

BLESSED ARE THE PEACE MARKERS. Mt. 5:9
A Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda
on the 2021 General Elections
December, 2020
PREAMBLE

Dear Brothers and Sisters

1. May the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Being inspired with the spirit of Christmas, we pray that the joy of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ brings you renewed hope and commitment in the New Year, 2021.
2. We have already said in our previous messages and guidance to you, that the year 2020 will be remembered as a special year, the year the world experienced an epidemic of great magnitude and ferocity. The epidemic has left a trail of death, fear and illness in many families and communities. For us who are still alive, we have reasons to thank God, and as the Lord has assured us, we need not be afraid, but take heart because he has overcome the world.
3. The year 2020 is also marked by political campaigns leading to general elections in January 2021. As usual, the country is gripped by election fever, and a number of challenges have already emerged that require urgent attention and remedy as we get closer to the polling day. The purpose of this pastoral letter, therefore, is to add our voice to many others calling for peaceful, free and fair elections. We do this, as responsible citizens of our country, and also as shepherds of the people.
4. From the pastoral letter issued in 1961 by His Grace Joseph Kiwanuka, of venerable memories, the then Archbishop of Kampala Archdiocese, titled, The Church and State: Guiding Principles, the Catholic Bishops in Uganda have written several letters to guide the country on various social, political and economic issues. By so doing, the bishops are making sure the message and mission of Christ on earth is implemented: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord. Again, the bishops have followed in the footsteps of the various Popes, like Leo XIII, who wrote the Encyclical Letter, Rerum Novarum in 1891, to ensure that the saving message of Christ shines on the social domain. It is this same message that lies at the heart of the Church's evangelizing mission today. And, compelled by Christ's command, Go into all the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature, we, as shepherds of the flock, cannot look aside as society slides into injustice and violence. And we say with St Paul, woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel.
Like the prophets of the Old Testament, like Christ, and his Apostles, we are obliged to speak up and guide both rulers and subjects to shun evil and walk in

the path of holiness and the truth. This requires of us to effectively read the signs of the times and to respond firmly with love, and without fear or favour.

5. It is from this perspective that the forthcoming elections, present us with signs that impose on us, shepherds, the duty to speak up and provide counsel to the people, rulers and subjects alike, in line with our duty to proclaim the Gospel at all cost. In so doing, we do not assume responsibility for every aspect of life in our country; but speak with the competence that is ours, which is that of proclaiming Christ the Redeemer. As Pope John Paul II observed, the aim of the Church is to help man on the path of salvation. This is her primary and sole purpose. Therefore, when it intervenes in social situations, it does not seek to usurp or evade the duties of others or to neglect her own; nor are there any thoughts of pursuing objectives that are foreign to her mission. In this pastoral letter, therefore, we provide some basic principles that, we believe, should guide the conduct of all stakeholders in the electoral process if the outcome is to be credible, and love and harmony is to prevail in the country after the elections. These principles, include respect for human life, respect for human dignity, promotion of justice, love and peace, upholding the common good, solidarity, and promoting community and democracy.

Part I

THE PREVAILING POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

6. Since the beginning of the electoral cycle in 2018, there have been some positive and negative events that have characterized the conduct of various stakeholders. We begin by applauding political parties and individuals who have offered themselves to participate in the elections by fielding candidates or standing for the various elective positions. We also recognize the efforts being made by the Electoral Commission to organize the elections in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and security agencies for providing the minimum environment for candidates to communicate or propagate their manifestoes to the voters.

7. We are, however, deeply concerned about certain anomalies that could taint the credibility of the electoral process and outcome of the polls if not addressed urgently. Some of these issues have also been noted by the courts of law, including the Supreme Court, in the various petitions filed by candidates challenging the outcome of similar elections in the past. In particular, we address ourselves to the following:

Breach of peace and rights of persons

8. We all witnessed the violence that characterized primary elections in some political parties; protests that rocked the country from 18th to 19th of November 2020, following the arrest of the presidential candidate for National Unity Platform; and the several clashes between the security agencies and some opposition candidates and their supporters. These episodes have caused the deaths of more than seventy people since the electoral process began, some of them innocent bystanders. Many more have also been injured; some are still

nursing injuries, and property worth of millions of shillings destroyed. The innocent and perpetrators alike, are yet to get justice.

