

THE KANUNGU MASSACRE

**The Movement for the Restoration of the
Ten Commandments of God Indicted**

**The Uganda Human Rights Commission
Periodical Report**

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FOREWORD

Uganda is a secular state for which the national Constitution prescribes no state religion. Every Ugandan is free to subscribe to whatever faith or religion they want. And the government of Uganda has had minimal if any, interference into the citizens' freedom of worship and religion. It is only during the period 1971-78 that the state meddled in the religious affairs of the nation by declaring that only four religions namely Islam, the Catholic Church, Church of Uganda, and the Uganda Orthodox Church were official.

Since then and until recently the issue of freedom of religion in Uganda hardly raised any national controversy. Government treated it as the private matter without intervening directly by banning religions or sects, or discreetly by restricting their registration. All indications were that government totally respected the right of worship and freedom of religion.

The philosophy behind freedom of religion has been the rationality of human beings and their ability to be masters of their own destiny. Human beings are believed to be endowed with a special quality to think and reason therefore having the ability to decide how they want to worship in accordance with each one's conscience. It is this conscience that inform how, when, why one relates to the super natural arena. In all this the human being is expected to know and be mindful of the boundary of this freedom: where it begins to violate another person's rights.

It was with shock that the world woke up to the events of 17 March 2000, when more than 500 members of a locally based cult, the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments, perished in an inferno in Kanungu, southwestern Uganda. The equally shocking developments that subsequently unfolded confirmed that the freedom of worship had been taken for granted and this was obviously detrimental.

Following the incident, the Uganda Human Rights Commission drawing on its constitutional mandate, immediately set up a team to assess the possible causes and the human rights implications of the tragedy. Article 52(2) of the Constitution of Uganda requires that *"The Uganda Human Rights Commission shall publish periodical reports on its findings and submit annual reports to Parliament on the state of human rights and freedoms in the country"*. The publication of this report is in line with this provision.

The report presents findings from the on-the-spot assessment by the Commission team; the interviews with former members of the cult, their neighbours and friends; the local political and religious leaders in areas where the cult operated and the district authorities. The findings are presented together with statistics on the extent of the human rights violations.

The Commission was able to draw specific conclusions from these findings, which formed the basis for the recommendations made to Government and other relevant authorities in this periodical report. Our prayer is that the government and all Ugandans pay special attention to the issues raised in the report and take appropriate action so that the rights that were violated in the Kanungu tragedy are safeguarded.

We are aware that our investigation into the Kanungu incident was just one of many efforts that were launched following the incident. Notable among which is the Commission of Inquiry set up by the Government. We hope this report provides information and lessons that will be found very useful by this Commission of Inquiry and all those interested particularly human rights advocates and researchers and that it will help illuminate and transform the context in which freedom of worship has hitherto been regarded in this country.

For God and my Country

Margaret Sekaggya (Mrs)
Chairperson
Uganda Human Rights Commission

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT

People could see that they (cult) were being odd but they were given the benefit of the doubt.
Mr A. Rutaroh (LC5 Chairperson, Rukungiri)

On 17 March 2000 over 500 people were burnt to death in Kanungu, Rukungiri (now Kanungu) District. It was reported that those who were burnt belonged to a religious cult calling itself the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God led by Joseph Kibwetere, Credonia Mwerinde, Angelina Mugisha, Fr Joseph Kasapurari and Fr Dominic Kataribabo. At first it was assumed that the Kanungu massacre was mass suicide by the members of the cult who were convinced about going to heaven through fire but later it was established that it was planned and executed by the cult leadership. The victims of the inferno included children too young to make independent decisions.

Before the dust could settle after the Kanungu tragedy, it was discovered that many more people belonging to the same cult had died and been secretly buried in other camps outside Kanungu including Bushenyi and Buziga near Kampala. By the end of March the death toll of the cult members had risen to about 1000 people. Indeed, it is conceivable that if government had not suspended exhumation of such bodies the number would have even been higher.

