

Inter-Religious Council of Uganda



Religions for Peace

END-OF-YEAR 2024 MESSAGE

**DELIVERED BY COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS,
INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF UGANDA**

**VENUE: INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF UGANDA
SECRETARIAT**

*“Don’t be afraid, I bring you good news that will bring
great joy to all people.” Lk. 2:10*

*And do not waver, nor be sad, you are the superior
ones – if you are believers” Quran 3:139*

DATE: 16TH DECEMBER, 2024

Fellow citizens and residents of Uganda, our beloved motherland,

Greetings to all of you in the name of the Almighty God who has sustained us throughout this year and continues to protect, guide and provide for us.

We extend our warmest wishes to our Christian brothers and sisters who observe the historic and sacred occasion of Christmas. In the spirit of unity, we encourage adherents of all faiths to embrace the values of love, charity, peace, compassion, harmony and kindness that Christmas symbolizes. It is our prayer that this year's Christmas season will inspire us to extend these values to one another and to foster peace in our diverse society.

We give thanks and glory to God for the gift of life, good health, strength and wisdom, which He has mercifully and gracefully granted unto us this year. We are also thankful for the rains, good weather and the abundant food that our farmers continue to produce.

To those who have lost loved ones through various tragedies, we extend our deepest condolences. We hold in our prayers those who are unwell; and those who are struggling in various ways including our brothers and sisters from neighboring countries who are displaced in IDP camps and refugee settlements due to wars and natural disasters.

We recognize the burdens and empathize with your struggles as we commit you into the hands of God, our Creator, who, according to our holy scriptures "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine." -and is—the Redeemer and Transformer of lives and circumstances (***Ephesians 3:20, Quran 7:157***).

As we approach the festive season, we urge every Ugandan to celebrate calmly and responsibly, maintain good health, drive safely, and prioritize peace in your homes and communities. Let this time not be marred by acts of violence, particularly gender-based violence. Instead, let it be a moment to reflect on God's blessings, the challenges you have overcome, and to set meaningful plans for 2025.

While this year ushered in blessings in many ways, there have also been notable challenges. During our pastoral visits across the country, we engaged with communities on many pressing issues. These include the resettlement of those affected by the collapse of the Kiteezi garbage landfill, increasing HIV infections, persistent corruption, rising youth unemployment, widespread poverty, the widening social divide, and the erosion of family values, alongside declining education and healthcare standards.

If we are honest with ourselves, our country is faced with serious challenges that need our urgent attention. The country is fearful, hurting and getting highly polarized.

Some of these challenges emanate from:

Our failure to learn from history: We have not learnt from our history of toxic politics characterized by polarization, marginalization, intolerance, and harassment which have locked the country in vicious cycles of conflict.

How we manage our Elections: As we approach another electoral season, we are concerned about the emerging tensions and early signs of political conflicts. However, elections should provide us an opportunity to shape the future of our nation by voting accountable, compassionate and responsible leaders. We, therefore, urge all citizens to exercise their democratic right to vote by following the Electoral Commission's electoral roadmap. We also urge all political actors to settle their differences responsibly, adhere to the rule of law and work towards free, fair, and peaceful elections.

The yoke of poverty: We acknowledge the growing poverty levels and its dehumanizing impact on many Ugandans. Our failure to break this yoke of poverty and vulnerability among the majority of Ugandans is a result of our inability to responsibly and faithfully manage the resources bestowed upon us by the Almighty God. Consequently, this has lowered the quality of essential services such as education, transport infrastructure, and health, while also widening the gap between the rich and the poor. This lack of faithful stewardship has eroded the citizens' trust in public institutions, leading to apathy and hopelessness.

Moral Decadence

Moral decay is a pressing concern affecting every sector of society and is the reason why several development initiatives are failing. If we do not address this vice our aspirations as a nation will not count.

Our responsibility

Citizens and leaders alike have a collective responsibility to address these challenges. We must abandon the mentality that these issues will miraculously disappear or passively wait for a messianic intervention.

As Shepherds of the nation, we have taken time to pray and think through our calling during our recent leadership retreat in Mukono. The retreat enabled us to lay out detailed plans on several key issues of concern. We committed to among others to undertake the following actions

1. End the Vicious Cycle of Poverty:

We are hopeful, considering Uganda's vast natural resources, including oil, which, if managed well, could significantly alleviate poverty and ensure financial stability for future generations. The sovereign wealth derived from Uganda's resources—such as agriculture, fishing, forestry, gold, and oil—has the potential to address poverty if utilized wisely and inclusively. Therefore:

- a) We commit to initiating structured stakeholders' dialogues to build consensus on the use of Uganda's natural resources to ensure their sustainable management for the benefit of present and future generations, and effect this through a *national referendum*.
- b) We pledge to establish people-centered institutions, processes, and systems that prioritize social protection, responsible resource management, and professional investment of national wealth, including oil revenues, as part of our effort to break the cycle of poverty.

- c) We commit to establishing Saccos at different levels of our structures and liaise with the Micro-finance Support Centre and other entities to build their capacities.

2. Promote a credible, peaceful, and democratic process, we commit to the following:

- a) Engage key stakeholders, including the Electoral Commission, judiciary, security forces, and Parliament, to advocate for credible and peaceful elections.
- b) Support programs that discourage electoral violence and commercialization while promoting free and fair electoral processes.
- c) Establish a joint forum under the East African Inter-Religious Council to address regional peace and election-related issues.
- d) Facilitate voter education and peace-building initiatives through faith-based organizations.
- e) Organize a National Dialogue to discuss electoral reforms and governance challenges.

3. Promote Morality and Integrity

Moral decay is a pressing concern affecting every sector of society. To address this, we resolve to :

- a) Establish sub-county accountability platforms to enable citizens participate actively in enhancing the social accountability culture.
- b) Implement programs that promote justice, integrity, and mindset transformation.
- c) Partner with the relevant government agencies to uphold moral standards.
- d) Strengthen spiritual renewal and character-building initiatives in faith-based institutions.

4. Environmental Stewardship and Climate Change

Uganda faces significant climate change challenges, threatening livelihoods and ecosystems. To address these issues, we commit to:

- a) Scaling up environmental conservation projects such as reforestation and renewable energy initiatives.
- b) Rolling out programmes that build community resilience and awareness about climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Integrating environmental stewardship into our community outreach programs.

5. Support systems for holistic health.

We call upon Government to launch a national health insurance scheme. We shall also sensitize the population to take personal responsibility for their health, and respond positively to the government's campaigns aimed at containing and preventing public health epidemics, including the recent outbreak of M-pox.

6. Fight cyber-crime.

As we celebrate the developments in technology, we must be cognizant of its misuse in form of cyber-bullying, hacking, harassment, character assassination, etc. We commit to educate our people to embrace responsible use of technology.

Conclusion

These challenges are realities that we must confront with determination. They are barriers to our development and sustainable peace. As faith communities, we reaffirm our commitment to working alongside all stakeholders, including the government, to build the "**Uganda we Want**," as envisioned in the IRCU's Vision 2062. We are still convinced about the importance of collective wisdom to addressing the many of the obstacles to this vision. IRCU continues to hold the conviction that a National Dialogue Framework provides an inclusive and safe space for Ugandans to craft a more promising future for Mother Uganda.

As we navigate these challenges, let us draw inspiration from our history and faith including the Uganda Martyrs who courageously

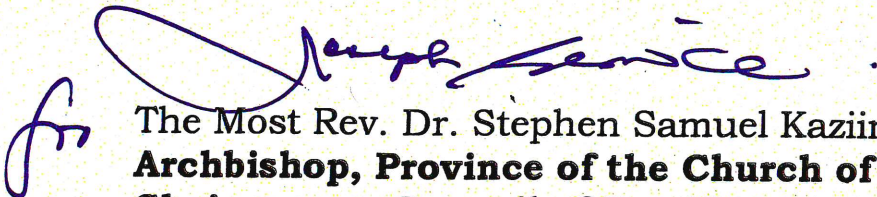
stood up for their convictions in the living God. Let us also be guided by the spirit of National motto— *"For God and My Country"*.

As we look forward to 2025, let us remain united as a nation, grounded in our faiths and values. Together, we can overcome challenges and lay the foundation for a brighter, more prosperous future for all Ugandans.

May God bless us all; may God bless Uganda - our motherland! We wish His Excellency the President of the Republic of Uganda; the First Family, and our fellow citizens Merry Christmas and Happy New Year 2025!

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY!

Signed this 16th day of December, 2024 for and on behalf of the faith fraternity in Uganda.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu', is written over a horizontal line. To the left of the signature is a large, stylized blue initial 'f'.

The Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu
Archbishop, Province of the Church of Uganda
Chairperson, Council of Presidents
INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF UGANDA