9. What perturbs us most is the fact that many of the victims died or got injured in the hands of security agencies tasked with the duty to protect life and property of citizens. We see this as abuse of authority. We want to state categorically the words of Pope John XXIII that those who have authority in the State must exercise that authority in a way which is not only morally irreproachable, but also best calculated to ensure or promote the State's welfare and those of the citizens. Such violence and conduct only negates this moral obligation and undermines the sanctity of life over which only God, the Creator, has authority. The State must exercise restraint in the face of adversity, very well knowing that...a regime which governs solely or mainly by means of threats and intimidation or promises of reward, provides men with no effective incentive to work for the common good (including peace).

10. Moreover, apart from demonstrating lack of political maturity on the part of various political actors, such violence only weakens the foundations of democracy laid by the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. Under Objective II of the National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy, The State shall be based on democratic Principles which empower and encourage the active participation of all citizens ...in their own governance. The same Constitution guarantees the right of every citizen to elect leaders through a vote , and gives the mandate to the Electoral Commission to organize free and fair elections where such right can be exercised.

For an election or electoral process to be free and fair, it must be conducted in an atmosphere that enables every citizen entitled to vote to exercise his or her right without any form of intimidation, or coercion, or manipulation. Short of that, an electoral process undermines the inherent rights of citizens to choose, rights derived from the very nature of the human person created in the likeness of God.

11. The link between elections in our country and human rights has been worrisome. We wonder how a democratic process should be a breeding ground for violation of rights provided for in our national Constitution. Every election, since independence, has paid less attention to human rights. Yet, human rights are inalienable, for the simple reason that nobody or institution has the power to grant them; they are rooted in natural law.

12. Man and woman have a string of rights, among them, the right to live, the right to be respected, the right to bodily integrity, the right to freedom in investigating the truth, and, within the moral order and common good, the right to freedom of speech, association and publication, and the right to be accurately informed about public events and policies. Man's dignity also involves the right to take part in public life, and to make a contribution to the common welfare of his fellow citizens.

13. But, man's rights come with duties and responsibilities. As Pope John XXIII said ...to claim one's rights and ignore one's duties, or only half fulfill them, is like building a house with one hand and tearing it down with the other. And during our time, Pope Francis says everyone should according to his or her specific gifts, fight to protect the fundamental rights of individuals during these elections, and to exercise their rights in a manner that does not impede others from enjoying their rights. This is the only way we will guarantee peace and stability before, during and after the elections.

Intolerance

14. In the previous elections, we witnessed several scuffles among and within political groups. Such scuffles are a sign of intolerance. Over time, we have pointed out and warned Ugandans about the dangers of intolerance to our country's stability. Seeds of intolerance led to the political turmoil which our country experienced immediately after independence, which continues to haunt us to date. This ugly history is well captured in the following words in the preamble of our national Constitution: RECALLING our history which has been characterized by political and constitutional instability....

15. We are mindful of the fact that disagreements are part of politics and reflect the divergent ways in which humans experience and interpret the world and the events around them. The more we come to the realization of this truth, the more we should open up to others to express themselves without imposing our own experiences and ideas on them. Unless, this expression evades our own rights, there can be no justification, whatsoever, for anyone or groups to prevent others from freely exercising their rights, including political rights.

Discord in political parties

16. A genuine multiparty political system must, firstly and foremost, be rooted in moral principles that are consistent with the true nature and aspirations of the human person; the fact that men are by nature social, and consequently they have the right to meet together and to form associations with their fellows . Secondly, it must be inclusive; open to the limits of possibilities provided within its internal rules and the national constitution, which includes the possibility to accept new members and to allow members to exit as and when they wish without any fear of intimidation or punishment. Thirdly, it must respect diversity and dissent; that although men and women are equal in the eyes of God and before the law, they, in fact, differ in their experiences, beliefs and ideas. Violence, division, discrimination and repressive tendencies within any political party, therefore, undermine these principles, and we need to remember that ...if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.

