

## A PASTORAL LETTER



**From the Council of Presidents of the  
Inter Religious Council of Uganda**

*“Ending AIDS as a Public Health Threat: A call to action”*





The Inter-Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) founded in 2001, is an indigenous, national faith-based organization uniting efforts of religious institutions to jointly address issues of common concern. The member organizations that constitute IRCU are the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of the Province of Uganda, the Uganda Orthodox Church, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council, Seventh-day Adventist Church in Uganda, the Born Again Faith in Uganda and the National Alliance of Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in Uganda

IRCU is affiliated to Religions for Peace International (RfP).

IRCU's main focus is on promotion of peace and conflict transformation, sustainable human development and network development among the religious leaders, communities, women and youths. It delivers services through religious leaders, structures and infrastructure which cascade down from national to the grassroots levels.

# PHILOSOPHY AND MANDATE

## *Philosophy*

Inspired and motivated by love and faith, IRCU strives to serve God through service to humanity, especially the poor and vulnerable of society Surah Al-Baqarah 17; Mathew 25:34-40; 1 John 4:20.

## *Mandate*

*From the philosophy, IRCU derives its mandate as follows:*

- a) Building the capacity of FBOs and religious leaders so that they rise up to today's challenges;
- b) Mobilizing resources for addressing the challenges;
- c) Influencing Public Policy Advocacy;
- d) Taking action as an agent of social change and transformation.

## *Vision*

The IRCU vision is "A divinely peaceful, united, prosperous Uganda where all people enjoy full health and freedoms for the common good."

## *Mission*

IRCU's mission is "To promote peace, reconciliation, good governance, and holistic human development through interfaith action and collaboration, advocating for the empowerment of member bodies for the common good."

# CORE VALUES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In advancing its mandate, IRCU is guided by the following values and principles:

## *Values*

- a) Solidarity,
- b) Justice, Peace and Reconciliation
- c) Ethics and integrity.

## *Core Principles*

### ***a) Representation:***

The principle of representation recognizes that religious communities, their structures and representatives are respected and duly taken into account in the work of IRCU

### ***b) Delegation:***

The principle of delegation recognizes that while local decisions and actions shall be taken and implemented at the local level, the national decisions and actions shall be taken and implemented at the national level.

### ***c) Consistency:***

The representation of the IRCU member Faith Based Organizations shall be consistent from the highest to the lowest level.

### ***d) Subsidiarity:***

Recognize that local and national decisions and actions can be taken at the respective levels.

# A Pastoral Letter From the Council of Presidents of the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda

*“Ending AIDS as a Public Health Threat: A call to action”*

*Dear brothers and sisters,*

We greet you all in the name of God Almighty from Inter Religious Council of Uganda, the body that unites religious leaders and faith communities to effectively respond to HIV and AIDS, as well as other matters of common concern to all of us.

As we commit to ensure a healthy nation, we acknowledge HIV and AIDS as one of the greatest threats to human well-being in modern times. Many of our brothers and sisters including religious leaders have died from this disease and many more have been directly or indirectly affected. We therefore need to examine ourselves to see if we are walking in accordance to the faith, values and beliefs.

Considering our calling and the immense spiritual and social resources that are at our disposal, we pray and commit our efforts to work harder to build a Uganda that is secure and stable, healthy, harmonious, caring, prosperous and God fearing.

## ***Our message, our concerns***

As your leaders, we are here to remind you again that current evidence shows that HIV has not gone away. This evidence which carry untold stories of loss, pain and incredible hardship, are unacceptable and demand a faithful and sustained response.

- Our efforts in fighting HIV and AIDS has resulted in reducing the number of people living with HIV from 18 out of every 100 individuals in 1990 to 6 out of every 100 people to date. However, this is still too high.
- And sadly, the social, cultural and economic factors including low socio-economic status of women, gender-based violence, alcohol and drug abuse, general moral decay and community and leadership complacency continue to drive HIV transmission especially among adolescent girls and young women.
- A substantial number of men are not aware of their HIV status, many whose HIV status is known to be positive are not on ARVs and yet these men engage in sexual partnerships with many women. We thank the women for their excellent health care seeking behaviors.
- Consequently, adult HIV positive men who are not taking ARVs are causing new HIV infections especially among young girls but also likely to die of HIV-related illnesses.
- Men are therefore dying more due to HIV related illnesses due to their poor health seeking behaviors.