The Kanungu tragedy and its aftermath invariably generated national and international concern. It was against this background that the Human Rights Commission found it necessary to investigate the incident to be able to comment or advise, in the context of the right of worship and its general implications on the tragedy for the future of human rights in Uganda. Accordingly, the Commission resolved that in order to authoritatively render such advice about the existing and emerging cults in relation to the right to worship, it was necessary for the Commission to carry out its own investigations to establish facts surrounding the cult and the circumstances that led to the mass murder without raising any suspicion. The Commission therefore selected a team to carry out the investigation and report the findings. The team members were:

Commissioner C. K. Karusoke: Head of the Team (Commissioner in charge of Complaints and Investigations)

Burhan Byenkya: Chief Investigations Officer (Head of Department, Complaints and Investigations)

Nathan Byamukama: Research Officer and Secretary to the Team (Head of Monitoring and Treaties Department)

Joseph Ndebwoha: Photographer to the Team (in charge of stores)

Siraji Mugisa: Driver

Terms of reference for the fact-finding team were as follows:

- i. To visit all possible scenes of the tragedy (murder) involving followers of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God.
- ii. To search for all possible information about the cult from at least five people within the neighbourhood of each scene visited including:
 - LC I and II officials
 - Police
 - Religious leaders
 - Opinion leaders
 - Neighbours.
- iii. To take photographs of the scenes, mass graves, etc. to be kept in the Uganda Human Rights Commission photo archives for future use.
- iv. To take video recordings of the scenes visited and the people interviewed.
- v. To collect any possible written literature of and about the cult.
- vi. To examine the register containing the particulars (of names, age, sex, location, occupation, education background) of members of the cult who died/were killed which the police are compiling.
- vii. To interview the LC5 Chairperson, RDC, DPC, DISO and CAO of Rukungiri District about the history, operations, behaviour and conduct of this cult and its leaders.
- viii. To write a full account of what happened, why it happened and lessons drawn from the tragedy which should be used for the protection of human rights and peoples' education on the proper use and expression of the freedom of religious beliefs.
- ix. To develop the findings into an official report to Government and the people of Uganda. The report should be such that it contributes to the Commission of Enquiry by Government into this matter.
- x. To brief the entire staff (of the Human Rights Commission) for half a day about the team's findings.

In addition to the above mentioned terms of reference the team was required to:

- (a) establish where the people who died in Kanungu had come from;
- (b) talk to retired Bishop John Baptist Kakubi or Archbishop Paul Bakyenga of Mbarara about the character of Joseph Kibwetere, Fr Dominic Kataribabo and others from the Catholic Church and to find out why these people broke away;
- (c) talk to Fr Paul Ikazire and Secondina, former cult leaders (in Bunyaruguru), who had defected from the cult;
- (d) find out the method of preaching that moved people to sell their property, surrender all the proceeds to the cult leaders and agree to take their lives;
- (e) examine the mind-altering approaches. Did they use drugs and if so which drugs?
- (f) find out what the content of this information was and what was so attractive in it; and
- (g) visit the prisoners who exhumed and reburied the bodies to find out the circumstances under which they worked and how they were affected.

2. PLACES/ SCENES VISITED

2.1 Nyabugoto site – Kanungu, Rukungiri: Home of the Cult

This is about 70 kms west of Rukungiri town. Kanungu is the headquarters of Kinkizi County and Sub-District now a separate District). This was the cult's headquarters but the tragedy in which an estimated 500 people were burnt to death and beyond recognition took place at Nyabugoto. The victims were incinerated. In addition, a total of eight bodies were exhumed from a pit in one of the rooms where the cult members used to sleep and the possibility of more bodies at the same site cannot be ruled out. The cult headquarters was only a kilometre away from Makiro Catholic Church and Nyakatare, Church of Uganda (COU) – seat of the diocese of Kinkizi.