17. Often, these ugly scenes play out due to failure in the management of internal elections, many of which fail to meet the standards of a genuine democratic process. Apart from loss of life and property, this has persistently given rise to "independents". Statistics show that "independents" dominate the current electoral process. The rise of "independents" from internal party elections, is a clear sign of limited appreciation of the workings of a multiparty

democracy. It reverses the gains made since the country reverted to multiparty system in 2005. It is also a sign that most political parties have not built credible internal dispute resolution mechanisms and a culture of consensus.

Commercialization of elections

18. In our previous pastoral letters and communiqués, we pointed out the futility of turning politics into a money-making venture. To our disappointment, the situation has gotten worse, thus, threatening the good initiatives by various actors to deepen democratic governance in our country. We have seen some candidates spend colossal sum of money with the hope of recouping this money when they come to office.

19. The current laws governing presidential, parliamentary and local government elections impose restrictions only on foreign-source funding. The purpose, we understand, is to safeguard the country from illicit financing, prevent breach of national security and encourage accountability on the part of political parties and their leaders. There is no law that pays specific attention to the unfair imbalance that excessive money may create among political players.

20. Whereas, it is lawful for a party or individual to invest resources in an election, there is need to emphasize modesty given the likely adverse effect on our economy; the rights of less resourced citizens to effectively participate in the electoral process as candidates; and the quality of leaders that such election is likely to produce. If we may ask, how many leaders, after spending colossal sums of money to get elected, will give priority to the pursuit of the common good?

Bribery

21. Like we said before, material resources are a significant aspect of any political activity, including elections. However, its use to influence the decision of voters remains a thorn in our budding democracy. We have raised this concern before in our pastoral letters. In some cases we recommended amendment of the various electoral laws to empower the Electoral Commission, or any other body, to remove or bar candidates who bribe voters from running for any political office. This has not happened.

22. For purpose of clarity, bribery is criminal in Uganda under the Anti-Corruption Act and the relevant electoral laws. Under the Presidential Elections Act, for example, bribery is considered an offence punishable with imprisonment or fine. In the Act, bribery refers to any money, gift or other consideration given by a candidate or his/her agent to a voter with the intention of inducing the person to vote for that candidate. Both the Parliamentary Elections Act and The Local Government Act provide even wider application of the offence of bribery to include persons who receive such inducements from a candidate or his/her agent and the use of such inducements to prevent voters from voting for others or their opponents.

23. The problem with bribery is that while the politician knows it is immoral and illegal, often the voter does not easily distinguish such gifts from the normal facilitation allowed under the same laws. Accordingly, the practice has continued unabated at all levels of elective position, and no candidate or voter appears to be innocent. Further, there is weakness in enforcement of the law by relevant government bodies, such as Police and the Electoral Commission. The proper thing to do would be not to allow persons found guilty of bribery to stand in by-elections organized following annulment of results due to such misconduct.

24. Bribery during elections costs our country significant amount of resources in by-elections. New elections are organized following annulment of results. Further, it erodes the quality and integrity of leaders the country gets, often producing people whose primary goal is unjust enrichment as opposed to service of country and people. Leadership must be exercised only for the common good of citizens and society; Jesus said the greatest among you must be your servant.
Intimidation

25. Intimidation is another serious dent in our elections, despite being criminal under the various electoral laws. It is referred to as undue influence under the Presidential Elections Act, The Parliamentary Elections Acts and The Local Government Act. In all three laws, undue influence is defined to include making use or threatening to make use of force, inflicting or threatening to inflict temporary or spiritual injury, or loss, upon a person in order to induce or refrain that person from voting for his or her preferred candidate. It may take the form of abduction, duress, or any fraudulent device or gadget. Unlike bribery, it attracts a heavier sentence of up to five years or fine of one hundred currency points.

