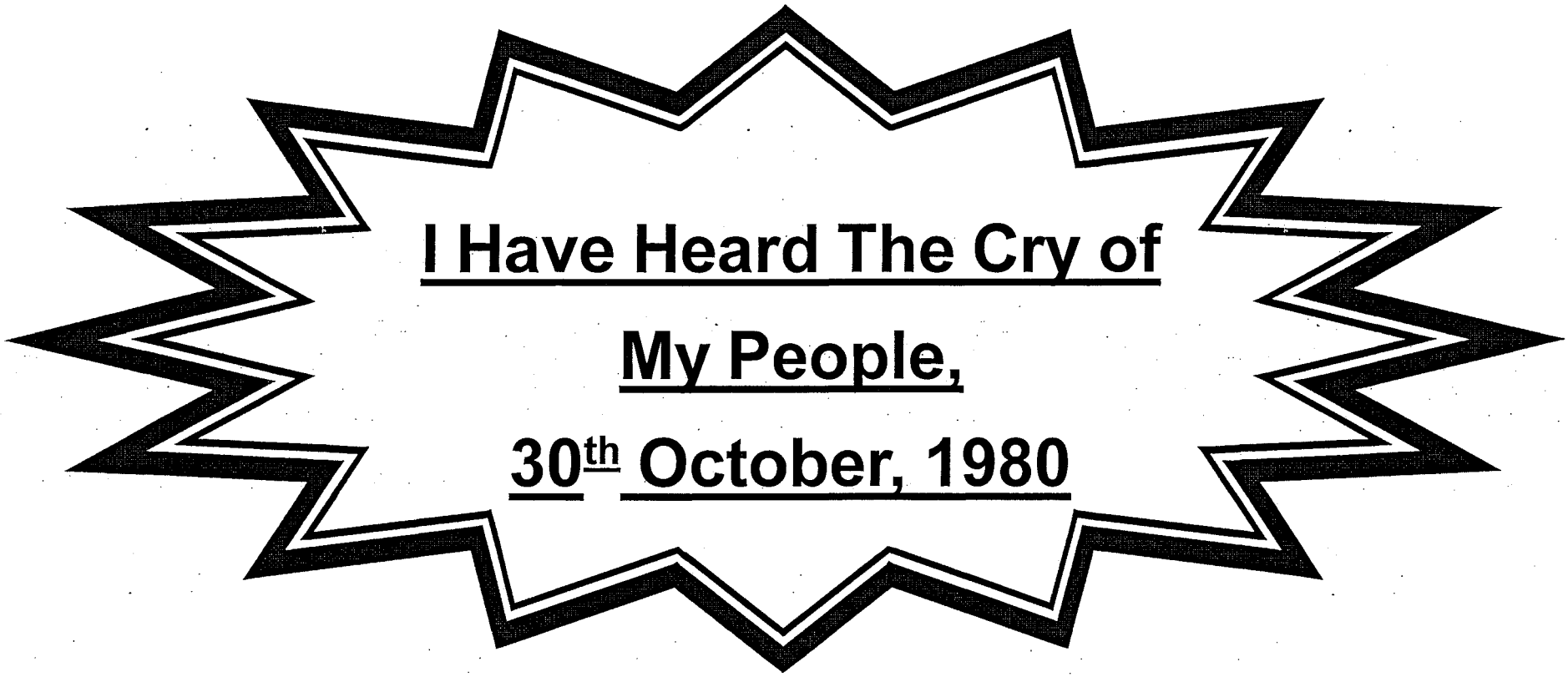