At Nyabugoto, the cult had a primary school called 'Ishaayuriro Boarding School, P.O. Box 19, Karuhinda, Kanungu Rukungiri' which was benefiting from the Universal Primary Education (UPE) funds. The fact finding team saw a letter of 1998 on the notice board of that school from Mr P.K. Byamugisha, the District Education Officer, Rukungiri, regarding the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). On the same notice board names of the teachers at the school were:

- *Archangel Kiiza*
- *F. Kenyabumba*
- *Jeremian Kabateraine*
- *Nee Kekibiina*
- *Claudio Makunda*
- *P. Tuhumwire*
- - *Baltazer Muhangura*

These teachers were cult members and they too lived in the camp. It is likely that they also died in the inferno. It is said that cult members used to build their own houses. They were their own architects, masons and carpenters. It is even believed that the carpenter who sealed off the church before the explosion and the fire was part of the cult members that perished at Nyabugoto.

Property of the cult in Kanungu

The cult had a big farm at their headquarters where they grew food and kept animals – mainly cattle. Before they sold their animals and burnt people, they had over 60 head of cattle. It is said that before 17 March 2000 they had sold off all the animals so cheaply to the surprise of most people. The local residents say that a cow which would have ordinarily been sold for about Shs.300,000/= (three hundred thousand) was going for as little as Shs.100,000/= (one hundred thousand) or less. They had two shops in the nearby Kanungu trading centre whose merchandise was also cheaply sold off before 17 March 2000. Only the land was not sold. They deposited the title deed of their land and other documents with the police at Kanungu for *safe custody*.

2.2 Kanungu Local Administration Prison

The team visited Kanungu Local Administration Prison to find out who of the prisoners exhumed bodies. The team established that 15 prisoners were taken to Nyabugoto from Kanungu prison to help in exhuming six bodies and reburying them, and to dig the mass grave and bury the burnt bodies. The prisoners had helped the Fire Brigade personnel to do all this for three days from 17 to 19 March 2000 using a grader. They explained that the Fire Brigade personnel used to go down in the grave where the bodies lay, tie a rope around a body which then would be pulled out by prisoners. They pulled out six dead bodies, carried them to a newly dug grave and reburied them. They said they wore

gloves but had no gumboots. They informed the team that the bodies that were exhumed had decomposed beyond recognition. The prisoners said after burying the bodies they went back to prison and bathed with soap. The team was able to talk to four convicted prisoners out of the fifteen who had participated in this exercise at Nyabugoto – Kanungu. They were:

Sam Byaruhanga (*Katikiro*) - 22 years old – serving a 2-year sentence, with effect from 29 August 1999, for stealing a tarpaulin.

Herbert Kyolibona – 19 years old serving a twelve-month sentence, with effect from 30 January 2000, for stealing a goat.
Francis Rutashesha – serving a fifteen-month sentence, with effect from 7 July 1999, for stealing a goat .

Alfonse Twinomugisha – 20 years old, serving a three-month sentence for tax defaulting with effect from 4 February 2000.

2.3 Rutooma site – Buhunga

This is about 8 kilometres from Rukungiri town off Rukungiri-Ishaka road. At this site 153 bodies had been buried, exhumed and reburied on the orders of the police. According to Emmy Twagira, the District Security Officer (DISO), Rukungiri, 59 of the victims were children while 94 were adults, majority of whom were women. Three bodies had fractured skulls, 21 had signs of strangulation and one had signs of stabbing. There were three mass graves in the house used by cult leaders which doubled as residence and offices. In one of the rooms there were two graves. A third grave was in another room. There were about eight old graves in a banana garden in front of the houses which had not been opened up. Villagers told the team that these were of people who died long before the Kanungu tragedy and had been buried with the knowledge of local LC officials and neighbours.

Busharizi, the owner of this home and land, and head of the household, himself was not a member of the cult and had shifted with another wife to Bwambara, leaving behind his senior wife and children. After the departure of the husband, Mrs Verentina Busharizi, and most of her children, all of whom were adults (like Topista, Puritazio, Anatori and Jesenta), joined the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God. They surrendered the house to the cult. This place was a transit centre to Kanungu. This family alone lost six people excluding Topista who had died earlier but buried in Kanungu. Topista was one of the preachers. It is said that Topista is the one who brought the cult from Fr Ikazire in Bunyaruguru to this area. According to Mary Rubarema, the LC-I Vice Chairperson, Topista, the daughter of Busharizi, used to stay at Fr Ikazire's place and she "even got pregnant from there". She and her child became sick and later died. According to Mary Rubarema, Topista used to collect herbs from the area and take them to Fr Ikazire's place in Bunyaruguru.