26. Intimidation continues despite this elaborate legal framework, simply because the mechanisms in place are too weak or reluctant to enforce the law within an election environment. Sometimes, and more often, as observed by the Supreme Court in the various presidential election petitions, many such acts are committed by overzealous elements within the security apparatus. Candidates and voters too have been implicated in acts of intimidation. Many of these have escaped the long arm of the law, or have been selectively prosecuted.

27. We strongly believe that intimidation of any sort has no place in a civilized society, let alone political system. It undermines the will of the people to choose the leaders they want and the dignity of the human person, and violates several cardinal principles of democracy laid down in our own national Constitution and several international norms to which Uganda is a signatory. Indeed, nobody has the right to intimidate another. Each voter must be allowed to choose his or her leader, and candidates to reach out to voters without undue restrictions, but within the confines of a just law.

Mismanagement of election results

28. The results of an election are very crucial in the electoral process. We have already stated that the results of a mismanaged election led to bloodbath in the past, and the scars of that violence are still with us. Instead of learning from such incidents in order to improve the management of our elections, we seem to slide back into the same problem.

It is sad to note that tempering with election results, through forgery and ballot stuffing, remains one of the biggest challenges in our elections, and is among key drivers of election-related violence, both within political parties and the national elections. The Supreme Court, in its various rulings, noted this challenge, and provided some recommendations to relevant bodies to address the problem. We appeal to the conscience of persons involved in such acts to allow the will of the people to prevail. Remember, that the commandment Thou Shall Not Steal applies also to vote stealing.

Abusive and derogatory language

29. This is another offence under our electoral laws and attracts imprisonment or fine. The use of abusive and derogatory language by a candidate is driven by intolerance and desperation arising from loss of confidence in oneself to win an election. It also indicates a lack of respect and minimum modesty expected of a leader. Some candidates have made it a habit to insult and degrade their colleagues instead of focusing on what they intend to deliver once elected into office.

30. Candidates need to know that God has given each person a talent and the ability to multiply the talents for the benefit of humanity. Therefore, who should lead a country is a matter that belongs to God through the voters. Moreover, we have emphasized the centrality of human dignity and the need for us to recognize the fact that every human person enjoys that inner beauty that only awaits unravelling. Remember Jesus' warning to his followers: But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to the fiery Gehenna.

The enforcement of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

31. Right from the onset of this pastoral letter, we acknowledged the special circumstance, created by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the elections are taking place. The raft of measures issued by the Ministry of Health to curb the spread of the virus found their way into the Electoral Commission Election Guidelines of 2020. They include: restriction on the number persons in any campaign meeting to not more than 200, provision of hygiene facilities at the venue of such meetings, ban on political processions, and wearing masks during campaign meetings.

32. In addition to limiting face-to-face campaigns, candidates were advised to use other media, electronic and print, to reach out to voters. Just recently, the Electoral Commission imposed a controversial moratorium on physical campaigns in several districts, citing the rising cases of COVID-19 infections. The assumption was that candidates would utilize alternative media to reach voters.

Our view is that the Commission should assure candidates of unfettered access to media houses provided they meet the terms set by the owners, and equal access to all public media. In the absence of such assurance, we are likely to witness noncompliance by some candidates and their supporters, and disenfranchisement of a large segment of voters.

33. Whereas we appreciate the delicate balance between health of the population and mandate of the Electoral Commission to organize free and fair elections, the enforcement of the guidelines by security agencies and adherence by candidates leaves a lot to be desired. Right from the primary elections of the National Resistance Movement Organization in September 2020, we have seen excited voters and defiant candidates throw these restrictions to the wind. The current spike in COVID-19 infections is attributed partly to such reckless behavior.

34. On the other hand, we have witnessed partial and inconsistent enforcement of the guidelines by security forces. In many cases, disproportionate force has been meted on candidates and their supporters in the name of enforcing these measures. Some candidates continue to be blocked from accessing their campaign venues and voters, contrary to the directives given by the Electoral Commission to security agencies.