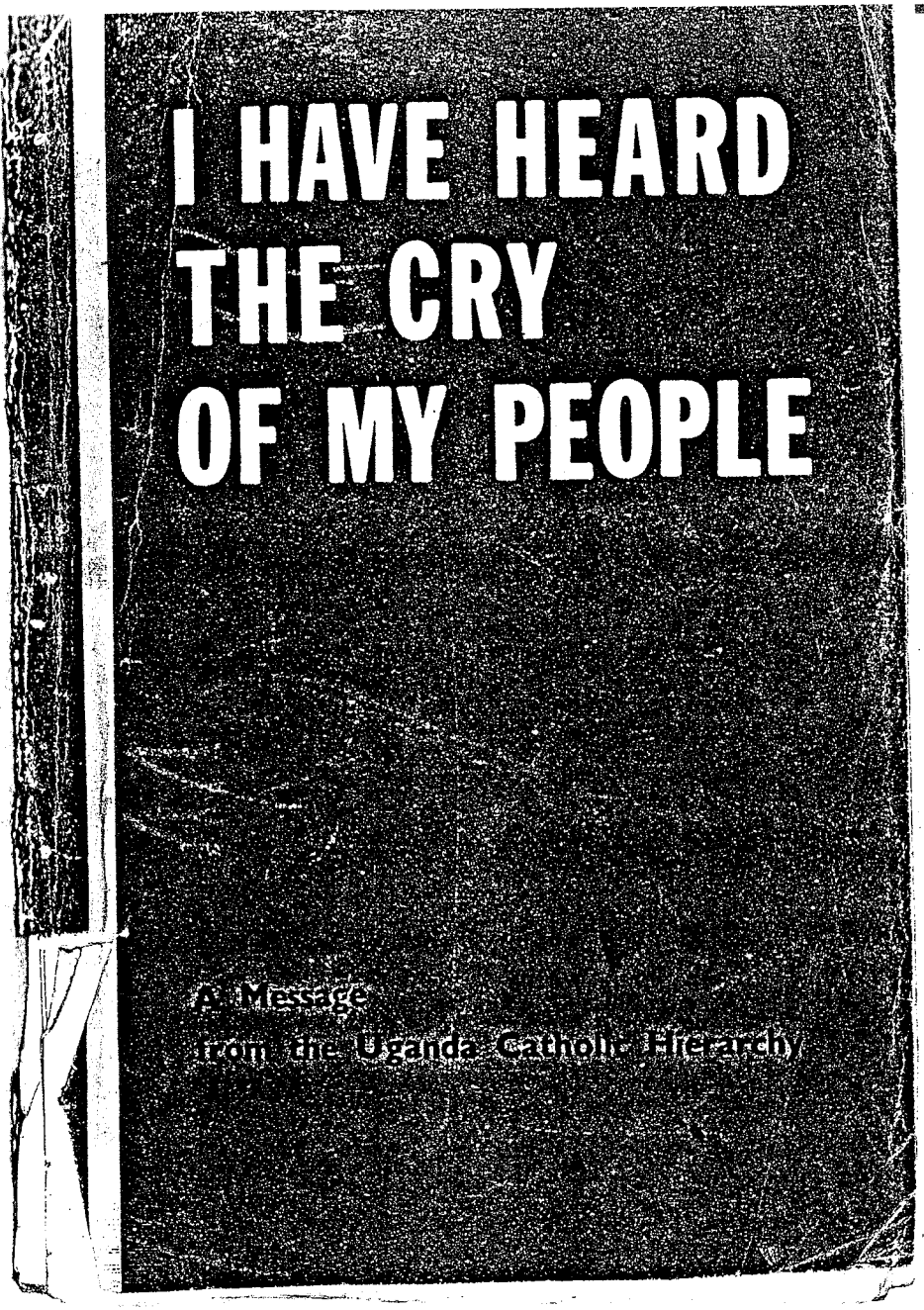

