

Inter-Religious Council of Uganda



Religions for Peace

CALL FOR AN INTEGRATED RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC

PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release

Fellow Ugandans,

Members of the Press.

On 30th January, World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern. In the wake of the pandemic, countries embarked on devising strategies to curb the spread of the virus and offering support to their citizens to cushion the negative impact caused. In Uganda, the Ministry of Health and His Excellency the President responded by issuing guidelines and directive, respectively to curb the spread of the corona virus.

The Council wishes to applaud His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda for the timely response to ensure safety of all Ugandans and to restrain the spread of COVID-19.

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IRCU also acknowledges and appreciates the food and non-food items being procured and distributed by government and the donations to support the COVID-19 response. We encourage them to donate more towards this cause.

While the Council appreciates this support to Kampala and Wakiso Districts targeting the most vulnerable groups, the distribution process has been slow making the beneficiaries anxious. There are also many more vulnerable groups throughout the country who equally need to be supported.

We also acknowledge the economic stimuli packages as outlined by the different government agencies like Bank of Uganda to restructure loan repayment periods and NSSF to defer contribution by employers for a stipulated period. However, up to-date, the Government is yet come up with a comprehensive economic stimuli strategy to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 pandemic covering all sectors.

The Council recognizes the enormous health challenges that we face as a country and how much the corona virus has stretched this already struggling sector. We are aware of the shortage of personnel, limited access of supplies such as personal protective equipment in addition to the limited beds for Intensive Care Units (ICUs).

The Council is saddened by the on-going stigma around COVID-19 patients. The increasing rate of domestic violence throughout the country, the stress and anxiety among the general population.

The Council has also noted with concern the increasing incidences of land grabbing during the lock-down even after the Minister of Lands issued a directive to halt land transactions and evictions following land wrangles in at-risk districts; Kiryandongo, Hoima, Mubende, Mityana, Kassanda, Wakiso, Luwero, Nakaseke, Nakasongola, Masaka, Mayuge and Napak among others.

Religious leaders take note of COVID 19 increasing the crises which has exacerbated age, gender, and disability inequalities and placed women, girls, and other vulnerable populations at increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV) and intimate partner violence (IPV). In these situations, some women cannot seek recourse with the authorities or seek shelter elsewhere because they are not allowed to move.

Religious leaders note that the corona virus has over-shadowed the existing diseases and conditions such as cancer, TB, diabetes, high blood pressure, sickle cells, HIV and AIDS, malaria, as well as the high maternal and child mortality.

The Council recognizes the role of our security agencies in enforcing the presidential directives on COVID-19 and keeping law and order. While we appreciate the security agencies for heeding to the presidential directive to desist from torturing citizens during the enforcement of the COVID-19 guidelines, we have learnt with concern incidences where some members of the public have attacked and seriously injured some security personnel in the line of duty.

In this regard, we wish to make the following recommendations:

1. To Government:

- Food and non-food items should be distributed in a timely manner to all the vulnerable groups throughout the country. With guidance from the National Task Force, Government should decentralize food distribution to allow other institutions and agencies such as faith groups and civil society to participate in fund-raising, collection, and distribution of items, especially at district and local level.
- Under the guidance of the national task force, the local churches and mosques should be allowed to mobilize and contribute food and non-food items to the most vulnerable groups within their congregations.

- Government should quicken the procurement of protective gear and other health supplies to all health centres that are managing the COVID -19 pandemic inclusive of those managing other illnesses other than COVID-19.
- Government should continue to pay serious attention to the management of existing diseases and conditions in the country such as cancer, TB, diabetes, high blood pressure, sickle cells, HIV and AIDS, malaria, as well as the high maternal and child mortality.
- Government should make provision for transport at the sub-county level for expectant mothers to ensure that they deliver safely.
- Government should increase psycho-social support to the patients, families and communities, and indeed, the general awareness on COVID-19.
- Government should follow up, apprehend and bring to book the heads of the security units under whose command the culprits that shield the land grabbers are coming from.
- Government should amend the NSSF act to offer at least 20% to workers who are willing to receive their pay because of the negative impact of redundancy in the job sector.
- Government and its development partners need to promote Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and civil society participation in Gender Based Violence(GBV) monitoring and reporting, with a key focus on increasing the involvement of women.

2. To Religious leaders:

- Religious leaders, through their structures and networks (Men, Women, Youth and Children's Associations) should increase psycho-social support

to the patients, families and communities, and the general awareness on COVID-19.

- Religious leaders should increase their prophetic voice in the dissemination of the Ministry of Health guidelines and Presidential directives on COVID-19, especially in the rural areas.
- Through the religious structures, promote community resilience by putting in place platforms to support the most vulnerable groups.
- Continue to sustain compassion, hope and care through prayers and virtual outreach programmes.
- In consultation with Government, IRCU will organize the second national prayers.
- To continue preventing and mitigating Gender Based Violence (GBV) during this period.

3. To the general public:

- The general public should continue to adhere to the and Ministry of Health guidelines and the presidential directives, most importantly to stay at home.
- The general public should desist from attacking the security agencies while on duty.
- Members of the general public who are sick should remember to consistently take their medicines as prescribed by their doctors.

- The general public should continue to be vigilant and report any incidences of insecurity, emergencies or suspected cases of COVID-19.
- The general public should desist from Gender Based Violence and report all incidences to the police or local councils.
- The general public in their respective families and homes to continue to pray and extend compassion to one another.
- We encourage men to exercise their roles as priests of the family- promote harmony, parental love and tolerance in the family.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY!

Signed this 21st day of April, 2020 for and on behalf of the faith fraternity in Uganda

No.	Name and Designation	Signature
1.	His Eminence Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubaje Grand Mufti of Uganda Chairperson, Council of Presidents	
2.	His Grace Dr. Cyprian Kizito Lwanga Archbishop of Kampala Roman Catholic Church Uganda Co-Chairperson, Council of Presidents	
3.	His Eminence Metropolitan Jonah Lwanga Archbishop Uganda Orthodox Church Co-Chairperson, Council of Presidents	
4.	His Grace the Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu Archbishop, Province of the Church of Uganda Co-Chairperson, Council of Presidents	

5.	<p>Pastor Dr. Daniel Matte President, Seventh-day Adventist Uganda union Co-Chairperson, Council of Presidents</p>	
6.	<p>Apostle Dr. Joseph Serwadda Presiding Apostle Born Again Faith in Uganda Co-Chairperson, Council of Presidents</p>	
7.	<p>Bishop Joshua Lwere General Overseer National Alliance of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in Uganda Co-Chairperson, Council of Presidents</p>	
8.	<p>Joshua Kitakule Secretary General Inter-Religious Council of Uganda Council Secretary</p>	