

By Juliet Anna Lukwago

Church leaders have rallied behind President Yoweri Museveni's directive postponing the June 3 Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations at Namugongo following fears over the Ebola outbreak, even as preparations and pilgrimages had already started in different parts of the country.

The Uganda Episcopal Conference on Monday urged Christians to remain calm, prayerful and united following the suspension of the annual celebrations, which attract millions of pilgrims from Uganda and across the region.

In a statement signed by the chairman of the Episcopal Conference and Bishop of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese, Bishop Dr Joseph Anthony Zziwa, the Catholic Church said the decision should not weaken the faith of believers, noting that the witness of the Uganda Martyrs continues to inspire Christians through sacrifice, courage and fidelity to God.

"Although the national gathering at Namugongo has been postponed, dioceses

and parishes are encouraged to celebrate the day with the guidance of the diocesan bishop and the relevant government authorities," the statement reads in part.

The bishops also called upon Christians to continue praying for the nation, health workers and all people affected by the Ebola outbreak while strictly observing guidelines issued by the Government and the health ministry.

The Catholic Church further appealed to media organisations to support public awareness campaigns aimed at preventing the spread of Ebola.

Preparations for this year's celebrations had already reached advanced stages at both the Catholic and Anglican shrines in Namugongo.

Pilgrims from several dioceses had already started walking to Namugongo while others were making final travel arrangements before the abrupt postponement.



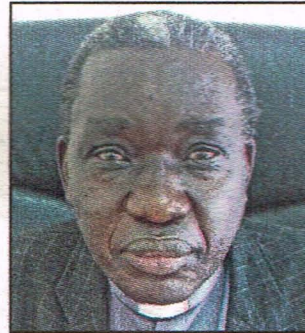
Bishop Anthony Zziwa

This year, Kasese Diocese had been selected by the Uganda Episcopal Conference to animate the 2026 Uganda Martyrs Day celebrations at the Catholic shrine under the theme "Christ is alive in you and me."

The annual celebrations are organised on a rotational basis among the four ecclesiastical provinces of the Catholic Church in Uganda.

ANGLICAN CHURCH

Meanwhile, the Anglican



The Rev. Canon Ongeng

Church also endorsed the Government's directive and called upon Christians and organising committees to fully co-operate with health authorities.

In a statement issued by the provincial secretary of the Church of Uganda, Rev. Canon William Ongeng, the Church said the postponement followed consultations between government, health authorities and religious leaders in light of the Ebola outbreak linked to

ABOUT THE DAY

Uganda Martyrs Day commemorates the 45 Christian converts who were killed between 1885 and 1887 on the orders of Kabaka Mwanga of Buganda for refusing to renounce their faith. Of these, 22 were Catholics while 23 were Anglicans.

The 22 Catholic martyrs were beatified by Pope Benedict XV in 1920 before being canonised by Pope Paul VI in 1964.

neighbouring DR Congo.

"Although the annual gathering remains one of the most significant events on the Christian calendar, the Church recognises the importance of prioritising public safety and preserving life," Ongeng said.

Uganda Christian University had been selected to lead this year's Anglican Martyrs Day celebrations.

Ongeng commended the university leadership, organising committees, volunteers and partners for the preparations and resources already invested in the event.

He added that the Church of Uganda would continue consulting government and health authorities on possible alternatives for commemorating Martyrs Day safely.

Church spokesperson Adams Sadiik revealed that internal discussions were ongoing on possible options, including diocesan-level prayers and a nationally televised service on June 3.

The postponement comes amid heightened Ebola surveillance and emergency response measures across Uganda after authorities confirmed Ebola virus cases in the country.