

Inter-Religious Council of Uganda



Religions for Peace

PRESS STATEMENT

24th November 2025

PASTORAL CALL FOR PEACE, JUSTICE, AND INTEGRITY IN THE 2026 ELECTIONS

Greetings from the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda!

Fellow citizens and residents of Uganda, we speak to you today not as individuals but as stakeholders entrusted with the moral responsibility to watch over our country and to guide it through moments of uncertainty.

In recent months, we have walked with communities, listened to their fears, and prayed over their hopes. We have also witnessed encouraging examples of discipline and restraint from many civil servants, security personnel, electoral officers, and community leaders who continue to uphold the law faithfully even in a climate of heightened tension. For their integrity, we offer our sincere gratitude. Their conduct reminds us that peace is built not only by words but by daily acts of responsibility.

The Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, taught that “the strong one is the one who controls his anger.” In our context, this is a powerful reminder that national stability is strengthened when those entrusted with authority act with patience, justice, and self-control, even when under pressure.

It is in this spirit of gratitude, prayer, and moral duty that we now draw the attention of the nation to several emerging issues that require honesty, courage, and immediate attention. These matters, if left unaddressed, have the potential to stir frustration, deepen divisions, and threaten the peace we all cherish. Allow us to now place before the nation our pastoral call for peace, justice, and integrity, and to highlight the concerns that stand before us as Uganda approaches the 2026 elections.

1. Arbitrary arrests, prolonged detention without trial

Brothers and sisters, we are receiving troubling reports that weigh heavily on the conscience of our nation. Over recent months, many opposition members, supporters, and activists have been arrested on charges ranging from incitement and unlawful assembly to treason, with some reportedly held for extended periods without timely access to bail. Incidents such as the November 2024 detention under military jurisdiction of Dr. Kizza Besigye and his aide following their return from Kenya, and others illustrate the scale of these concerns.

While we recognize that security agencies have a mandate to enforce the law and may arrest any person reasonably suspected of committing a crime, such actions must be conducted in accordance with the law and with full respect for due process. As faith leaders, we appeal for restraint, fairness, and fidelity to the Constitution. Every Ugandan deserves assurance that the law serves all equally.

2. Harassment, intimidation, and disruption of political campaigns

In many parts of the country, communities have raised concerns about the atmosphere surrounding campaign activities. Citizens report political gatherings being dispersed by security personnel, restricted access to campaign venues, and the use of tear gas during tense moments. Additionally, several candidates describe difficulties moving freely to meet their supporters, while diversions onto longer routes have cost them valuable campaign time. As a result, voters are denied opportunities to engage with diverse political viewpoints, and parties that face repeated disruptions cannot fully present their programs to the nation. Over time, these patterns discourage participation, fuel apathy, and deepen the sense that elections are predetermined rather than competitive.

3. Militarization of the electoral process and excessive use of force by security agencies

The conduct of some security operations during political activities has left many Ugandans uneasy. Armed units, including the Special Forces Command, masked personnel, and plainclothes teams in unmarked vehicles have at times made civilian elections feel more like military operations than civic exercises. We are equally concerned by reports that some political parties are grooming militias under the guise of vote protection. Such actions

are a recipe for unrest and must stop, and we call upon all political actors to demobilize these groups immediately. Proverbs 29:2 teaches that when righteous authority is upheld, people rejoice, but when oppressive treatment prevails, people groan. Our nation cannot afford to nurture fear at a time when unity and fairness are urgently needed.

4. Challenges and irregularities in the National Identification and Voter Registration process

A matter of deep national concern is the difficulty many Ugandans continue to face in securing or renewing their National IDs ahead of the 2025 elections. Many citizens, especially youth, still face long queues, faulty machines, repeated delays and worrying reports of officials demanding bribes. The voter register update in January and February 2025 had to be extended because only a fraction of the required registration kits were available, and many eligible citizens were unable to register in time.

The implications are grave. Widespread exclusion undermines the inclusivity that is essential to a legitimate election. As polling day approaches, we remain deeply concerned that many Ugandans will still lack valid National IDs or find their names missing from the register, effectively denying them their God-given right to vote. This is not merely an administrative lapse; it strikes at the very heart of our democracy. As a moral voice in this nation, we appeal to all agencies involved to intensify their efforts, allocate the necessary resources, and ensure that every eligible Ugandan has a fair opportunity to register and vote.