- Our young girls are now the face of new HIV infections due to their high vulnerability.
- We have become complacent about the threat of the disease and started engaging in transactional and premarital sex, alcohol and drug abuse, Gender based Violence hence viewing HIV and AIDS as less alarming today than 30 or 35 years ago.

### **Brothers and Sisters,**

Our country has made a commitment to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. As Council, together with our like-minded partners and all people of good will, we are compelled to contribute to “End AIDS by 2030”. For us this means supporting people and communities living with, or vulnerable to HIV every day,

every month, every year until AIDS has been overcome.

Brothers and Sisters, the HIV epidemic is now in its 40th year. We as religious leaders state that - *“AIDS challenges us at all levels to be the leaders in deed and in truth: to be the faith institutions as a healing community”*.

### **Our commitment and Call to action**

As people of faith, we are all called by God to facilitate “life” for all God’s people. We are compelled by our commitment to God and God’s people to heed these calls. “HIV and AIDS cannot therefore stand ground in the face of resolute faith community leadership”.

On our journey to end AIDS as a public health threat, we call upon all people of God, government, development partners, and people of goodwill to do as follows:

## *To the men*

- Let's protect our lives as it's sacred. Take up responsibility of our lives and our families not forgetting to take up and fulfill our spiritual roles in families.
- Let's voluntarily take an HIV test and know our status and share our results with loved ones or families. This will help us make an informed decision about our sexual behaviour and valuing our own and other people's lives.
- And testing for HIV is not a statement about morality, but a health practice that we should all do. But there are some of you especially men who rely on the status of your spouses a practice we must stop.
- If you test positive for HIV, ask for assistance to start taking ARVs which will ensure your health is not affected by the virus hence prolonging your life. Then ensure you stay and adhere to treatment which will prolong your life and reduce the chances of infecting others. As the Doctor treats, God heals.
- If you find out you are HIV negative, we encourage you to abstain if not married and or remain faithful to your partner(s) for those who are married.

## *To young people*

- As young people, our future lies in you. But we appreciate that curiosity about relationships and sexuality is a natural part of growing up.



- You also have the right to receive information and support from us about relationships, sexuality, and reproductive health.
- But with good intentions, we are here to guide you as you grow up to appreciate the importance and benefits of not engaging in premarital sex and other risky behaviors.
- Avoid engaging in risky behaviors such as taking alcohol and drug abuse, premarital sex including bad influences and risky places. This is likely to expose you to HIV and other infection including unplanned pregnancy.
- Always involve your parents/Guardians and other family members in your decisions about relationships and sexuality.

### *To parents/Guardians*

- Let us create a conducive and enabling environment for our children at home that facilitates free interaction and discussion about sexuality and HIV.
- Let us all remember that not teaching our children Godly values with regard to sexuality means that they will be influenced instead by their friends and by the media. We should appreciate the current information and digital age.
- Let us therefore educate our children right from their early childhood for respect of family values and traditions, responsible gender relations, rejection of risky behaviour including drug use and fidelity and compassion.

- Let us serve as role models to the beloved children and communities and build social support mechanisms for those who need help.
- Be exemplary towards these children and equip them with skills on how to deal with peer pressure.
- Let us support our children who are taking ARVs to adhere until they are of age to do so on their own.
- We are all sinners and God loves us all. Disease and predicaments are invitations for courage and faith.
- God still loves, cares for and longs to pour His grace on those infected and affected by HIV.
- We deeply regret instances where some Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) and religious leaders have contributed to creating an environment of stigma, fear and mis-information such as acts of faith healing.