Restrictions on the use of mass media

35. In its guidance to political parties and candidates, the Electoral Commission emphasized the use of mass media to supplement the limited space provided for physical campaigns. It was dubbed “virtual” campaigns. It was expected that candidates would have equal and easy access to the media. It has, however, emerged that it is not only expensive for many candidates, but that some candidates are also being blocked by security agencies and Resident District Commissioners from using these channels, even when they have fully paid for them.

36. Such acts, coupled with exorbitant cost of media campaign, only lends credence to the continued flouting of the Election Guidelines by some candidates. As we have already stated, there is need for the Electoral Commission to give confidence to all candidates that they can indeed rely on mass media as an alternative to reach out to voters. In the absence of such, we are likely to see continued flouting of the Guidelines to the detriment of health of the people.

Attacks on journalists and civil society organizations

37. Journalists are often referred to as the ear, nose and eye of society. Their function is to educate, inform, and entertain. A free, independent and responsible media is one of the pillars of democratic governance, which must be upheld, more so in such important moments of any country, such as elections. They help in unravelling anomalies in the electoral process and providing the information voters need to make informed decisions. In that case they act as

messengers, and, are therefore, entitled to protection from unjustified attacks from anybody.

38. Even as these principles and obligations are well known, some elements within security organs have continued to direct their attacks on journalists for reasons best known to them. Some journalists covering the campaign trail of some opposition leaders, including the latest in Masaka, have suffered grave injuries as a result of such attacks. We condemn this kind of behavior as it adds fire to an already fragile situation that characterize these elections. No amount of justification can explain such unprofessional conduct on the part of persons who must protect the people and their property. Something must, surely, be done to deal decisively with such errant officers, lest impunity takes root, and anarchy descends on the land.

39. We are equally concerned about the recent interventions directed at some civil society organizations. A number of them have had their bank accounts frozen and some of their officials arrested and charged with very serious crimes. Yet, a vibrant civil society is key to the growth of democracy in any country and sign of great political maturity. Civil society is the bridge between the citizenry and duty bearers and are among watchdogs over the conduct of those in authority.

Inadequate voter education

40. The goal of voter education is to enable voters to participate in the electoral process from an informed position. Lack of, or inadequate voter education is partly responsible for the many invalid votes in our elections since 1996. In 2016 presidential elections alone, there were 185,043 invalid votes, constituting 4.98% of total votes cast, more than twice the number in the 2011 elections, which was 334,548 votes, that is, 0.41%.

41. Voter education is equally key in encouraging voters to turn up on polling day. This is particularly significant given the declining trend in voter participation in the polls. Statistics show that whereas the 1996 elections had a high voter turn up of 74.3%, it dropped to 67.6% in 2016.

42. Because of factors best known to the Electoral Commission, a number of election activities have not taken place in a timely and comprehensive manner. For instance, voter education is inadequate. This is likely to lead to limited awareness among voters of the major electoral activities and their duties in the various stages of the electoral cycle. We think that the ignorance among the electorate regarding electoral process, and the violence and conflict within political parties can be blamed, partly, on failure by the relevant constitutional bodies to provide the necessary voter and civic information to citizens.

The role of the youth

43. These particular elections have aroused a lot of excitement among young people, partly because for the first time in our political history, the law allows them to compete for the top political position in the land. This followed an

amendment of the Constitution in 2019 that removed the age limit for the office of President and Local Council V. Indeed, some youth have responded and are among the presidential candidates traversing the country in search for the people's mandate. Many too have picked interest in voting and are eagerly waiting to cast their votes for their preferred candidates.

44. The youth, are very important and a special category of citizens in Uganda in that they are the majority. Surprisingly, little effort has been made to prepare them for constructive participation in the forthcoming elections and other civic obligations. Not even political parties have done much in this regard.