5. A Firm Voice of the Electoral Commission is Missing

In recent weeks of campaigning, we have witnessed disruptive incidents such as young people in Sanga, dressed in NRM t-shirts and armed with sticks, chasing NUP supporters who were on an official campaign trail. Such acts reflect a regression in democratic practice, and the voice of the Electoral Commission has been absent in condemning such lawlessness. Furthermore, delays in accrediting organizations to carry out voter education are unhealthy for our democracy especially given that, the majority of potential voters are not aware of their rights and civic responsibilities. We call upon the Electoral Commission to speak out clearly, provide guidance and fulfil their obligations with the expected proficiency.

6. Attacks and Restrictions on Mass Media

A free and courageous press is one of the pillars that upholds democracy, yet recent events show that many journalists are operating under fear. Some media houses have been banned from covering certain candidates. This is a violation of freedoms of speech and expression. Citizens who depend on the media to understand what is happening in their country are now receiving less information at a time when they need it most. When the media is unable to report freely, voters cannot make informed decisions. Irregularities remain hidden, misinformation spreads unchecked, and official narratives dominate while alternative voices are silenced. Such conditions tilt the political environment and weaken public confidence in the entire process. For these reasons, we appeal to all authorities to respect the work of journalists and protect them from intimidation or harm. Media practitioners should be allowed to report events as they occur, without fear of arrest or assault.

7. Message to MP and Mayoral Candidates

To the candidates contesting parliamentary, mayoral, and other electoral positions: remember that elections are not an end in themselves. Your neighbor will remain your neighbor, so campaign in peace. There can only be one winner. Campaign in peace with magnanimity, placing the broad interests of the nation at heart. If you do not win, do not cause commotion. Let us all be agents of peace.

Conclusion

Elections, when conducted with fairness and integrity, do more than enable citizens to choose their leaders. They renew the nation's commitment to higher standards of leadership and service. They strengthen the legitimacy of those who govern by rooting authority in the consent of the people. A credible election invites every Ugandan into the work of building the country and transforms political competition into a peaceful test of ideas rather than a struggle for survival.

As religious leaders in this land, we hold no army, no treasury, and no political party. What we have is a sacred responsibility entrusted to us by the One who created us all: to tell the truth with humility, to stand with those who feel unheard, and to remind our nation of the path that leads to justice, compassion, and peace. In that spirit,

we offer this respectful appeal to all who guide the affairs of our nation:

- **To the Government and security agencies:** Use the authority entrusted to you to safeguard citizens, protect rights, and uphold the dignity of every Ugandan. Our people look to you for reassurance and fairness.
- **To the courts of law:** Use your offices to dispense justice. Desist from being used as tools of oppression and marginalization.
- **To the Electoral Commission:** Continue your work with transparency and urgency so that no eligible Ugandan is left out of the voting process. The country depends on your diligence.
- **To all political parties and candidates:** Present your programs with clarity, honour and sincerity. Avoid provocative and abusive language. Respect each other. Compete through ideas, integrity, and service, not through fear or hostility.
- **To our fellow religious leaders in every pulpit, mosque, and temple:** Let our places of worship remain sanctuaries of truth, prayer, and reconciliation. May our words lift the nation and not divide it.
- **To the media fraternity:** Keep informing the public with accuracy and courage. A nation cannot choose wisely if it cannot see clearly.
- **To every citizen:** Do not lose heart. Participate peacefully. Hold fast to the values that have carried Uganda through difficult times. Your vote is a right given to you by the Constitution and a trust given to you by God. Use it with wisdom.

The eyes of our children are watching the choices we make. The region and the world look to Uganda as a country capable of navigating its challenges with dignity. Above all, God sees our intentions and our actions. Let us honour that divine trust by choosing the way of peace, restraint, and unity.

for.

The Most Rev. Dr. Stephen Samuel Kaziimba Mugalu

Chairperson Council of Presidents

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