

28th September 2012,
John Paul II Justice & Peace Centre, Kampala

THE LAUNCH OF ANTI-CORRUPTION CAMPAIGN, CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

Dear friends,
Dear invited guests,

As a member of the Board of Governors of the John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre, I would like to welcome you all at today's launch of an anti-corruption campaign. You are all most welcome. As our beloved country Uganda prepares to celebrate 50 years of Independence, we feel that the Ugandan society is at a crossroads. At this important point in the history of Uganda, the people of Uganda have to decide which direction it wants to go. Do we want to tolerate and sustain corrupt practices at different levels in our Society or do we want to work towards a corruption free society where there will be an absolute zero-tolerance at all levels towards corruption? Only concrete action can tell if we are serious in combating corruption or if we just pay lip service in order to serve certain interests. As the John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre, we look at socio-economic realities from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching. Therefore our stance is clearly pro-life and anti-corruption as corruption kills and destroys our Society. As Catholics we are called to be pro-life, but surely not only Catholics; we believe all God fearing people are called to be pro-life as life is our most precious gift from God. However, corruption is truly the great enemy of life; corruption promotes a culture of death which we can see happening in all areas of life in our Society; when we look at how the health sector suffers, then surely corruption kills people; when we see the state of some of our roads, and as a result all the accidents, then surely corruption kills people; when we see how bureaucrats and politicians eat public money, then surely corruption is killing us; when police officers and people in the judiciary cannot maintain the rule of law and do justice, surely corruption will continue to kill people; if government agencies cannot protect our environment and stop people from illegal practices endangering our living conditions, surely corruption will kill more people, etc.; and when people see such wrongdoing being left unpunished, surely more people will be killed while in the mean time our moral values are being eroded in an alarming way.

My friends, this is the time; the time is now; we all have a responsibility; we have the choice; the choice is ours; do we allow corruption to control our Society and therefore let it impoverish and destroy our communities **OR** do we take control, let the Rule of Law prevail and help Society control corruption so that our communities can prosper and grow and people can have a better future indeed?

At the end of last year, I was on a visit to Malaysia. Malaysia has become one of the new economic tigers in Asia. In Malaysia a lot of oil and gas was found

and exploited and it is for everyone to see that the benefits of these resources are being used for the good and the building up of the country. Since the Malaysian government started exploiting oil and gas, the profits have been invested in a better infrastructure and also in areas like free primary and secondary education, including free boarding and feeding programmes in schools. My friends, it will be up to the Ugandan people to decide if in future the oil in this country is going to be a curse or a blessing, if it will give life or bring death, if it will draw people out of poverty or if it will only make the elite few richer? It all depends on the real stance the different sectors in Ugandan Society are now going to take in the fight against corruption. Without full transparency and accountability, without demanding total openness from the oil companies and the national government about the actual revenues paid and received from oil companies, and without showing how public financial resources will be used to better the economic and social living conditions of the people, especially the poor, without all of this, at the end the oil will not help us but will only kill Uganda; without this Uganda will be caught up in a vicious cycle of conflict and poverty exacerbated by embezzlement, corruption and revenue misappropriation. My friends, is this what we want? Surely not!

Please, my friends, let us remember the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke (16:10), “whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much”; this means if we do not take corruption seriously now, if we do not help to promote change now, the problem of corruption will in future only increase. Therefore, as the John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre we hope and pray that from now on the people of Uganda at all levels will say and show a clear NO to corruption; please, let us stop pretending and do as if we “Hear no evil, see no evil and speak no evil”; the time is now; let us act against and say NO to corruption; it will be the only way towards a significant and integral economic and social development of the country and of the people in Uganda; it will be the only way to become truly independent as a country in a world which would like to make Uganda only become more dependent; it will be the only way to claim our independence knowing that otherwise others will take advantage and can try to exploit and abuse the rich natural resources that are available here in Uganda; let us say NO to corruption if from now on we want to become a more transparent and corruption free society. My friends, this is the time; let us be united and say NO to corruption; let us all agree: people with legislative, executive and judiciary powers, people from all sectors in Society: from the public and the private sectors, from the Churches, from the entire religious sector, the business community, the media, and educational sectors, the people who are self-employed or unemployed; people from all regions and districts in Uganda; people who are young, middle aged or old; please, let us think about the future of our families; the future of our children; the future of the citizens of this country.

My friends, the choice is ours; and the choice is now; this is the time; this is the time to choose pro-life and to say NO to corruption; corruption is not acceptable and if it ever was, now not anymore; for the sake of human dignity and for the sake of the common good, for the sake of development and peace, my friends, there is no excuse to tolerate corruption any longer; if we like it or not, corruption will only destroy and kill us; let us therefore say a loud and clear NO to corruption; it is the only way to celebrate 50 years of Independence with joy, hope and faith in the future.

My friends, to conclude, please know that Blessed Pope John Paul II is encouraging us also to take up a “major role” in the fight to end corruption. In his appeal to Philippine Catholics in October 2003, he said that (quote) “to eliminate corruption calls for the committed support of all citizens, the resolute determination of the authorities and a firm moral conscience”; my friends, it is therefore our responsibility to bring this campaign against corruption in every home and institution by using our distinct influence and resources; it is our prayer and wish that this campaign against corruption does not stop here but will enter the hearts of all people in Uganda; with our participation and that of all people, yes of all citizens, let this campaign against corruption makes us proud to be Ugandans; let it penetrate and transform the spirit in all our communities, in all our associations, our parliaments, our councils, our houses, our schools, our colleges and universities, in all our businesses, our churches, our mosques and temples, and in all our offices. The time is here and now! We have had enough talk about corruption. The time is now for action and for us all to do our part. Let us put an END to the malice of corruption now!

Thank you very much for listening. God bless you all.

Board of Governors,
John Paul II Justice and Peace Centre,
Kampala, Uganda