45. We advise our youth to be cautious as they undertake to support various contestants. Like all Ugandans, we urge them to express their political aspirations in a manner that maintains the relative peace, stability and development prevailing in the country. They should desist from being used by politicians or others to destabilize the country and abuse the rights of fellow men and women. Similarly, political parties should look at the youth as leaders of today and of tomorrow, and must, therefore, instill in them the sense of responsibility required of leaders. No politician should use the youth as mere ladders to ascend to any political office. The youth, far from being objects, or as it were, inert elements in society, must be considered as its subjects, its basis and its purpose, and, so, must be esteemed, respected and nurtured, an attitude and responsibility that must begin at family level.

Other issues

46. There are other concerns we have not brought up in this Pastoral Letter; that does not mean that they do not matter. We have only focused on what we consider major and urgent so that we can all realize and embrace the need to work together to improve our electoral system and behavior during these elections, especially the way we treat one another.

47. The three main laws governing elections in our country, namely, The Presidential Elections Act, The Parliamentary Elections Act, and The Local Government Act, provide for offences such as defacing of candidates posters, impersonation, and unauthorized voting and voting more than once. Various sentences are prescribed for these offences although enforcement is wanting. Some of the offences and penalties are specific to election managers.

Part II

OUR PASTORAL EXHORTATIONS

Effective Management of the Electoral Process

48. We have already stated that the Electoral Commission is the only body constitutionally mandated to organize and manage elections. It is unfortunate that right from the first elections in 1961, the credibility of our electoral management bodies have been doubted by some stakeholders in the various electoral processes. In some cases, those who disagreed with the outcomes of polls waged costly wars. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the Electoral Commission to maintain the confidence of all political players in the process by:

- a) demonstrating that it is, indeed, in full control of the electoral process;
- b) applying its guidelines in an impartial manner;
- c) engaging all political players on all matters likely to affect credibility of the process and the common good; and
- d) establishing a robust voter education programme in collaboration with various stakeholders, including candidates, since they are key in mobilizing voters to turn up on polling day and observe law and order. They also provide policy options that act as incentive for voters to participate in the elections.

Securing the Electoral Process

49. Although maintaining peace during elections is the duty of all stakeholders, security agencies are mandated by law to coordinate these efforts. The Police Force, in particular, is given the primary responsibility for security and peace during elections. The Constitution, however, gives it the privilege of inviting other security organs, including the military, when necessary.

We appeal to the Police Force and all other security agencies involved in the electoral process to dispense their mandate in a diligent and professional manner. In particular we recommend that:

- a) in the maintenance of law and order, the police should be seen to act impartially and refuse to be drawn into the political contestations, it must at all times be seen to account to the people, not to any political group;
- b) the internal mechanisms within the Force must swiftly act on errant officers by subjecting them to the due process of the law;
- c) full investigations should be done into incidences of death and injuries caused by security officers as a means of restoring public confidence in the security organs;
- d) police should be seen to be in charge of all security agencies involved in the electoral process and take full responsibility for any unprofessional conduct, notwithstanding individual liabilities under relevant laws, such as, The Anti-Torture Act and The Human Rights Act;
- e) the police should desist from unnecessary disruption of political activities authorized by the election management body;
- f) security agencies should give more prominence to preventive measures, rather than reactive measures, and, at the same time, respect the rights of citizens in order to avert confrontations with civilians, and loss of lives and property;
- g) the police and other security agencies should exercise considerable restraint, and avoid the use of lethal force on unarmed civilians; they must in no way be identified with anarchy or extrajudicial killings; and
- h) police should always invite the military as a last resort given the latter's limited knowledge and experience in crowd management; the military is trained for battle not crowd control.

The Need for Patriotism

50. There can never be lasting peace if political players are not driven in their programmes by a strong sense of patriotism, which requires us to love our country and feed it with our labour and respect for its values. It is, therefore, important that candidates at all levels and voters should desist from acts that

can destroy the peace and foundation of economic and political development built with the sweat of many Ugandans. We do not want another war and a violent change of leadership in our country, as nobody, but the authors of such violence, stand to benefit from such violence. Candidates and voters should, therefore, avoid use of language and behavior that fuel hatred and violence.

