

Uganda churches lead 'Prayer for Peace' march in Kampala

by Linda de Hoyos

In an event without precedent in Uganda, more than 10,000 people joined a Prayer for Peace walk and rally in the Constitution Square of Kampala on Nov. 2. The march was led by Roman Catholic Cardinal Emmanuel Wamala, and was joined by church leaders of all Christian denominations in Uganda's capital city, with solidarity from Muslim religious leaders who also attended. The march gathered Kampala's Christians from their churches, and then headed for the main city square, where Cardinal Wamala and Rt. Rev. Macleod Baker Ochola, of the Anglican Church of Uganda, led the Prayer for Peace rally.

The theme of the Prayer for Peace, said Cardinal Wamala, is peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Although the Cardinal never directly addressed the government, his speech called upon all Ugandans to carry out the mandate of the Ugandan Constitution for the establishment of peace throughout the country (see speech excerpts below).

Cardinal Wamala also indirectly countered the British intelligence methods of divide-and-rule that have kept Uganda in a state of perpetual violent turmoil for more than 30 years, by citing the common heritage of all Ugandans: "The God we believe in, the Creator of us all, is the God of Peace, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation. We are all created in His image: male and female He created us. We share the same human nature, same equality before Him and inhabit the same earth. . . ."

An attempt to hold a Prayer for Peace earlier in March had been thwarted by the government, when it refused to grant a license for the rally. This time, the march took place without incident, although march organizers were threatened by state agencies, according to sources. No government official attended the rally.

The Prayer for Peace was prompted by the dire situation afflicting northern Uganda, where a full half of the population is living in so-called protected villages, where they are dying from lack of food, sanitation, medicine, and clean water (see accompanying interview with Bishop Ochola of Kitgum). The protected villages are the government's answer to the threat increasingly posed to the people of the two northern districts of Kitgum and Gulu by the war between the government of Yoweri Museveni and the Lord's Resistance Army of Joseph Kony, a conflict which has persisted for more than 11 years.

President Museveni is coming under increasing pressure, from church leaders, from opposition leaders such as Cecilia

Ogwal of the Ugandan Peoples Congress and Paul Ssemogerere of the Democratic Party, and even within his own military, to end the war through negotiations. Museveni has stated that he will accept only the military defeat of the LRA. In 1994, an LRA bid for peace negotiations was rebuffed by Museveni.

Many well-informed Ugandans believe that the British warlord has contrived to keep the war going as his excuse for continuation of his one-party system, as a cover for military operations in support of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) war against southern Sudan from northern Uganda, and as a justification for the disbursement of government monies for military hardware imports, which are then often diverted to other military adventures, such as in Rwanda or eastern Congo.

The initiation of peace negotiations is made all the more urgent by the push for a total war to "bring down the National Islamic Front government in Khartoum" coming from the British Privy Council, speaking through Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords Caroline Cox, and in Washington, through Roger Winter, U.S. Committee for Refugees; John Prendergast, of the U.S. National Security Council; and Susan Rice, assistant secretary of state for Africa.

Military build-up is proceeding

The military build-up for this war is proceeding within Uganda, even as the Sudan government and the SPLA are engaged in ongoing negotiations for peace in Nairobi, Kenya (see article this issue). But such a war, which Winter declared on Sept. 17 would cause a "humanitarian catastrophe," will bring death and destruction not only to Sudan, but also to Uganda.

Within Uganda itself, the policies of Museveni since he came to power in January 1986 with the backing of Winter, the British Crown's Lonrho Corp., and the British Broadcasting Corp., have sacrificed the well-being of the citizens of Uganda, to the opening up of the country to external looting and to a policy of regional militarism sponsored by the British Privy Council. This has created conditions of despair for insurgencies not only in the north, but now also gravely affecting western Uganda, eastern Uganda, and the Kampala area itself.

To bring an end to the British-sponsored culture of violence in Uganda, the Prayer for Peace made clear, requires that Ugandans learn to reconcile their bitter differences, but

also requires that the government act to bring about an environment of peace in which true economic development can take place. Instead, the government, Ugandan sources report, is using the cover of counterinsurgency to physically eliminate any potential civilian and constitutional opponents. Rather than protecting populations caught in war zones, the Ugandan military has been deployed to gun down opponents under the guise that they are “supporting the rebels.”

The Prayer for Peace, as Cardinal Wamala and Bishop Ochola have made clear is their intent, raises a voice not heard from in Uganda for many years—that of the people, whose inalienable rights to life and liberty are being trampled on daily in Uganda.

A call for peace and reconciliation

by Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala

Here are excerpts of the keynote speech of His Eminence, Emmanuel Cardinal Wamala, archbishop of Kampala and chairman, Uganda Joint Christian Council, to the Prayer for Peace rally in Kampala, on Nov. 2:

Distinguished leaders from the civil, religious, cultural and diplomatic sectors here present, and all of you dear brothers and sisters in God our Father, I greet you with the words of God’s peace: Peace be with you; *Salamalekum; Amani iwe nanyi; Emirembe gibe namwe; Obusingye bube naimwe*. . . .

The Peace-March we have made to this Constitution Square has a deep symbolic meaning. It has shown the unity and solidarity of the people of God in search for lasting peace throughout our country. . . .

1. Peace

We all need peace and therefore we all have a religious and human duty to be *peace-makers, peace-keepers, and peace-promoters*. This duty cannot be left to the state alone, and its security organs. It is a duty in which each person, family, community, religious organization, and each part of Uganda has an important role to play.

I appeal to everyone here present and to all Ugandans to take up this challenge seriously: to do all we can to keep peace, preserve peace, and promote peace where it exists, to restore peace, to reject armed conflicts and seek peaceful resolution of conflicts where they exist, and always to be God’s instruments of peace wherever we are. “*Blessed are the peace-makers, they shall be called the children of God.*” (Matthew 5:9)

2. Forgiveness

We all need God’s power to forgive and God’s grace to be forgiven. If God were to remember all our sins and faults,

where would we be? But with God there is mercy and forgiveness. If there were no forgiveness in our inter-personal relations, in the families and communities, where would we be? We would be at each other’s throat every day.

Forgiveness is a religious and human *must* for everyone, every leader and every community. Forgiveness restores harmony, love, and trust. It restores unity and togetherness. It is not always easy to forgive, that is why we need God to touch our hearts in order to learn to forgive, discover the power of forgiveness, and become committed agents of spreading forgiveness. We have, as a people and as a nation, to learn to love our enemies and in doing so, turn them into friends. This is the message Jesus Christ gives us:

“You have heard that it was said: You shall love your neighbor, and you shall hate your enemies. I say to you: Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may become children of your Father Who is in heaven, because He makes His sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5)

3. Reconciliation

Reconciliation is a fundamental requirement for our human solidarity, religious unity in God, and nation-building.

The moment we allow divisions among us to sharpen and deepen, we undermine ourselves. We need negotiations and negotiators to heal divisions among us. We need people always committed to preventing such divisions from developing into hatred, prejudice, and disunity.

My appeal to you is to be ambassadors of reconciliation wherever and whenever there are dangerous divisions among us. *Where there is hatred, let us sow love. Where there is injury, sow pardon. Where there is discord, sow unity*. . . .

5. Our common human and religious heritage

Although coming from different religious, ethnic, and regional backgrounds, we do share some common and fundamental beliefs and values which should unite us in the work of promoting peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

- The God we believe in, the Creator of us all, is the God of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
- We are all created in His image: male and female He created us.
- We share the same human nature, same equality before Him, and inhabit the same earth.
- To each one of us God has given a conscience, His inner voice in us, which tells us to distinguish the good from the evil, the right from the wrong, the just from the unjust, the peaceful from the violent.
- We share the same beautiful nation, one constitution, and one government.
- We share our joys and aspirations, and our sufferings and our problems, jointly.
- We have a common past, a common present and shall have a common future. . . .

7. Our National Constitution challenges us to peace and reconciliation