The property of the cult in Buhunga

Before this group (Busharizi family and many other cult members) left for Kanungu on 13 March 2000, they had sold all their property including a very big fenced piece of land. The neighbours said that such land would have cost over 10 million shillings in Rukungiri but they sold it at only four million shillings. They sold off the iron sheets. The remaining grass-thatched houses that were being used as the church were burnt in the night following the Kanungu inferno. It is not clear who burnt this camp. According to Mary Rubarema, a neighbour near the road, a vehicle came in the night, past midnight, shortly after it had returned from the camp people noticed that the churches and other houses were on fire. There was suspicion that whoever set the houses on fire must have been one of the cult members/leaders.

2.4 Rukungiri Central Government Prison

At Rukungiri Central Government Prison, the team wanted to establish how the prisoners were used in the exhumation of bodies. Caleb Twikirize, the Officer in-Charge prison at Rukungiri, confirmed that 20 prisoners from his prison were used in the exhumation of bodies in Kanungu and 20 exhumed bodies in Buhunga. Some healthy and energetic prisoners had been used to exhume bodies in both places. He informed the team that the District Medical Officer (DMO) gave these prisoners gloves and "heavy duty gumboots". Twikirize said the prisoners did not lift the bodies. They only removed the earth from the grave and they washed themselves at the gate before returning to prison. A doctor had come to check the health of prisoners who had exhumed the bodies and had declared them "fine".

According to the prisoners themselves, they were given gloves but of poor quality. They used clinical gloves, which got torn, as they pulled bodies with ropes from the graves. Although they had the gumboots, they had to put off their shirts, which meant that apart from the feet and to some extent the hands, they were not covered and this got them into contact with decomposing bodies. The prisoners complained of nightmares and one of them was still occasionally vomiting when the team visited the prison.

In Rukungiri Government Prison, there were prisoners who participated in exhuming bodies from Nyabugoto–Kanungu only, from both Nyabugoto and Buhunga and then Buhunga only as indicated below:

Prisoners who worked in Nyabugoto–Kanungu only

Name	Age	Case/allegation
1. <i>Ambrose Byomuhangi</i>	22	Robbery
2. <i>Patrick Behakanisa</i>	34	Theft
3. <i>Suragi Monday</i>	20	Robbery
4. <i>Kenneth Mutegaya</i>	22	Murder

5. <i>Justus Beingana</i>	21	Robbery
6. <i>Venancio Besigye</i>	25	Murder
7. <i>Erasmus Tweheyo</i>	18	Defilement

Prisoners who worked in Buhunga only

In Buhunga, the prisoners had gloves and gumboots. They were the only people who exhumed the 153 bodies, dug fresh graves and reburied them. They removed the shirts even when they had the gloves and gumboots. Those who worked in Buhunga are:

Name	Age	Case/allegation
1. <i>Julius Birungi</i>	28	Robbery
2. <i>Martin Karyaija</i>	20	Murder
3. <i>Wilber Kizito</i>	20	Murder
4. <i>Jack Kamugisha</i>	27	Robbery
5. <i>Ronald Byaruhanga</i>	17	Murder
6. <i>Colins Bashaija</i>	25	Murder
7. <i>Moses Muhwezi</i>	22	Theft
8. <i>Godfrey Barindwa</i>	38	Robbery
9. <i>Francis Ntanda</i>	47	Burglary
10. <i>Stanley Shariff</i>	40	Theft
11. <i>Wilbrod Mugabagye</i>	20	Graduated Tax defaulting
12. <i>Benon Tumwakire</i>	17	Rape
13. <i>Emmanuel Bainobwengye</i>	25	Murder
14. <i>George Kobusheshe</i>	27	Defilement
15. <i>Gerosome Nuwagaba</i>	20	Murder

Prisoners who exhumed bodies in both Kanungu and Buhunga

Name	Age	Case/allegation
1. <i>Milton Muhairwe</i>	34	Rape - on remand
2. <i>Onerius Nuwagaba</i>	18	Defilement
3. <i>Muhairwe Wilber</i>	19	Defilement
4. <i>Alex Ngabirano</i>	18	Defilement
5. <i>Geoffrey Turyasingura</i>	18	Murder
6. <i>Wilber Kamusiime</i>	18	Defilement.