51. In the same vein, we call on all registered voters to turn up on polling days and exercise their rights to choose the leaders they want. We strongly appeal to you to reject bribes in form of money, material things and empty promises from any political group or individuals meant to compromise your conscience and the right to freely choose your preferred leader. God created you with value that no amount of money or material gifts can buy.

Balancing between health and the right to vote

52. We have learnt from the latest statistics that COVID-19 infections are on the rise, partly due to unregulated political activities and failure to enforce the guidelines in many other public spaces. In those instances where security agencies have tried to intervene, this has been done at a high cost; many Ugandans have lost their lives in the process.

Today, we see more vigor in enforcing the procedures within the political environment, while areas, such as markets, remain completely unregulated.

This has given the impression that the SOPs are being used as a ploy to curtail political activities of opposition groups. Therefore we recommend the following:

a) If, indeed, it is true that all unregulated public gatherings aid transmission of the virus, Government should apply a comprehensive approach that targets crowded places, such as markets, not just political activities.

b) Enforcement of the Election Guidelines and the SOPs should be applied to all political groups equally without fear or favour.

c) Candidates should encourage their supporters to observe the SOPs and avoid large gatherings of excited supporters that can easily aggravate the situation.

d) In enforcing the SOPs, security agencies must put the lives of citizens in the forefront; use of excessive force and loss of life to prevent a disease is counterproductive as it leads to the same outcome.

Protecting the rights of journalists

53. We have already emphasized the important role journalists and the media, as a whole, play in an election. It is in that same spirit that we call upon the State to respect and safeguard press freedom in the interest of promoting the common good and respect for the fundamental human rights and freedoms enshrined in our national Constitution and various international human rights instruments. We condemn any unprovoked attacks on journalists covering the electoral process, and urge the Police and other security agencies, not merely to apologize to the media fraternity, but also to expedite investigations into these incidences with the view of bringing the culprits to account for their actions.

54. Similarly we ask all journalists to exercise their mandate with humility and desist from any provocative language and acts that can inflame violence. Media houses and practitioners must be objective, practice responsible reporting and

serve all sections of people without any bias since irresponsible reporting can be a cause of chaos that can lead to violence and untold suffering. Please take note of the words of Pope Francis: Amid the confusion of voices and messages that surround us, a Christian journalist is called to be a new witness to the truth, thus becoming a bearer of hope and confidence in the future. This message applies not only to Christian journalists but to all persons involved with the media. Such persons should refuse to be used by any political group to fan conflict.

55. Media owners and practitioners should allow all political players to access their airwaves upon fulfilling the relevant business terms and conditions. Moreover, the State should guarantee equal access to all state-owned media by all candidates, irrespective of their political affiliations, in order to achieve the objective of “scientific political campaigns” in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

56. Dear people of God, we remind you of our noble Motto: For God and My Country. We, therefore, reiterate the fact that elections are a very important aspect in any democracy. It comes with many expectations. We, therefore, call upon all players to conduct themselves in a manner that promotes peace, unity, equality, freedom and social justice. We should all focus on building, and not destroying our common home, Uganda. We cannot do this unless we exhibit high level of political maturity. This includes accepting others who are different from us in their opinion and belief.

57. We urge those responsible for organizing the forthcoming elections to establish a credible electoral process, whose outcome will be respected by all stakeholders. We call upon all voters to turn-out in large numbers to cast their votes for candidates of their choice.

58. Finally, once the elections are over, we advise the ruling party that will come to power to initiate a process of national dialogue and reconciliation. There are many outstanding issues in our country that cannot be resolved by elections or mere change in leadership. Ugandans need to be given the opportunity to chart a future together and strive to promote a society befitting God and mankind.

May God keep you safe during this election period; may he inspire you to be agents of peace; may he give you the courage to witness the love of God in your daily interactions with your neighbours, for, as Jesus taught us “Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called children of God”.

Signed

+Joseph Antony Zziwa
Chairman of Uganda Episcopal Conference
And Bishop of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese