

From: Religious Leaders and Concerned Citizens of Uganda,

TO:

The President of the Republic of Uganda,

State House Uganda

P.O Box 25497

Kampala

Uganda.

Dear Mr. President,

RE: OPEN PETITION AGAINST THE PROPOSED NATIONAL RELIGIOUS & FAITH ORGANISATIONS (RFOs) POLICY, 2023

We, religious leaders and citizens express our grave concerns regarding the proposed National Religious and Faith Organisations (RFOs) policy in Uganda, championed by the Directorate of Ethics and Integrity under the office of the President. This policy is purported to foster a culture of accountability, provide a streamlined registration process for all RFOs in Uganda, facilitate legal and procedural changes to empower RFOs to contribute effectively to our nation's development, promote unity amidst diversity, and establish standards that inspire confidence among all stakeholders. However, this policy if enacted, poses a significant threat to the fundamental rights of freedom of worship and association guaranteed by the Constitution. Allow us to elaborate on our key arguments:

1. **Infringement of Constitutional Rights:** The RFOs proposed policy directly contravenes *Article 7 of the Ugandan Constitution*, which mandates the State to create and maintain an environment where all individuals can freely practice their chosen faiths without fear of interference or persecution. By imposing regulatory measures on religious activities, the proposed policy undermines this constitutional guarantee.
2. **State Control of Beliefs:** By seeking to legislate religious practices and beliefs, the RFOs proposed policy grants unprecedented power to the State in determining what

constitutes acceptable religious expression. Such intrusive measures not only disregard the inherent diversity of religious beliefs in Uganda but also violate the spirit of *Article 29(1)(c) of the Constitution*, which grants every person the right to practice their religion freely.

3. **Discriminatory Spirit:** There are alarming indications that the proponents of the RFOs proposed policy are targeting specific religious groups, particularly "born again churches," with accusations of being "mushrooming" and "out of control." This discriminatory rhetoric goes against the principles of equality and non-discrimination enshrined in *Article 21(2) of the Constitution* and threatens to marginalize certain religious communities based on their beliefs.
4. **Excessive Control:** The proposed policy extends far beyond reasonable regulation and encroaches upon various aspects of religious life, including observance of rituals, and infringement on the God ordained roles of religious leaders. Such overreach not only restricts individual autonomy and freedom of choice but also sets a dangerous precedent for government interference in personal matters of conscience.
5. **International Human Rights Obligations:** Uganda is a signatory to numerous international human rights treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights that protect the right to freedom of religion and belief. Enacting laws that curtail these freedoms would not only undermine Uganda's commitments under these treaties but also risk damaging its reputation on the global stage as a champion of human rights.
6. **Precedents in Commonwealth Countries:** It is worth noting that other Commonwealth nations, such as South Africa, have upheld the principle of religious freedom by allowing individuals to practice their faiths without undue interference from the State. Uganda should heed these examples and prioritize individual liberties over excessive governmental control.
7. **Existing Legal Framework:** The Penal Code Act already contains provisions to address crimes allegedly committed by religious leaders, including offenses against religion, such

as the desecration of sacred texts, as well as more general crimes like financial exploitation and fraud. Rather than introducing new legislation, the focus should be on effectively implementing existing laws to address any reported abuses or instances.

We believe that this proposed policy is a direct contradiction of the NRA historical mission of freeing the people of Uganda from domineering ideologies that were perpetrated by the previous authoritarian regimes that caused divisionism based on religion, faith and beliefs and subsequently perpetuated suppression of the freedom of worship. We also associate with the NRM Partys position of protecting and upholding the Constitutionally established fundamental and other human rights such as freedom of expression and association which are fundamental to the realization of this governments core agenda.

In conclusion, we appeal to Your Excellency to support this petition, giving an opportunity to enact meaningful change and uphold the values of justice, equality and progress that define our nation under your leadership.