According to this group, at Kanungu they did not have gumboots. They only had gloves.

In general there were fewer gloves and gumboots for all those who took part in exhuming and reburying of the bodies. For example, prisoners said four people in Kanungu and eight in Buhunga did not have gumboots.

2.5 Kibwetere's Home Site

Kibwetere's home is in Kabumba village, Nyabihoko Sub-county, Kajara County, Ntungamo District. This was also one of the sites of the cult up to 1992 when one of Kibwetere's sons, Juvenal Rugambwa, chased them away. The team reached Kibwetere's home on 18 April 2000 at around 5.20 pm and found his wife, Tereza Kibwetere, alone in a house of 24 bedrooms. Tereza Kibwetere was praying alone in the house when the team arrived there. According to her, she had separated from her husband as long ago as July 1992, a year the cult members were chased away from her home. When they separated she moved to Kampala to stay with some of her children. Tereza had 10 children with Kibwetere excluding three who died and three others whom Kibwetere got outside wedlock. The members of the Kibwetere family did not suspect any mass grave at their place because by the time they were chased away in 1992, the culture of killing by the cult had not started. According to Tereza, the cult members came and stayed at their place in 1989 but they, including Kibwetere himself started keeping mum and behaving in an unusual manner. Tereza had joined the cult and become a very active member until she defected in 1992 when the cult leaders burnt her clothes and her husband started selling family property and surrendering all proceeds to the cult.

Kibwetere's property and the cult

According to Tereza, the family had a Toyota Stout pick-up, a very big farm with cows and goats, two plots of land in Ntungamo town, one with a building in which there were, among other things, a refrigerator and a cooker. She says they sold off all these properties, leaving the family with the house, a few cows and the farm where they now keep around 20 Friesian cows. She said that one of the many reasons for abandoning the cult was Kibwetere's selling of family property with impunity. Tereza was convinced that if her son had not evicted the cult from their home all the family property would have been sold off.

2.6 Elly Baryaruha's residence

The Commission's fact finding team went to Elly Baryaruha's residence in Nyaruzinga, Bushenyi District on 19 April 2000. Baryaruha was a former NRA soldier No.RA 7434. It is said he was at the rank of Lieutenant when he retired. It is highly suspected that he also died in the Kanungu inferno. He was the son of Eric Mahija. According to Elly's sister, Rosemary Tumusiime (40 years), the family lost eleven people (including Elly and his mother) who went to Kanungu and never came back. Elly Baryaruha's place was also a transit centre and had all the characteristics of other cult centres. It is not known whether the place was also a killing ground but that cannot be ruled out. It is said that Baryaruha and his group left four days before the Kanungu inferno. Baryaruha left two young kids with his niece, Grace Naturinda, who was 17 years old but who also has a child of her own, less than one year old. The parents or the whereabouts of the young children, Rachel (2 years) and another only known as "Boy", who was about nine months old, are also not known. Neither is it known where they were born. These children need help because Rosemary Tumusiime and her daughter, Grace Naturinda, cannot afford to look after them (the children).

