



## Politics of Patronage and Religion in Uganda



### Synthesis Report of the Proceedings of the 9th Session of the State of the Nation Platform

June 4, 2010, Kampala-Uganda

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**ACODE Policy Dialogue Series No. 13, 2010**

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# List of Acronyms

STON	State of the Nation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
UPC	Uganda People’s Congress
IRCU	Inter-Religious Council of Uganda
UJCC	Uganda Joint Christian Council
UPE	Universal Primary Education
MP	Member of Parliament
TTI	Think Tank Initiative

# Introduction

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The 9<sup>th</sup> State of the Nation Platform meeting held on June 4, 2010 debated the “The Role of Religious Leaders in Promoting and Sustaining Democracy and Good Governance in Uganda: Towards the 2011 Elections and Beyond.” Bishop Zac Niringiye, the assistant Bishop of the Church of Uganda’s Diocese of Kampala and the chairman of the National Governing Council of the African Peer Review Mechanism was the main speaker. The other speakers included politician and former journalist Sheila Kawamara, Rev. Fr. Peter Matovu of the Orthodox Church, and Sheik. Amani Sulaiman Asimwe of the Islamic faith. The meeting was well attended by religious leaders from other

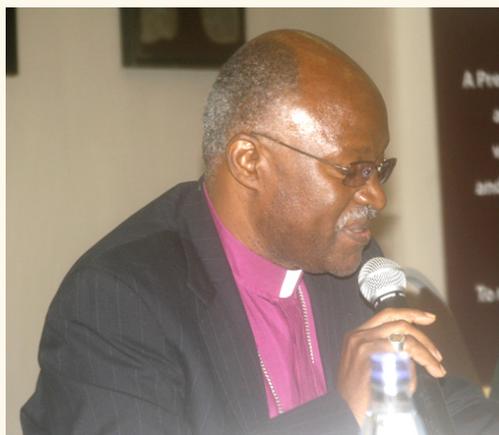
denominations and officials from Inter-religious Council of Uganda. There was near unanimity at the end of the debate that things are not going well in Uganda. Churches or religious groupings/faith-based organisations are very much a part of the problem. They are selfish, corrupt, and are as patronage-oriented as the government that has so successfully co-opted them. But things need not stay that way. A new beginning with a new cadre of leaders with vision, conviction, and courage is Uganda needs to kick the country to a higher level, not new laws and institutions because the country has adequate

# Governance: A General Picture

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Bishop Zac Niringiye framed his submission in terms of the politics of patronage. "Our governance challenge is political," he said. "We have a long history of the entrenched politics of patronage." It is no longer God and Country first, the bishop said in reference to Uganda's national motto: For God and My Country. The motto that works, he said, is: For Me and My Group First. Whether it is creation of districts or behaviour of churches. For example, when Catholics and Anglicans conflict quietly in western Uganda, it is all to do with 'me and my group'. "We seem not to have leaders who are capable of going beyond this mindset," the bishop said.

Digging into the discussion further, the clergyman said the quality of life of citizens is the key measure of how good or bad governance is in a country. This way of looking at things goes beyond the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) measure largely because GDP figures in Uganda tell a rosier story than what real people know and feel exists. Therefore, using the human development indices, or for that matter the prosperity/wellbeing indices, yields more realistic results. When considering governance, one needs also to examine the foundational nature of programmes, policies, mechanisms, structures, systems, institutions, and practices that aim to deliver wellbeing. What undergirds the



*Bishop Zac Niringiye, the Chairman of the National Governing Council of APRM, making a submission on the role of religious leaders in promoting and sustaining democracy and good governance at the 9th session of the platform*

institutions and policies and the other related aspects?

"As a country," the bishop said, "we have produced work that gives us tools to check how the quality of life is changing." There is the country review report, an outcome of the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) self-assessment process. The report lists 10 cross cutting issues that are critical for the country to address so as to ensure meaningful progress. These include high population growth, management of political transition, the land question, resolution of conflict in northern Uganda, decentralisation, management of political diversity and corruption. Countries that have ignored aspects of the APRM findings have paid dearly, for example, South Africa had an explosion of xenophobic violence in 2008, and Kenya which

experienced post-election violence early in 2008.

