

Introduction

Fellow citizens, we congratulate you upon completing the year 2019 and join you all in welcoming the New Year 2020.

During the year 2020, we will celebrate the 58th anniversary of our Nation's independence. We will celebrate 25 years since the 1995 Constitution was promulgated by the Uganda Constituent Assembly. The Constitution promised a new dawn of democracy and rule of law. It has always been our collective commitment to search for common ground in building a nation based on values of respect for human dignity, equality before the law and equal opportunity.

In our New Years' message for 2019, we highlighted a number of structural problems that make it impossible for us to make qualitative progress for both our country and ourselves based on the promise of the 1995 Constitution. These include: failure to establish political common ground given the egoistic nature of our leaders; the fusion of the state with the ruling NRM elites and a partisan Parliament defined by a transactional culture.

We pointed out the increasing limitations on the rights to freedom of speech and expression, the blatant denial of justice to Ugandans because of the dysfunctionality of our judicial system and investigative agencies and the growing cancer of corruption that permeates through our political and public service leadership and society.

Our Challenges - Our Duty in 2020

Fellow citizens, we have entered 2020 with a mixture of uncertainty and insecurity but also hope, which calls for all of us to undertake our national duty. The uncertainty before us is compounded by the following challenges:

- a) **Consistent economic growth without positive impact at household level;** Our economy is consistently posting positive economic growth figures but this does not reflect in the pockets of individual Ugandans and on our kitchen tables.
- b) **Our environmental and natural resources which is the backbone of our national and household economy is at risk.** In spite of the many years of commendable policy and legislative actions, the Government has not demonstrated the will, the commitment and the discipline to ensure effective implementation of agreed environmental policy measures.
- c) **Land grabbing and land evictions both in urban and rural areas places the majority at risk of landlessness and a potential of massive conflicts.** Moreover, despite the rollout of the Land Sector Strategic Plan since 2000, our land administration system remains messy, with heartbreaking stories from ordinary citizens. Sadly, local government administrative boundaries are becoming our new fault lines for ethnic conflicts across the country.
- d) **The absence of meaningful electoral reforms continues to make citizens participation in elections meaningless.** We are entering the last year of the ruling party's 5-year term of office. The constitutional and electoral reforms necessary to secure a conducive democratic environment for citizens have not yet been enacted. We are likely to see a mixture of rushed legislative actions, executive posturing and blame-games on who is responsible for legislative inaction.
- e) **The challenge of keeping Law and Order in a national context of human rights abuse with impunity;** In his 2020 new year address, the President highlighted the progress on fighting crime based on his "12-point action plan". However, the underlying causes of crime (petty and violent) are not addressed at the political and policy level. When we fail to address the political and social dimensions of crime, it sounds logical and gratifying to celebrate the catching and prosecution of criminals. But these are after-the-fact actions since lives and/or property have already been lost.

The quality and character of leadership is key to development, transformation and prosperity.

Every society is as good as the quality of its leadership. The state of our families, our churches or SACCOS, our schools, our communities, our districts and our country can only be a reflection of the quality and character of our leaders.

- If the priest at your local church or the Mwalimu at your local mosque is not transformative, he/she may only use the church or the mosque to preach religious messages but not transformation and prosperity of the believers.
- If the leaders of your SACCO do not have the spirit to serve SACCO members, the SACCO will grow and enrich the leaders but the members will either remain the same or become more indebted.
- If district leaders have no clue on how to lead, they will spend more time looking for deals and contracts, negotiating for their salaries and allowances, and at worst paying you to support them instead of ensuring your district service commission or schools or health centers deliver the much needed services.
- At the national level, if Members of Parliament are corrupt and concentrate on making deals for themselves, we will end up with an unaccountable President and executive branch and corrupt judicial system.
- If you have judicial leaders, judges and judicial officers who are corrupt, you can only end up with a dysfunctional judicial system where cases will take years to be determined, files will be lost and judgements will be on sale.
- If a president heads an executive branch that is not accountable, or likes buying everything from votes to fellow leaders, you can only end up with a corrupt public service. Broken politics and impunity of political leadership can easily hamper progress.

Unfortunately, deceptive spiritual encouragement and political sloganeering cannot be a perfect replacement for sound economic policies and the need for accountability to ensure effective public service delivery. The words of your most popular clergy will prepare you for salvation but must be complemented by spiritual wisdom that encourage you to work your way out of economic deprivation and poverty.

The year 2020 should be our year to be bold enough and look direct into the eyes of our clergymen and political leaders and ask them the hard question – how have your words and actions changed my condition? We should not allow deception to replace effective implementation of sound economic and social policies and lead to the delivery of good quality public services in health, education and sanitation that dignify every Ugandan citizen.

We should use elections as an opportunity to use our votes to replace bad, corrupt and ineffective leaders with good, decent and transformative leaders.

The need for national healing and consensus building through a National Dialogue should be our pathway to the future.

We entered the year 2019 when the Government of Uganda and the Working Group of Seven (WG7) organizations had signed a communique to accelerate the convening of the Uganda National Dialogue (UND) process. The Communique in which Government committed to allocate taxpayer funds and mobilize other funding for the process was unveiled at a public event on December 18, 2018. Through the Communique, the GoU and the WG7 committed to officially launch the UND within six months. It is now over a year and both the Government and the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda went mute.

The President never gave accountability for Uganda National Dialogue process in his New Year speech. To our knowledge, the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda and other organizations that constitute the WG7 remain mute. The Uganda National Dialogue Coordinating Team which was constituted on the basis of the Communique clearly seems to be in abeyance. As we embark on our 12 months' journey of 2020, we urge the President, the Government and the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda to step forward and offer leadership for the Uganda National Dialogue process. Let's embrace the idea of a National Dialogue and demand that it is launched as a matter of priority.

Let's make 2020 a consequential year to change and shape the character of our nation's political leadership.

The good news is that 2020 is an election preparatory

year and elections have consequences. Politicians from the President to Members of Parliament, district council leaders and your sub-county or village chairpersons have become consequential actors in our current discourse. Our political leaders will determine how much of our taxes or borrowed money go to paying themselves, fix roads and bridges or build a school or health center.

We therefore call upon each one of us to take the coming elections seriously. We have to be bold and courageous and insist on electing decent politicians – politicians who have a track record of credibility; who are selfless public servants and who are not liars but leaders. Electing decent politicians is a civic duty and we don't have to apologize for demanding an electoral system that enables us to discharge this duty.

We all agree that we deserve a country and a future where there is utmost respect for human dignity, equal opportunity and shared prosperity for every Ugandan woman, man, young person and child. Let's take 2020 to be the year when we reject lies from corrupt politicians, half-truth from the clergy or self-righteousness from civic leaders and ask the hard questions from those we have entrusted the responsibility of leadership.

Fellow citizens, let's make 2020 a year of big ideas and bold actions at whatever level that we pursue success and prosperity. We must create sufficient discomfort for ourselves not to accept our country as it is but to aspire to build a country and a future that we desire.

As civil society leaders, we commit to work hand in hand with the diversity of citizens' organizations and formations to ensure that the 2020/21 elections have an enduring impact on our Nation's politics and political culture and development. To achieve our dreams as citizens and as a country will require transformative political leaders and self-leadership by each and every one of us. Let's make 2020 the year when we rose up and demanded accountability and decency from our leaders at every level of leadership. For we know, the quality and character of our leaders determine how much we succeed as a people now and in the future.

For God and My Country
January 2020

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