### *To the People living with HIV and AIDS*

- You are created in the image of God; and God loves you whether you are responsible for your condition or no.
- None of us knows when we shall die; every moment that we live is but a gift from God, an invitation to be fruitful and to live a life that reflects His glory.
- We therefore commit to offer dignified care to you at all times and places. We call upon you never to resign your fate to live in fear, anger, shame and denial.
- Let us all pray that regardless of our status, we will always love and support our neighbors living with HIV.

- We encourage you not to lose faith in God's mercy, and aspire to a rewarding and productive life, embracing fate with courage and faith.
- We pray for all people who are living with HIV. We remember those who have died from AIDS-related illnesses. We give thanks for the progress that has been made; and ask God to give us strength and courage to stand up together to eliminate AIDS as a public health threat.
- Let us utilize our structures and leadership to mobilize communities for uptake of HIV services.
- Let us create an enabling environment for our children in our places of worship and communities where people can feel welcomed, protected, affirmed and accepted.
- Let's form partnerships to jointly offer pastoral/spiritual care and guide people on where to get services.
- Let us speak out against stigma and discrimination including GBV at every level of society, including, our faith institutions.

### ***To religious leaders, Partners and Government***

- Let us at all levels act as champions in our faith constituencies to mobilize communities especially men not to engage in risky behaviors such as multiple sexual partnerships, Gender based violence, drug and alcohol abuse.
- Let all us all ensure that informational campaigns for preventing HIV and AIDS remains within our ethical, social norms and cherished values.

- Let us utilize our privileged positions to encourage communities to embrace progressive social norms to ensure we end AIDS by 2030.
- Let us all involve people that are living with HIV in decision making not as a problem but as part of the solution and allow them to live their lives as normally as they can and preserve their confidentiality.
- Hold ourselves accountable to the commitments made towards eliminating AIDS.

As your leaders, we call upon all of you to act as beacons of life, hope and meaning even in difficult situations. Let us all pray that regardless of our status, we will love and support our neighbors living with HIV. Let us pray for God's help to refrain from offering words against those living with or affected by HIV. Let us pray for God's help to encourage one another with words and actions which offer solace that alleviates our shared pain.

Brothers and Sister, we are all called to bear witness to the harsh reality that, without comprehensively addressing these challenges, all of us will suffer illness and death. Our mission as faith communities compels us to work together to ensure that all may flourish.



His Eminence Sheikh  
Shaban Ramadhan  
Mubaje

Grand Mufti of Uganda, Uganda Muslim Supreme Council,  
Chairman, IRCU Council of Presidents



His Grace the Most  
Rev. Stanley Ntagali

Archbishop, Church of the Province of Uganda,  
Co-Chair, IRCU Council of Presidents



His Eminence  
Metropolitan Jonah  
Lwanga

Archbishop, Uganda Orthodox Church, Co-Chair, IRCU  
Council of Presidents



Pr. Dr. Daniel Matte

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Daniel", positioned above a thin horizontal line.

President, Seventh-day Adventist Uganda Union  
Co-Chair, IRCU Council of Presidents



His Grace Dr. Cyprian  
Kizito Lwanga

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Cyprian", positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Archbishop, Kampala Archdiocese, Co-Chair, IRCU  
Council of Presidents



Bishop Joshua Lwere

A blue ink signature of Bishop Joshua Lwere, written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a thin horizontal line.

General Overseer, National Alliance of Pentecostal  
and Evangelical Churches in Uganda,  
Co-Chair, IRCU Council of Presidents



Apostle Dr. Joseph  
Serwadda

A blue ink signature of Apostle Dr. Joseph Serwadda, written in a cursive style. Below the signature is a thin horizontal line.

President, Born Again Faith in Uganda Co-Chair, IRCU  
Council of Presidents



Plot 245 Sentema Road, Mengo  
P. O. Box 7502 Kampala  
Tel : +256 414 342 877,+256 312 265 670/1  
E-mail : [secretarygeneral@ircu.or.ug](mailto:secretarygeneral@ircu.or.ug)  
Website: [www.ircu.or.ug](http://www.ircu.or.ug)

