

# Inter-Religious Council of Uganda



Religions for Peace

## END-OF-YEAR 2023 PASTORAL LETTER AND MESSAGE TO THE NATION

### Theme:

**“I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is there anything too hard for me?**

**Behold, I am making all things new”**

**(Jeremiah 32:27, Rev 21:5; Quran 20:14, Quran 20:13)**

**VENUE: ARCHBISHOP’S PALACE, CHURCH OF UGANDA**

**DATE: 18TH DECEMBER, 2023**

# ABOUT IRCU

The Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) founded in 2001, is an indigenous, national faith-based organization uniting efforts of religious institutions to jointly address issues of common concern. The member organizations that constitute IRCU are; the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Uganda, the Uganda Orthodox Church, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, the Seventh-day Adventist Uganda Union, the Born-Again Faith in Uganda and the Association of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in Uganda.

## VISION

**"A divinely peaceful, united, prosperous Uganda where all people enjoy full health and freedoms for the common good."**

## MISSION

**"To promote peace, reconciliation, good governance, and holistic human development through interfaith action and collaboration, advocating for the empowerment of member bodies for the common good."**

## IRCU MANDATE

- a) Building the capacity of FBOs and religious leaders so that they rise up to today's challenges;
- b) Mobilizing resources for addressing the challenges;
- c) Influencing Public Policy Advocacy;
- d) Acting as an agent of social change and transformation.

**Fellow Citizens,**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow!**

We are thankful to God for this opportunity to address you as your religious leaders as we enter the festive season of Christmas and look forward to the New Year. We thank God for His protection and providence and for all the other mercies upon our Nation. We speak to you with the conviction that, despite being weak vessels, God in His grace has given us the mandate to be your Shepherds.

We are in the season of Christmas, when Christians celebrate Christ's birth. The birth of Jesus as we remember demonstrates the power of God to redeem (He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved son Col.1:13-14); and His commitment to cause renewal in our personal lives, our families, institutions, nation and the whole creation (behold, I am making everything new Rev.21:5). The birth of Jesus opens up fresh possibilities after the fall of Adam; the salvation of humankind and their lot. It is for this reason, that it is called, a season of the "good news: Luk. 2:10-11; Quran 3:45. God is calling all of us as citizens of this country to renew our trust in Him, respond to his invitation to salvation and surrender our fears and anxieties about our future into His hands. For He is the God of all mankind.' Is there anything too hard for Him? (Jer.32:27).

We don't consider ourselves as the only people that are carrying the burden of transforming our country into a land of God-fearing people, of peace and dignity, this is a shared burden and so it should be.

Sir Winston Churchill, Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom described our motherland as the “Pearl of Africa.”

A confession that carries both gratitude and an aspiration. As it were, Churchill set an agenda for us to be grateful to God for the natural beauty of our beloved country, but also a task to work hard to uphold this beauty and to protect our Motherland from losing its enviable standing among the nations.

George William Kakoma, Composer of our national Anthem provided us with the means of how we can achieve these; that is, by honouring God in all our lives and choices and prioritizing the broad interests of our motherland as opposed to self-gratification.

Fellow Citizens, knowing what needs to be done and how to do it may not be enough. One must have a compelling reason and the right motivation. These were the martyrs of Uganda, who now provide us a compelling example that acting on conviction is honourable even if it may be costly.

You will wonder why we are looking back into our history. When we face hard times, there is wisdom in looking back for fresh inspiration. Whenever the children of Israel faced challenging situations, they often went back into their History and recalled the hand of God that delivered them from captivity in Egypt, guided them, provided for them in the desert and protected them from their enemies. This reassured them, that the hand of God that saw them through those trying situations was still Alive, present, willing and able to deliver them (Deut 5:15).