I Have Heard The Cry of
My People,
30th October, 1980


I HAVE HEARD
THE CRY
OF MY PEOPLE
A Message
from the Uganda Catholic Hierarchy

TO OUR CLERGY AND RELIGIOUS, TO ALL THE FAITHFUL CATHOLIC LAITY AND TO ALL UGANDANS OF GOOD WILL: PEACE AND GOD'S BLESSINGS.

1. God's Power

Both in times of joy and in times of sorrow God spoke to his people through the mouth of his prophets. They were not always the best of speakers, but acted in humility and trusting in God's power; thus they were able to bring comfort and hope, both by speaking God's words and by sharing the fate of their people. As Israel suffered at the hands of the Egyptians, God spoke to one of these religious leaders, Moses, and said: "I have heard the cry of my people, and I have decided to set them free."

It is with Moses' same feelings of humility and of trust in God that we wish to address ourselves to you. We know that we cannot bring a quick solution to the problems that beset you on every side. Just the same, we want you to know that in your hour of sorrow we, your shepherds, are close to you with sympathy, fatherly love and solidarity. Once again we renew our intention of being the voice of the poor and of the oppressed, the defenders of truth and right, the agents of reconciliation and conversion. Where our efforts fail, may God's mercy and power triumph.

2. West Nile in Sorrow

First of all we want to express our brotherly concern and solidarity to our brother in the episcopate, Bishop

Angelo Tarantino of Arua. We know of your suffering and we thank God, who has given you strength and kept you safe. We know how you yourself have been harassed, together with your closest associates, by unruly members of the Armed Forces. We mourn with you over the violent death of one of your religious at the hands of the same people. Together with you we deprecate the desacration of Churches and sanctuaries, such as happened at Maracha. We condemn in the strongest terms those undisciplined elements of different forces in the country who have destroyed and looted property, scattered your flock, stained their hands with innocent blood. We long to see you safe and in good health. At this time we assure you, your faithful and courageous clergy and religious, your suffering people, that our blessings, our prayers and our hearts are with you. May God bring peace, security and pardon to all the oppressed and the oppressors.

3. The Victims of Violence

We associate ourselves to the concern expressed by Emmanuel Cardinal Nsubuga on November 2nd, for the victims of violence, their families and their murderers. We make our own His plea for peace and for forgiveness. We encourage our faithful people to extend a helping hand to those who, having been touched by violence, need special care and support. From the information we have we are deeply concerned and worried about the suffering situation of the people in the Diocese of Arua, mainly in the Districts of Arua and Moyo.

The main victim of the fighting among different forces is the population. Many civilians have been killed

and their corpses have been left unburied for several days; terror spread around the villages forcing the population to take refuge outside Uganda. We appeal to the solidarity of all Ugandans and to the responsibility of the leaders of the Nation and of International Organisations to make all possible efforts for the relief of the suffering people both inside and outside the country. We want in fact to declare that the majority of those who fled the country have done so out of fear and not because they are enemies of Uganda.

4. Violence and the Army

Unifortunately, violence has been the curse that has poisoned the lives of people all over the country. As defenders of the weak we make our own the concern of citizens for their personal safety, for the security of their property and for their future as free human beings. In the past we appealed, both in public letters and private conversation, to the political and military leaders of the country, but up to now the situation has not improved. Indeed in some areas it has deteriorated. We want therefore to make an appeal to all men of good will in such a way that all may know our deep concern for the suffering of the ordinary citizen.

For too long people in uniform have engaged in acts of violence against peaceful civilians rather than defending them from the enemies of peace. Under different pretexts houses and citizens have been searched and deprived of their property at gunpoint. The sight of a uniform is now an occasion for fear and apprehension. Common criminals have found an easy method to carry out their activities — a military uniform. We long for

the day when Ugandans in uniform will act as defenders of the people and not as their enemies.

We ask therefore the responsible leaders to take what steps are necessary to ensure the desired peace and security. We consider it very important that soldiers be chosen through a really nation-wide and careful recruiting, be given moral and professional training, clear supervision and discipline. These are necessary and traditional conditions for the dignity and function of a national army.

In a particular way we make our own the request of local leaders that soldiers with their guns be confined to the barracks and that security be entrusted to a properly trained police force.

5. Honest and Free Elections

The coming elections are an extraordinary event for our Nation and of vital importance for overcoming the evils we have mentioned.

Therefore we are greatly concerned about them, and desire that each citizen may be able to express his free choice in a peaceful atmosphere. Many people across the country have expressed concern and sorrow over the high-handed tactics used in the political and social fields. Rigged registration lists and dishonest practices of intimidation have been reported in many parts of the country. Even duly appointed delegates to party conventions have seen their religious and/ or tribal origin used against them. There is a pervading feeling of dejection among common people, that stems from the fact that those who hold power seem to care little

for the voice of the common citizen. This in itself is against the rights and dignity of honest and God fearing Ugandans.

Although many of the malpractices mentioned above are carried out at local level and mostly by undisciplined elements inside various parties; we nevertheless question the interest and the sense of responsibility of the respective leaders. In some cases in fact these leaders seem to favour or to cover under silence such proceedings. In most cases, because of the lack of true respect for popular choices, they fail to give to their followers strong leadership and a clear understanding of the implications of a true democratic regime. 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.

6. The Right to Information

Truth and reliable information are necessary for the growth of national conscience and solidarity. We have very often observed in the people a lack of knowledge of what is going on in other parts of Uganda and as a consequence of it, lack of interest. For a long time many Ugandans were not aware of what was going on in Karamoja. Now they do not know what is going on in West Nile and Kasese District, just as if these areas were not part of the Nation.

We may for the moment be enjoying a certain freedom of the press, yet we lament that the people of Uganda are not given the truth about some important

events that should be the concern of the nation as a whole. Among these issues we list:

— the indiscriminate shooting which takes place nearly every night in and around Kampala;

— the fighting of soldiers among themselves;

— the retaliation of armed forces against civilians;

— the financial situation of the country;

The real causes of these incidents, how they developed and the steps taken to solve them, not only are not explained to the people, but, at times, are covered up according to the views of certain political leaders. We find it difficult to accept that the tragedy of West Nile may be covered up simply by use of the sacred word of "Liberation." A situation of fear and violence in the context of imminent elections, cannot be covered up by superficial declarations that "everything is under control." This kind of falsehood generates the suspicion of connivance. Truth is the force of peace and is required by dignity of people.

7. Our Hopes and Plans

In the wake of the recent Synod of Bishops in Rome we shall address ourselves to the family over the next few months. In due time and with expert help we hope to establish also in Uganda a number of programmes and movements that have proved successful elsewhere in the world. But our families cannot now concentrate on spiritual things, when too many of them have to fight the daily battle for physical survival, be it in the desert of Karamoja or in the huts of Katwe. Violence pushes them to reprisal and fear, while poverty pushes

them to dishonesty and immorality. Together with worried parents we look forward to the coming of the Lord in the shape of a time of Peace, Goodness and Justice.

The coming Season of Advent gives us an opportunity to praise and encourage those among you who have kept the faith, practiced charity and forgiveness, spread words of peace and worked for justice. It is through your good works that the Lord will come. Uganda is morally sick and we are certain that a return to sound Christian practice can cure it. A return to moral health can only be obtained through prayer and fasting. With this in mind we plan to announce at a later date a comprehensive programme for a Year of Penance.

At this moment let it suffice to give you the basic idea behind this spiritual project. Sterile repentance leads to gloom and recrimination over the past. This is not in keeping with the Christian spirit. Repentance leads to peace of mind, generosity and joy. When God's people returned from the Exile in Babylon the High Priest was asked to read the Law that many had forgotten. As they listened, their hearts were touched and they all began to cry. The high priest paused in his reading and told the repentant crowd: "Do not cry, because the joy that comes from the Lord is your strength." May this joy be made available to each one of you, rulers and rulers, oppressed and oppressors, victims and tormentors.

The Catholic Bishops of Uganda
Kampala, 11th of November 19[illegible]

THE MESSAGE OF HIS EMINENCE EMMANUEL CARDINAL K. NSUBUGA ARCHBISHOP OF KAMPALA FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE ON ALL SOULS' DAY 1980

My dear sons and daughters in Christ,

Traditionally "All Souls' Day" is the occasion when Catholics offer special prayers for the faithful departed. This year All Souls' Day acquires a special meaning, because it falls on Sunday, the day when we remember in a special way the Mystery of the Resurrection of our Lord. This day also has a special meaning for all of us in Kampala Archdiocese and in the whole country, Uganda. The reason is that for all too long Death has been our daily companion.

With this fact in mind, as your shepherd, I ask all the clergy and the faithful to offer special prayers for the faithful departed on Sunday, November 2nd, for all those members of our Nation, Uganda, who in one way or another have been touched by the tragedy of violent death.

In a special way we want to pray for the repose of the souls of all the VICTIMS of violence. Let us pray for the nameless victims whose bodies are left on our city sidewalks, in ditches and garbage dumps. Let us not forget the victims dumped in our forests and rivers, without the benefits of decent burial and Christian prayers. Let us pray for the victims of the daytime robberies, and nightly house raids. Let us pray for the defenceless civilians, the recent victims in West Nile and other troubled areas of our beautiful country. Let us beseech God's mercy on those who have lost their

lives in and around Karamoja because of hunger and heartless killings. Our prayers go also to the victims of political intrigue.

We also want to express our solidarity with the FAMILIES and friends of these victims. They live lives marked by sorrow, fear and want. I ask each individual Christian to express this solidarity in a concrete way by willingly offering to help neighbours in time of sorrow. Each parish community should consider it a duty to come to the aid of these families irrespective of religious, social or tribal differences. We are all members of God's family.

Prayer and guidance is needed so that the families of these victims of violence be led along the path of forgiveness and reconciliation. Without this Christian outlook, the blood of the victims will have been shed in vain and will only ask for more blood.

At this point, in God's name, I ask all of you to join me in prayer for those who have stained their hands with innocent blood. As Christians we believe that we ourselves have been saved by innocent blood — the Sacred Blood of Christ. He died for all — His tormentors included. The blood of Christ did not cry to vengeance, but for forgiveness and conversion. At this time in history, Uganda needs the *change of hearts* much more than it needs material reconstruction.

On account of all this, every Christian worthy of the name should pray for the MURDERERS who are all around us. We pray for those who pull the trigger and for those who provide the weapons. We pray for those who hire the killers and for those who praise their

murderous deeds. We pray for those who cast a cover of silence over individual killings and over mass murder, thus approving by their murderous silence the existing violence. We also pray for those who are entrusted with our security, that they may use their power for our effective protection, following the will of God. Jesus died for all, including His persecutors. May this *day of commemoration of the victims of violence in our country*, be the beginning of a new age to stop violence in all its forms. May the words of the prophet Zechariah be realised in the lives of the still violent people and penetrate their souls today: "I, the Lord, will pour out a spirit of kindness and prayer. They will look on the one they have pierced and they will mourn for him as for an only son." (Zek. 12,10)

I encourage you strongly to preserve the practice of praying for all the dead during the month of November. But due to the seriousness of the actual situation in our country, *I am making a special appeal to you all God's people of good will.* Let this month of November, 1980, especially on Sundays, be a month of prayer, particularly for all the citizens of our country, who untimely left this world as victims of the current wave of violence.

In conclusion, my dear sons and daughters in Christ, I declare this Second Day of November, 1980, to be a special day of forgiveness and reconciliation, so that new life in Christ may rise from the ashes of senseless death. I urge all of you to carry this spirit of love and forgiveness out of your churches and into your families, your neighbourhoods, our beloved city, our towns and all over the country. During this time of trouble we plan to offer you programmes of reconcili-

ation that will further encourage this process of collective and personal conversion or change of heart. We must all reach the point where, together with the Apostle, we shall be able with God's power to mock death and say: "Oh, death, where is your sting?"

May I conclude this exhortation with the prayer the Holy Father said in St. Peter's last year for Uganda during the War of Liberation:

"I would like the prayer that we address to the Lord together, through the intercession of Mary, Queen of Heaven, to be able to give peace for the dead, relief for the wounded and homeless, protection for the populations threatened by raids or reprisals, humanity for prisoners and mercy for the defeated, forgiveness and reconciliation for everyone."

Given at Rubaga, this 30th day of the month October, 1980, the Fourteenth Anniversary of my Episcopal Ordination.

† *Emmanuel Cardinal K. Nsubuga,*
Archbishop of Kampala

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