On corruption, Bishop Zac declared: "We can be classified as a corrupt society. No doubt about that." Ironically, Uganda is lauded for having good laws on corruption. The Anti-Corruption Act passed in 2009 is as tough as they come but that

has not stopped the corrupt in their tracks. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2009 ranked Uganda number 130 out of 180 countries, a spot it shares with countries such as Nigeria and Mauritania. That was a drop from a year earlier when it ranked 126 of 180 countries.

# Place of Religious Organisations

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If churches or religious organisations are to make a difference, Bishop Zac said, they must address patronage nationally and within their own ranks. “The biggest challenge they face, however, is that they themselves are trapped in the politics of patronage,” he said. “Churches and religious groupings are part of the problem.” Apparently, the people who proclaim loud and clear For God and My Country are the very ones betraying the motto through the way they act.

There is also an inherent inertia in the way religious groups approach some national issues. They are more interested in increasing the size of their groups. The contest over education in Uganda has nothing to do with quality but of which religious groups have the largest number of educational institutions. Faith-based foundations deliver 75 percent of education. “Now, the failure to perform, especially regarding UPE, cuts across,” Bishop Zac said, adding that an issue like quality of education should be addressed at all levels, even political levels. “Sadly, historically, religious groups are a source of division. If churches are to be relevant, they themselves must be re-oriented; we must call for re-formation to act beyond ourselves and act for God and Country. There is need for a new way of acting by religious groupings.”

Leaders, both religious and

political, seem unable to think beyond patronage – patronage based on groups and individuals. The political parties, the bishop said, are “supposed to exercise patronage of ideas but are stuck in the patronage of individuals. UPC made [a leadership] change after [founding party president Milton] Obote’s death. I hope the rest [of the political parties] are not waiting for their leaders to die first”.

In support of the bishop’s thesis, Ms. Sheila Kawamara said that religious groupings, indeed, are part of the governance problem in Uganda. Ms. Kawamara referred to Martyrs Day, a public holiday that fell the day before the debate, to illustrate her point. “The whole of last week, the Church of Uganda put out adverts inviting people to go to the Anglican shrine at Namugongo, that His Excellency would be the chief guest,” she said. “But is President Museveni not Anglican, a Christian? Why should he be invited? Anyhow, when he went, he donated Shs100 million. That was the catch.”

Ms. Kawamara, added that when she was growing up she thought the church was the most organised institution. “But now there is bickering. There is corruption.”

Rev. Fr. Peter Matovu declared that the faithful and their leaders are confused and corrupt. “Everybody wants to eat,” he said. “We need to go back to the orthodox period



*Sheik Sulaiman Asiiimwe, Ms. Sheila Kawamara, Dr. Peter Mwesige, Bishop Zac Niringiye during the 9th session of the platform on the role of religious leaders in promoting democracy and good governance*

in Christianity when leaders were concerned about leading for God. We need to restore the dissociated mind.”

In Sheik Amani Sulaiman Asiiimwe’s view there is corruption because of the need to survive. He added that politicians have used their influence to confuse religious leaders for political ends. He cited the well-documented and recurring wrangles amongst Muslim leaders, going back decades. Politicians fuelled the divisions.

During the general discussion, Bishop Zac returned to the issue of confusion and co-optation of religious leaders who necessarily fail to demand accountability from the government. Ahead of the 2011 elections, every politician will find reason to go to church, to the mosque all in search of votes although in a thinly disguised way, he said. Consequently, religious leaders decline to criticise politicians because if a politician is seated in

the pew, he is critical to the day’s collections. Politicians tend to give big money when they attend church or go to the mosque. When time for elections comes, they hope that the faithful will remember their generosity and reward them with votes. This is all about economic survival of the clergy and political survival for the politicians. And the politicians will get what they want because “we are locked in a system of patronage. You give Shs100 million to Anglicans, another Shs100 million to Catholics. Where is the budget? Make it public. But the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Uganda simply say: thank you very much”. The bishop was making reference to the pledges the President made over two days to Anglicans and Catholics to maintain their martyrs’ shrines during the Martyrs Day festivities. “We must honour our politicians because they have a passion for this country,” Bishop Zac said. “But this business of covering before the president/

minister – or Mr. President sir, Mr. Minister sir – is unhelpful.”

Political patronage in Uganda, according to the cleric, proceeds along these lines: if an ethnic group works for you, you create a district; if a church works for you, you provide a free car for the bishop; if it works for this group to have a king/traditional leader, you accept, if not, you deny it. That was as precise a summation of the colours of political patronage in Uganda as is possible. President Museveni has provided a free fuel-guzzling car to just about every bishop and every traditional/cultural leader on the day of installation. But congregants and supporters of traditional leaders never see fit to ask any questions about where, for example, the money is coming from. Is it private presidential cash or is it money from the State’s treasury? Indeed, supporters of these church leaders are always at the forefront in demanding the handouts, which the president is happy to oblige if he sees a chance to make political capital. If you have been in power nearly 25 years, it is inevitable that you will have spent a lot of political capital and yet you still need it if you have no plans of retiring any time soon. So you move away from renewing your political support by launching policies and programmes that make the people richer and healthier and better educated by negotiating and compromising your way through the political process to dishing out goodies as though you were a generous Maharaja in old India. President Museveni has been good at picking his options.

Most areas in Uganda now have traditional or cultural leaders because the Constitution says: “Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the institution of traditional leader or cultural leader may exist in any area of Uganda in accordance with the culture, customs and traditions or wishes and aspirations of the people to whom it applies.” Now Ankole is one of four old kingdom areas. The other three – Buganda, Bunyoro-Kitara, and Tooro – all have their kings back on the throne after the central government abolished kingship in the 1960s. Not so for Ankole. Not all Banyankole want the Omugabe back, but given that the traditional/cultural leaders no longer have any political, administrative, or legislative power, it defeats understanding why the minority who want the Omugabe on his throne cannot have their way. Their various attempts to restore their king have met with stiff resistance from the president. This has prompted critics to argue that Mr. Museveni, himself a Munyankole, does not want any institution emerging that may provide an alternative centre of power – moreover in his own backyard. The kings lucky enough to be on the throne must be reined in.

This is why the president has consistently warned religious and traditional leaders to stay out of politics and stick to minding Ugandans’ cultural and spiritual wellbeing. He was at it again just a week after the State of the Nation debate. The occasion, appropriately, was the 16th coronation anniversary

celebrations in Hoima of Omukama Solomon Gafabusa Iguru of Bunyoro-Kitara Kingdom. The president, according to media reports and his own press unit, likened the separation of roles of cultural leaders, religious leaders, and politicians to several people each with his lubimbi (garden) to cultivate but alongside one another. He said if suddenly one abandoned his lubimbi and crossed into another person's, he could easily have his head cut off and become a casualty without a case to press. He said there are many people, like himself, who are religious but not all of them are allowed to baptise. He called for unity and urged the traditional leaders to support the government's Prosperity for All programme to help their people fight household poverty. The request for traditional leaders to support Prosperity for All is reasonable. However, the president should allow that any meaningful discussion of the programme will inevitably turn political and yet he does not want traditional leaders to double in politics. That is a contradiction. Mr. Museveni wants to have his cake and eat it too. At the same function the president, true to character, donated Shs 200 million to the kingdom for the construction of a perimeter wall around the Buganda palace. He said that since the country's revenue base had grown, he would increase funding to cultural institutions.

The bishop took exception to the suggestion from the audience that

by distributing cars and promising to build this church or that mosque or fence that palace by handing out hundreds of millions of shillings, the president is distributing the national cake. Said the bishop: "Is the president accountable? It is only the president who decides where the cake goes because we lack systems. One of this country's biggest challenges is the transition from an individual called Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, not even from one government to the next. President Museveni is the epitome of patronage in this country."

When an audience member declared that religious leaders and their followers were "not the problem and not the solution" because there was gossip and ignorance everywhere and "an ignorant mind cannot be helpful," some leapt to the defence of religious groupings. They said not all was lost because there are individual churches and mosques and faith-based organisations doing some work to advance the cause of good governance in Uganda. "Religious institutions are part of the problem but not entirely," an audience member said. "They are trying to be part of the solution." The Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) and the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) were two organisations mentioned. The IRCU is conducting civic education to help people make informed political decisions, say during campaigns and voting. Also, religious institutions moderate our public and private lives. "Imagine a world where there were no religious faiths," another participant said.

# Church Should Focus on God and Country

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If Uganda is to become a freer, better-governed and prosperous country, there is no doubt that religious groupings – which together command a following that runs in the tens of millions – must leverage their potential to influence things. The State of the Nation attendees were not lacking in suggestions as to what exactly needs to be done. The ideas were informed by an underlying view that “politics is the business of every human being,” religious or otherwise. After all, church leaders, contrary to President Museveni’s assertion, being politically involved does not necessarily lead to confusion in roles. Norway’s constitution says for one to be prime minister, he or she has to belong to the Lutheran Church. There is no confusion in Norway on that basis. The solution lies in a re-ordering of our politics toward, for example, enforcing laws, strengthening institutions, and allowing for unfettered speech. Otherwise, as one participant said, “There may come a time when it will be taboo for anyone to stand on a pulpit to talk politics.”

For one, Bishop Zac wants a crusade to mobilise a new cadre of religious leaders who see a different patronage, a patronage of ideals and ideas and take serious the promise contained in the country’s motto: God and Country. Not God and Me, or God and Group. “The current leadership – bishops, sheiks – sadly

are not providing that leadership. We our selves are being patronised. That is our contribution currently.” The bishop’s ideal leader in the church and wider society is one who has:

- Vision – not for himself or herself but for God and for Country. We have good public documents, such as those against corruption, but no leaders to concretise them.
- Conviction – to live for and possibly die for; and
- Courage – to, for example, turn down presidential donations whose source is not clear. Instead of Christians refusing the President’s car, he said, they agitate for it. “In fact, they write to the president ahead of consecration. How shall we create accountability in the church?”

To achieve accountability, religious leaders should open up their structures for public participation. People should be involved in decision-making. They should also open their audited books of account so that parishioners and others gain a reasonable understanding of what their money is doing. Otherwise it would be ironical for religious groupings to demand accountability of the government when they are not doing the same.

Ahead of the elections next year,



Cover Photo: Sheik Sulaiman Asimwe, Ms. Sheila Kawamara, Dr. Peter Mwesige, Bishop Zac Niringiye, Mr. Godber Tumushabe and Rev. Fr. Peter Matovu during the 9th session of the platform on the role of religious leaders in promoting democracy and good governance

every church will be organising a fundraising event to tap money from different candidates. This is a practice that entrenches co-optation of religious leaders by politicians, making it difficult for such leaders to demand public accountability or raise serious questions about the democratisation process. Therefore, the IRCU should consider rejecting money from politicians, especially around campaign time. That would be a bold first step.

Also, religious groupings have infras-structure that they can use to organise around two things: teaching everybody a just route to economic development to avoid being bribed and patronised; and teaching the importance of values in society. Ahead of the 2011 elections, tolerance and acceptance are two of the values that certainly

need to be emphasised to Ugandans to avoid the devil's temptation to engage in acts of violence. Apart from the IRCU, Muslims are separately rolling out civic education programmes to teach people tolerance. It is too early to judge the impact these efforts will have.

It would, however, be helpful for the church and all religious groupings to engage in a vigorous internal debate about what the Rev. Aaron Mwesigye, who attended the State of the Nation debate, called the prophetic mission of the church. That debate could also help to clarify what the men and women of the cloth can do politically. That is important. Take the case of the Rev. Peter Bakaluba Mukasa. He was elected MP for Mukono North in 2006. His opponent went to court saying he

had won fraudulently. The reverend lost but appealed all the way to the Supreme Court. He lost there too and was defeated in the subsequent by-election. Some in the church said he was an embarrassment. Presently, the church in Kenya is campaigning against the proposed constitution of that country because it legalises abortion and provides for the creation of Islamic Khadi courts. The church in Kenya also helped fight the Daniel Arap Moi dictatorship. So the Kenyan church is very politically active compared to Uganda's. Be that as it

may, the debates could also lead to the emergence of a movement inside the church to reform it, as Bishop Zac would like to see.

Religious groupings could also initiate a bridge-building process across faith, political orientation, and ethnicity. "We have polarising figures in the church, and even in politics," said one participant. "We should isolate them. Europeans who introduced Christianity here transplanted their divisions here."

# Conclusion

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Christianity and Islam have been in Uganda for about 150 years. A vast majority of Ugandans identify themselves as religious. Churches, especially, have mushroomed all over the place spurred by the fast growth of Pentecostalism. But the discussion suggests that having so many churches dotting the landscape does not mean people will behave in holy ways. Indeed, many progressive countries do not have as many churches and religious groupings as there are in Uganda. Ironically, it is in societies bedevilled by corruption, political patronage, poor service delivery that the church should have a big and uplifting presence. That does not seem to be

the case in Uganda. But that means there is room for religious groupings to engage a different gear. As one participant noted, religious leaders have the chance to build a good foundation for Uganda. Not only do they have ready-to-address issues, they have a massive following. Instead of discussing issues and then retreating to their “little networks.” religious groupings such as UJCC and IRCU must stay engaged to contribute more effectively toward the enhancement of democracy and good governance so that Ugandans can live better lives. The alternative is for us to wait for divine intervention. And that may be quite a wait.

# Annex: List of Participant.

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## About State of the Nation Platform

The State of the Nation platform is a national policy forum to promote upward and downward policy conversation on contemporary public policy and governance issues in Uganda. The platform brings together individual leaders and professionals in the public sector, the private sector, civil society, the media and other interest groups into a policy discourse on contemporary policy and governance issues in the country. As an innovation in policy outreach and communication, the platform is a hybrid of ACODE's breakfast dialogue format, interactive panel discussions and outreach through media. This policy outreach initiative has been conceived and is made possible with core funding support to ACODE provided under a grant from the Think Tank Initiative (TTI).

The State of the Nation platform as a policy dialogue fora is defined by five core features:

A core group of persons selected based on their professional backgrounds and achievement, public roles, active leadership in their social groups and interest in public policy and governance issues. Because of the individual influence and positions of its individual members, this core group acts as the brain trust of the State of the National platform and provide a policy feedback loop between citizens and policy makers.

Local Level Segment is an innovative elements of the State of the Nation platform as a strategy for downward and upward policy engagement. The district fora aims at localizing national policy debates and putting them into the local context.

Students Segments are organised to nurture and encourage a new generation of young leaders in the country, special segments of the State of the Nation Platform are from time to time organized targeting students and student leaders. Like the District segment of the platform, the students' segment are organized in the different parts of the country and attendance is by invitation.

All proceedings of the various State of the Nation platform are fully recorded. ACODE has entered into partnership with a number of media houses (TV and Radio) to ensure that the proceedings are broadcasted to a wider audience. In addition, the proceedings are also produced in the form of video and audio podcasts and loaded on the internet so that they can be accessed through ACODE and other partner websites.

The participants in the State of the Nation platform have been built into a citizens network linked through electronic media, in particular, e-mail, cell phone and shot message texts. Building on the lessons from previous policy campaigns, the participants are mobilized into a network of citizens exchanging views and ideas on contemporary public policy and governance issues, helping members leverage key policy and decision making centers to increase the impact of their work, and generating consensus on issues of national importance.



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