## **We, too, in our time are facing a number of challenges that have the potential to weaken our self-confidence and faith in the living God;**

1. Because of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill, support by partners to various programs has dwindled, increasing hardship and stress as citizens grapple with meeting their health needs and keeping children at school. Our nation, like all others, has had its share of unanticipated social, economic and political challenges. These challenges we are encountering test our collective strength and determination.
2. The changing climate conditions have led to displacements, threatening livelihoods, Food Security and disrupting the business environment even leading to death.
3. With the unfolding of the 2026 Election Commission (EC) roadmap, there is growing anxiety about the whole process, especially in light of the unpleasant experiences during the previous elections.
4. Citizens are perplexed about the increasing levels of corruption and the manner in which it is crippling the implementation of Government programs aimed at improving the welfare of the masses.
5. Withstanding its advantages, Technology has facilitated cyber crime, sexual harassments, character assassinations and waste of productive time, especially among the youth.

6. We have faced a number of epidemics, which our Ministry of Health has ably mobilized the population to respond to. However, there is concern about the increasing numbers of new HIV/AIDS infections in the country, especially among the young people. It is, therefore, our collective responsibility to reverse this trend.

7. The challenge of the growing number of young people without meaningful employment and with little hope for the future needs more attention. For lack of opportunities here, many able, trained young men and women are being forced into slave-like employment in the Middle East. While it appears as a good revenue earner, the conditions in which these young people work and its long-time effect on their lives and values as well as the exodus of such large numbers of the human workforce, are not being factored into the equation.

8. Political parties have been embroiled into leadership wrangles. This is not good for improving governance and stability in the country. We have had a history where power consternation in political parties and security organs have led to internal strife, which has retarded our progress as a country. Therefore, the failure to nurture internal democracy in our political parties, to nurture leadership and to appreciate the broader national aspirations of the citizens beyond their petty narrow party interests; brings in question their relevance as political systems to a country that desperately needs healing, uninterrupted peace and development, like Uganda.

As we look into the future, let us not turn our backs to these realities. They are partly responsible for our failure to realize the middle- income status and sustainable peace. As faith communities, we are committed to support our Government and other stakeholders to work towards the “Uganda we want,” as enshrined in the IRCU vision. We would like to underline five things that we consider as of now, critical to securing a peaceful, stable and prosperous future for our country:

### **1. Believing in ourselves.**

This is crucial to succeeding in our endeavours; with self-confidence, we are able to act on the opportunities that come our way. For example, we could take advantage of the cut in donor funding to discipline ourselves, in paying our taxes, reducing Government spending, curbing corruption and investing in productive areas and enterprises. God gave us a spirit not of fear. (2 Timothy 1:7)

### **2. Trusting in God.**

Limited by our plans and strategies, God is able to do far much more than we could ever ask, think or imagine. (Eph 3:20, Q 65:3). Therefore, our trust in God opens up incredible opportunities and the resilience essential to tackling obstacles to our progress as individuals and the nation at large.

### **3. Harnessing who we are and what we have as citizens in terms of skills and experiences.**

The way politics is practised in our country is now our greatest enemy in responding to the budget gaps left by the donors. We are a small country, we need to harness all the skills across the political divide. Therefore, the practice of marginalizing and alienating ourselves from each other because of political party interests, needs our collective attention.

In trying times, it is easy to succumb to fear, suspicion and division as has been depicted in the management of our national affairs, especially by our Parliament. However, history has taught us that it is unity that propels nations forward. Regardless of our differences, we are bound by a common destiny, and it is only through unity, cooperation and understanding that we shall be able to steer through the predicament in which the country finds herself. It is in this light, that our call for a national dialogue needs to be appreciated because it will enable us to harvest the wealth of experience among the citizens to manage a healthy transition to the benefit of crafting a more promising future for mother Uganda.

#### **4. Embracing the stewardship role for the environment and for one another:**

**i) Custodians of the Environment (Gen 2:15) (Quran 80:24-33, Quran 13:3-4).** The environment is like a womb that nurtures life. We neglect and mismanage it to our peril. The recent COP 28 has highlighted the need to de-carbonize our economy and to promote re-afforestation. This is in line with the commitment of the Government of Uganda, and IRCU's declaration at their Governance retreat in April this year.

Let us recognize our responsibility as stewards of this beautiful planet. Small changes in our daily lives can collectively have a significant impact. Let us strive for sustainability and a healthier environment for ourselves and future generations. In support of this agenda, IRCU is launching a 15-year project aimed at afforestation, re-afforestation and tree conservation of 250million trees. This project will be launched today at the Archbishop's Palace



## **ii. Custodians of our lives and entrusted responsibilities (Col 1:20, Eph 2:10, Quran 49:13).**

Each one of us is created in God's image. We are, therefore, precious to God. He has invested in us a number of gifts but more importantly the gift of conscience, which enables us to know what is right and wrong. In this sense, we become accountable for our choices and actions. No one is an exception to this accountability. We, therefore, should pay attention to how we live our lives and how we relate with others because it is in the quality of these relationships that we reflect our honour for God. We are also challenged to use the gifts and talents that God has given us, as blessings to each other. In life, God entrusts us with various responsibilities. We, therefore, become God's custodians through our talents, the offices we hold and opportunities for service that come our way.

Sadly, most of us Ugandans are failing in our custodianship role. This is evidenced by the rampant corruption, which is inevitably retarding the progress of our country. Let us all re-examine ourselves in the way we are executing our responsibilities as leaders at different levels, parents, employers and employees. We call for repentance in this area for it's the only way in which we can build a promising future for ourselves and our country.

## **iii. Stewardship of one another (John 13:34, Hebrews 13:16).**

Our origin is God, we are children of the same creator. Our diversity in terms of race, gender, religion and status is not a mistake. It's God's design. He treats creation in fairness, He gives rain and sunshine to the righteous and unrighteous. We, therefore, have a shared responsibility to work towards harmonious living and shared prosperity. (Matt 4:45)

## 5. Technology and innovation

It is being acknowledged that we are among the leading countries where young people are using technology to innovate. Judging from global trends, it is in our interest to boost these initiatives through start-up capital, affordable internet, and extension of electricity in all rural villages and to all learning centres. We must think wisely about how we use these innovative tools. We must understand that there is nothing inherently evil in the nature of technology as it is a natural outcome of the mandate which God gave to man and woman. Ultimately, however we will be accountable for how we have used what God has given us. Genesis 1: 26-28.

## Our Commitments:

1. As faith communities, we are committed to support our Government and other stakeholders to work towards the “Uganda we want,” as enshrined in the IRCU vision. We will strive to ensure a God-fearing nation; a prosperous nation; a healthy nation, a secure and stable nation; a harmonious nation; and a caring nation.
2. We commit to pray for the nation. We will continue to align our desires with what we sense to be the will of God and will mobilize the faithful in this regard.
3. We will work at reconciling the nation through shuttle diplomacy and public advocacy for accountable leadership and responsible citizenship.
4. We shall use technology positively to innovatively advance and subdue the world to the Glory of God.
5. With regard to the Electoral roadmap:
  - We commit to advocate for an enabling legal environment
  - We commit to support citizen preparedness for the elections
  - We commit to support citizens participation in the elections
  - We commit to build momentum towards a campaign for peaceful and credible elections using the Elders Forum platform as well as the IRCU structures.

## Conclusion.

We are thankful for God's protection and providence over this year. As we look forward to 2024, We plead with God to continue to watch over you, to meet the desires of your heart and to transform you into instruments of healing and transformation in our country.

We would like to wish His Excellency the President and the members of the first family and all fellow Ugandans a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year 2024!



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The Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu  
**Archbishop Province of the Church of Uganda**  
**Chairperson Council of Presidents**

**FOR AND ON BEHALF OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF UGANDA**

# IRCU COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS



**The Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu**  
Archbishop Province of the Church of Uganda  
Chairperson Council of Presidents



**His Eminence Sheikh Shaban Ramadhan Mubaje, Grand Mufti of Uganda**  
Co-Chairperson, Council of Presidents



**His Eminence Metropolitan Jeronymos Muzeeyi**  
Archbishop Uganda Orthodox Church  
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**Pastor Dr. Moses Maka Ndimukika**  
President, Seventh-day Adventist Uganda union  
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**Rt. Rev. Antony Zziwa**  
Bishop of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese  
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