God" (#63).

3.0 Appreciation:

1) We would like, first and foremost, to recognize the positive developments that have been recorded since our last Pastoral Letter **"A Concern for Peace, Unity and Harmony in Uganda"** issued during Easter of 2004. The content of this letter remains very relevant even today. Once again we say;
"We must all build peace in our hearts as individuals; we must build peace in our families and communities and then we shall be able to build peace in our nation. This is a big call we want to make to our pastoral agents, all leaders in the country to build a culture of peace, security and tolerance among all individuals and communities in Uganda" (#9 (2))

2) Among the positive developments that have been registered are the following;

   - The opening of political space and registration by political parties have been made possible through appropriate laws such as the Political Organizations Act and the amendment of articles 74 and 269 of the 1995 Constitution. Such has ushered in a new political dispensation and a

significant change from the Movement to the Multi-party system of governance.

- There has been a strong and consistent recourse to the courts of law, as opposed to violence, by individuals and groups who felt dissatisfied with certain provisions of the Political Organizations Bill.

- Several political parties have responded positively to the legal calls for registration. As we write there are 33 registered political parties operating legally in the Country.

- In addition there have been a number of constitutional amendments that have paved way for more freedoms on the one hand, but have also raised some significant controversies. Issues such as the lifting of the term limits on the Presidency and "Federo" were particularly contentious and are likely to remain so for an unforeseeable future. It is our hope that these contentions will continue to be dealt with through honest and transparent dialogue among those concerned.

3) In the same spirit we thank Parliament for the expediency shown in passing laws to facilitate people's participation in determining the destiny of their country. However, we do at the same time recognize the disagreements that emerged over the last referendum on change of political systems. We are particularly pleased with the civility exhibited by opposition groups who despite boycotting the referendum did not resort to any extrajudicial means to express their grievances.

4.0 Observations and concerns:

On the transition process:

1) We observe and note with concern some unhealthy trends in our country that seem to provide the seed for discord, fear and uncertainty. These trends need to concern all of us, for their consequences can be destructive not only to us today, but also to the future generation.

2) While we note with understanding that the transition towards multiparty politics is arousing bitter memories of the past, it is also observed that for many other Ugandans it is offering fresh hopes for a better future based on tolerance and cooperation in the pursuit of the common good for all.

3) Most political parties, old and new, are spending much energy on internal power struggles instead of concentrating on organizational strengthening and policy development.

4) We have also observed with great concern the militaristic trend developing in the transition process, with some parties already forming or planning to form Youth brigades to promote their manifestoes through use of violence. A lot of concerns have begun to emerge about the possible destructive role of Kalangala Action Plan (KAP) during the ongoing campaigns and forthcoming elections. We too share the concerns of these peace-loving Ugandans and hope that Government will reign on this group and ensure that no party supports any militant group that can derail the relatively smooth political process.

5) General concerns for peace in the troubled areas of the country:

a) <u>The Conflicts in Northern and Eastern Uganda:</u>

- We once again reiterate our call to Government to do all it can to end the war in the North without any further delays. We do understand that significant achievements have been recorded in terms of security of people and property - reduction in abductions, security on roads and the surrender of many Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) fighters - thanks to the Government and to the Amnesty Act and the efforts of Ms. Betty Bigombe and different religious and political groups in Northern Uganda.

- During our visit to the war-torn regions we came across what we believed was unacceptable situation that needed immediate intervention. We were overwhelmed by the level of desperation and suffering that the people of Northern and Eastern Uganda were going through. We raised important questions that were presented to the President of Uganda by His Eminence Cardinal Wamala – all in a bid to encourage more interventions in the affected regions. It is our belief that following that meeting something tangible is being done by the government to address the several issues we raised.

- We want to emphasize that peace must return to the Northern and Eastern parts of this country. Government bears the primary responsibility of restoring peace; otherwise the gains that this Country has recorded might be lost in a shadow of this unimaginable human pain and suffering. Once again we wish to encourage a negotiable settlement of the conflict in order to stop further loss of lives and perpetuation of violence.

b) <u>The Karamoja Conflict:</u>

- Concerning disarmament in Karamoja, we call for transparency and commitment in the process so that it becomes a really effective intervention. We suggest that the exercise include other fundamental issues in Karamoja, such as apparent marginalisation of Karamoja, poverty, raids and road thuggery, and cultural rigidities among others that have hampered any positive progress in that part of the country.

- We do encourage government to pursue a regional approach in handling the disarmament in Karamoja to ensure that the exercise is carried out simultaneously in the entire Karamoja cluster. In the meantime those who surrender their guns should be protected against attacks by hostile communities from neighboring countries.

- We also insist that the cooperation with civil society organizations, Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC), and other religious

institutions should be of paramount importance. Government needs to recognize the constitutional and spiritual duties of civic society and religious groups to support any peaceful effort to deal with this crisis. We must ensure that any approach in dealing with these situations is guided by respect for the dignity of the human person created in the image of God.

c) **Paramilitary groups:**

- The continued existence of paramilitary groups in the North and East of the country that are now taking over the role of the army should be checked. Special reference is made to the Arrow boys in Teso region, Amuka in Lango, but also now the Elephant in Kitgum and several Local Defence Units (LDUs) in West Nile Sub-region and other parts of the country, all recruited to bolster the efforts of the army to maintain peace in the country.

- Above all, sections of the population have expressed fear of possible manipulation of these groups for selfish political ends. This, in our view, should be avoided as it will contradict the notion of democracy and culture of fundamental peace.

5.0 General Recommendations:

a) **We call upon Government:**

- To translate into tangible structures and systems their suggestions for the national

reconciliation that will see all Ugandans participate actively in the process. We suggest that an instrument for reconciliation be instituted (possibly a national conference) to discuss and analyze the conflicts in this country and agree on how to resolve them. A possible establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission has already been proposed by His Excellency the President of Uganda, but in order for such initiative to succeed it should be adequately participatory and accompanied by openness and sincerity on the part of every Ugandan who in one way or another contributed to the bloody past and present.

- To provide adequate resources for timely Civic Education exercise to enable people exercise their civic rights through full participation based on full information about the political process. We suggest that civil society be engaged in this process in order for it to reach as many people as possible. Meanwhile civic education should be developed as an exercise that will continue to educate the people even after the elections are gone.

- To create a conducive environment where every one will feel free and safe to participate fully in the political activities so that the common good achieved is celebrated by all equally. Government ought to create a levelled political playing field that will enable all political parties to compete favorably for political power. Political activities should be totally demilitarized in order to create confidence in Ugandans and

enhance their hope for a peaceful, democratic and prosperous future.

- To provide sufficient facilitation to the relevant bodies, especially the Electoral Commission to enable it carry out its mandate with efficiency and effectively. At the same time we call on the Electoral Commission to play its role with total impartiality and transparency and ensure that the forthcoming elections are conducted in accordance with provided guidelines.

b) Politicians and Political Parties:

- All political parties, old and new, should strive to resolve their internal conflicts in a peaceful manner. We hear of eruption of violence during a number of party primary elections and internal discord in some parties that seem to set a bad precedence for the overall national political competition during this multiparty political dispensation. It is imperative and important for parties to reflect on these developments and lay appropriate strategies that will enable them gain the confidence of the people.

- Politicians and political parties should desist from sacrificing the common good for selfish ends. In his Encyclical letter "Peace on Earth", issued in 1963, Pope John XXIII states categorically that "the chief concern of civil authorities must...be to ensure (rights and duties of individuals) are acknowledged, respected, coordinated with other rights, defended and promoted...." (#60). This means

that all their activities should be informed by the need to build strong foundations for peace and prosperity for all Ugandans and not for a few in positions of power. In other words, the human person **MUST** be at the centre of all political programmes.

- Political parties should develop meaningful manifestoes with clear strategies to deal with most of the pressing challenges of our times – notably corruption, insecurity, tribalism and nepotism, rampart poverty and intolerance.

- Politicians should act with maturity in the face of every challenge. The resort to violence in all its forms is not only demeaning of one's dignity but is also contradictory to the very notion of democracy and peace that we are all yearning to achieve in this country.

- Unity in diversity should be among important ingredients of the pluralistic political dispensation that Uganda has embraced. With unity as a starting point and the pursuit of the common good for all citizens of Uganda as a fundamental political principle, we can be assured of a peaceful political transition and greater future prosperity as a country.

- The politics of empty promises to mislead the public, together with all other corrupt and non-transparent ways of politicking, should be history. We should transcend trivialism and embrace fundamental values of political tolerance, transparency and accountability at all levels of our society.

- Of course as is the case with any competition, there is always a winner and a looser. We appeal to those who go through the exercise successfully to celebrate with dignity while the losers accept defeat honorably and embark on enhancing their possibilities to win come next elections.

c) The Electorate:

- All citizens should be vigilant and concerned about any behaviour that might destroy the prospects of achieving the common good for all.

- All citizens should observe responsibly, their rights and obligations before, during and after the transitional period so that peace and tranquility may prevail in our country.

- Citizens should avoid passivity or **'I don't care'** attitude towards what affect them and the country at large; rather we should all participate actively in all the processes to full democratic culture in our country.

- Citizens should be vigilant and ensure that they safeguard their freedoms against any form of bribery during the forthcoming elections. We should all remember that bribes only benefit us individually and make us vote for bad leaders. Yet we bear the responsibility to contribute towards electing leaders that will take care of our aspirations, concerns and expectations as a duty and not as a privilege.

- We should similarly desist from putting undue pressure on politicians with demands and conditions that are clearly unrealistic and immoral. We should vote for political parties for what their programmes are and how they address our key concerns and wishes for this country.

d) The Candidates:

- All contestants should abide by the slogan of their respective political parties in order to create a positive impression on the electorate as a sure strategy to win their confidence and trust. As our history indicates, violence and conflict will win us nothing, while peace and tolerance will bring about increased confidence in the electorates. Let the rules and regulations of the game be backed with the spirit of tolerance, and reconciliation remain the center of every step we take.

- All of us should unite in solidarity adhering to the values and principles of common good. Political diversity should be rooted in this common good around which all party programmes should revolve.

- Contestants ought to develop and appreciate the need to stick to the principle of patriotism for our country Uganda. We should remember that no-body will love our country for us if we ourselves do not do it.

- Every individual or group contestant should endeavour to become a channel and an instrument of peace and reconciliation before,

during and after the transition. Let those who are bent on creating conflict and misunderstanding be brought to order through persuasion.

6.0 New issues:

1) The Army

a) (i) We applaud government for getting tough on serving army officers participating in active politics. With Uganda's nasty past the destructive role of the army in politics cannot be taken lightly. We are happy to note that the army will no longer be represented in Parliament. This is a positive development especially in the era of multiparty political dispensation.

(ii) Meanwhile we recommend that army laws should be applied with due diligence and impartiality so that all army personnel may feel fairly treated.

(iii) The Police should be strengthened to play the role of keeping law and order during the electoral process. As much as possible, the army should be left out of the process.

b) We call for transparency and accountability on issues of facilitation to parliamentarians during debates on critical matters which are contentious. Such an act on the part of the ruling government sends a negative signal. Transparency in the whole political transition process is crucial if we are to avoid a repeat of mistakes of the 1980 and 2001 general elections.

Facilitation to Members of Parliament should be streamlined so that it does not appear to be an inducement to our honorable Members of Parliament to make compromised decisions.

2. **Members of Parliament**

On the other hand we remind the Members of Parliament (MPs) that their primary responsibility is towards the people and not the Cabinet or even their parties or any other arms of government. MPs should know that:

- They are held in very high esteem by their electorates to whom they must always be accountable. People have a right to make them accountable for their actions and indeed we do encourage the citizens to do so always.
- At this critical moment of our history as a nation, we would like to advise our MPs to observe the highest degree of patriotism and honor in order to steer the country towards lasting peace. They should be guided by the principle of "common good for all Ugandans".
- The "self-seeking politics" that has characterized Uganda's politics for several years since independence should be shunned.
- Again government must deal decisively with any form of vote-buying and bribery before and during elections. Meanwhile politicians should desist from making empty promises that put them in a compromised position.

3. **Electoral Commission**

The Electoral Commission bears the obligation to ensure the prevalence of a smooth and transparent

process, keeping well in mind the dangers that mismanaged elections have always posed for peace and development in this country since 1961. The institution should be well facilitated to carry out its work in an impartial manner.

4. **Government**
   Government should pay special attention to the war-ravaged areas during the transition period. It should ensure a conducive atmosphere for the people to participate in the process without fear or intimidation from both government security agencies and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

7.0 Conclusion:

Pastoral Agents

As for the Church, the pastoral agents such as Priests, Religious, Catechists, Justice and Peace Commissions in the whole country should educate the people on the political transition through provision of accurate information using all available means. In their duties they should be governed by a deep appreciation of impartiality in order to maintain the confidence of all sides competing for political power. They should not condone any behaviour that seem to undermine a smooth political process – issues such as intimidation, bribery of voters, violence, manipulation cannot be left to go on unabated.

We encourage all Christians with plans to contest for different leadership posts at whatever level to do so but at the same time they should remember that leadership is a noble service and an expression of Christian commitment of service to others.

May we all live up to the Motto of our country "For God and My Country" as a uniting factor for all citizens in the country irrespective of tribe, religion, colour, or any other differences.

Let us all seize this opportunity to deepen our democracy in a spirit of participation and solidarity. Let us nourish the hope we all have to build a new, just and caring society in which every one will feel at home.

Let us all cast our vote, for candidates and parties which will in all likelihood strive and promote national reconciliation, peace and prosperity.

We request all Catholic Clergy and pastoral agents:

- That they should encourage their congregations to continue praying for peace and reconciliation in Uganda.
- They should read and teach the message contained in this letter to all their congregations throughout Advent and the beginning of the New Year.

May the peace and joy of Christmas bring new life to every one and our country at large. May it enable all Ugandans to live in peace, unity and harmony throughout the transition period.

Given by us the Catholic Bishops of Uganda, at St. Augustine Institute, Nsambya-Kampala, on 11th November 2005.

+Paul K. Bakyenga

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Printed at Marianum Press Ltd., P.O. Box 11 KISUBI – Uganda
Tel. 041 321341 Fax: 041 321458 Email: marianum@utlonline.co.ug
M.XII.2005 5M. RJ 195/2005

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1. Shaping our National Destiny, 1962
2. Reshaping our Nation, 1979
3. I Have Heard The Cry of My People, 30th October, 1980
4. Be Converted and Live, 14th March, 1981
5. In God We Trust, 1982
6. Celebrating Our Ancestors in the Faith, 14th November, 1984
7. With a New Heart and a New Spirit, 29th June 1986
8. Towards A New National Constitution, 26th March, 1989
9. The AIDS Epidemic, 8th September, 1989
10. Let your Light Shine, 18th October, 1992
11. Political Maturity: Constitution Peace and National Unity in Uganda, 13th April 1995
12. Be My Witnesses, August 1996
13. The Evil of Abortion, April 1998
14. True Peace Comes from Respect for Human Rights, January 1999
15. Test The Spirits, June 2000
16. A Concern for Peace, Unity and Harmony in Uganda, April 2004
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18. Towards a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda based on Common Good, November 2005

November, 2005