

Remarks at the Inter Denominational Prayer Session

- Archbishop Dr. Pastor Daniel Matte, Seventh Day Church
- Dr. Hafiz Walusimbi, Muslim Fraternity
- Rev. Dr. Paul Kakooza, Anglican Church
- Msgr. Gerald Kalumba, Catholic Church
- Pr. Vincent Mbalangu, Pentecostal Church

Good morning to you all.

Introduction

- I also want to thank everybody who helped organize this prayer session. It's wonderful to see so many friends, faith leaders and dignitaries. I am truly honored to be joining you here today. I want to offer a special welcome to the various faith leaders here today -- who are a powerful example of what it means to practice compassion, who inspires us to speak up for the freedom and dignity of all human beings. I am pleased to welcome you and we're grateful that you're able to join us here today.
- Today, I'm reminded of a line of prayer that **Eleanor Roosevelt** was fond of. **She said, "Keep us at tasks too hard for us that we may be driven to Thee for strength."** For me, this is always a chance to reflect on my own faith journey. I've wondered at times if maybe God was answering that prayer a little too literally. But no matter the challenge, He has been there for all of us. He's certainly strengthened me "with the power through his Spirit," as I've sought His guidance not just in my own life but in the life of our nation and the people we lead. This prayer session has brought us together, giving us the opportunity to come together in humility before the Almighty and to be reminded of what it is that we share as children of God.

Faith and issues at hand

- The interlink between the pandemic we face today and the issues in our society is diverse. So how do we reconcile these realities -- the profound good, the strength, the tenacity, the compassion and love that can flow from all of our faith, is a big engine towards a successful society we're trying to build but this can only happen if we join forces against what's affecting us.
- As we speak, around the country, we see faith inspiring people to lift up one another -- to feed the hungry and care for the poor, and comfort the afflicted and make peace where there is strife. I take this opportunity to applaud and commend all the religious leaders for their role in rebuilding compassion following the recent violence across the country. We see faith driving us to do right and we thank you for this.
- The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has added a blow to our already struggling communities and as result of this, we have experienced one of the most debilitating times with numerous violation of the rule of law by various stakeholders. Our society has witnessed a sharp increase in the deaths amongst our colleagues and loved ones due to the new variants of the virus. We take cognizance of the lack of oxygen which has been a much needed supply during the second wave; Infringement of the freedom of expression and association, abuse of children's rights, serial murders, teenage pregnancies, lack of accountability and transparency among others which continue to prevail.
- Saddening as this may be, there's need to adopt a more proactive approach in dealing with the human rights and rule of law challenges in the country. Starting from an in-house initiative, As Uganda Law Society, we launched a taskforce to investigate the issues help victims of these injustices. We have opened up our help lines to all those

that seek justice and we have further indicated this in our rule of law reports on Uganda during the COVID 19 period.

- So this fight is not unique to one group or one religion. And, first, we should start with some basic humility. Our job is not to ask that God responds to our notion of truth -- our job is to be true to Him, His word, and His commandments. And we should assume humbly that we're confused and don't always know what we're doing and we're staggering and stumbling towards Him, and have some humility in that process. That means we have to speak up against those who would misuse His name or even any situation to justify oppression, or violence, or hatred with that fierce certainty. No God condones terror. No grievance justifies the taking of innocent lives, or the oppression of those who are weaker or fewer in number.

Way forward

- And so, as people of faith, we are summoned to push back against those who try to distort any religion, or situation such as the one present in Uganda today -- for their own nihilistic ends. We will constantly reaffirm that fundamental freedom. There's wisdom in our founders writing in those documents that help found this nation the notion of freedom of religion, because they understood the need for humility. They also understood the need to uphold freedom of speech, that there was a connection between freedom of speech and freedom of religion. For to infringe on one right under the pretext of protecting another is a betrayal of both.
- But part of humility is also recognizing in modern, complicated, diverse societies, the functioning of these rights, the concern for the protection of these rights calls for each of us to exercise civility and restraint and judgment. And if, in fact, we defend the legal right of a person to insult another's religion, we're equally obligated

to use our free speech to condemn such insults and stand shoulder-to-shoulder with religious communities, particularly religious minorities who are the targets of such attacks.

- Just because you have the right to say something doesn't mean the rest of us shouldn't question those who would insult others in the name of free speech. Because we know that our nations are stronger when people of all faiths feel that they are welcome, that they, too, are full and equal members of our countries. This should apply in equal measure when we are dealing with societal issues just like the previous election times. We need to respect each other's version of expression as long as it is not one that oppresses, insults or discriminates others.
- So humility I think is needed. And the second thing we need is to uphold the distinction between our faith and our governments. Our nation does not sponsor a religion, nor does it pressure anyone to practice a particular faith, or any faith at all we are secular in nature as our constitution clearly places it. And the result is a culture where people of all backgrounds and beliefs can freely and proudly worship, without fear, or coercion.
- If there's one law that we can all be most certain of that seems to bind people of all faiths, that Golden Rule is that we should treat one another as we wish to be treated. The Torah says "Love thy neighbor as yourself." In Islam, there is a Hadith that states: "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." The Holy Bible tells us to "put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."
- **"Whatever our beliefs, whatever our traditions, we must seek to be instruments of peace, and bringing**

light where there is darkness, and sowing love where there is hatred.” And this is the loving message of His Holiness, Pope Francis.

- Each of us has a role in fulfilling our common, greater purpose -- not merely to seek high position, but to plumb greater depths so that we may find the strength to love more fully. And this is perhaps our greatest challenge -- to see our own reflection in each other; to be our brother's keepers and sister's keepers, and to keep faith with one another. As children of God, let's make that our work, together.

Conclusion

- Lastly, if we are properly humble, if we drop to our knees on occasion, we will acknowledge that we never fully know God's purpose. We can never fully fathom His amazing grace. “We see through a glass, darkly” -- grappling with the expanse of His awesome love. But even with our limits, we can heed that which is required: To do justice, and love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.
- I pray that we will. And as we journey together on this “march of living hope,” I pray that, in His name, we will run and not be weary, and walk and not be faint, and we'll heed those words and “put on love.” This should be our message as we move towards the election period.
- May the Lord bless you and keep you, and may He bless this precious country that we love. Let's stay safe the Virus is real.

Thank you all very much.

PHEONA WALL

President