Baryaruha and those who disappeared/died with him

People from Baryaruha's family who went away to Kanungu and could have died in the inferno include:

- Lt Eric Baryaruha – the NRA soldier turned cult member
- Josephine Kyenderesire – mother of Lt Baryaruha
- Rachel Baryaruha – daughter of Lt Baryaruha
- Gerald Baryaruha – son of Lt Baryaruha
- Slivia Baryaruha – wife of Lt Baryaruha
- Judy Atuhaire – close relative
- John Mary Goodluck
- Francis
- Amina and
- Joseph Anthony

All these together with many other members of the cult had left Nyaruzinga for Kanungu four days before the inferno. According to his sister Rosemary, a vehicle came and picked Lt Baryaruha a day after all the other members of the cult had departed. He left Shs.5000 (five thousand) and some food for his niece, Grace, "until he comes back". But, at the same time he left a written message to his brother, Babijugute, which reads as follows:

The Babijugutes (Babijugute is Baryaruha's brother who lives a few metres away from his house)

I have felt it ungodly and on the other hand inhuman to go away forever without a word of farewell. Now this is to say farewell to the whole family and if you do not see me once again, then do not ask! Throughout my 38 years (of) existence, I might have sinned venerably or gravely (mortally) against some members or all of the family, and as per now, I request kindly to be pardoned.

I have hardly remained with over 10 days here before I join all the other members of the Restoration of the 10 Commandments of God before the closure of the "ARK". That will mean therefore, that we shall never meet once again. To me, it sounds sad but that is what it must be. As we follow directives from Heaven, we are supposed to gather in the selected area before the wrath of the Almighty God the creator is let down on to non-repentants.

Keep my words on your hearts, there will never be the year 2001. Catastrophes will befall human kind and the indicators of such will be wars, crime increase such as murder, rape, robbery, etc. there will be a lot of fear among the human races! Appearance of strange animals and people will be noticed. I would request you that if you come across such, simply run and look for me. I will not fail to seek refuge for you. Whoever wanted his brother or family to perish? Do not stick to property. Simply leave it behind and run for your dear (life) I will always pray for you, as I have nothing else I can do! May God guide you!

*Ever loving brother, uncle and in-law,
Elly,*

I will always be there to welcome whoever comes for refuge.

Baryaruha and his property

Baryaruha sold all his property except his house and the land which his father had given him. According to his sister, Rosemary Tumusiime, he was the favourite son of their father. The father (Eric Mahija) had given his land to his son and the son had put the land title in his names. Baryaruha's father belongs to the Protestant faith but his mother was a Catholic. His father did not belong to the cult and he had another wife with whom he was staying on another piece of land, a distance away from the Baryaruha's and his mother. Baryaruha had wanted to leave the land title behind but on the last minute he decided not to (or he forgot) according to the niece. Baryaruha had knocked out all internal walls in his house so that it could accommodate as many members of the cult as possible. When the team went to his home they were told by Rosemary Tumusiime that her father, Eric Mahija, was planning to sell the land claiming that he wanted the money to look after six orphans. Rosemary Tumusiime was opposed to the sale of the land because she feared that Mahija would not look after the children as he claimed. The team advised Ms Tumusiime who was living in Baryaruha's home with the orphans to resist her father's plan to sell the land. They also encouraged Tumusiime to appeal to the Commission for help. Mahija had plans to sell the land at the expense of the orphans who were entitled to inherit their father's remaining property.

2.7 Fr Kataribabo's home

Fr Dominic Kataribabo's place is in Kigabiro village in Rugazi-Bunyuruguru, Bushenyi District. At this home a total of 155 bodies were exhumed and reburied. Seventy-four of the bodies were exhumed in a room inside his well-built and beautiful house, while the rest were from behind an old house and which the cult was using as a church. In one of his bedrooms he had constructed a big pit, which he used to tell people was meant for an "Underground Refrigerator". According to the DISO of Rukungiri and the police in Bushenyi, of the 155 exhumed bodies:

- 22 were male adults
- 59 were female adults
- 35 male juveniles
- 37 female juveniles
- 2 sex not clear.

They also said that 36 of these bodies had signs of strangulation. Fr Dominic Kataribabo was one of the leaders of the cult. He had been a Catholic priest ordained in 1965, according to Archbishop Paul Bakyenga of Mbarara Catholic Archdiocese. It is said that he had a masters degree in Theology from one of the American universities in California, USA.

Gregory Katureebe, the LC-I Chairman of the area, said that he had got a report of people digging pits like graves in Fr Kataribabo's rear compound. Although no outsider was allowed to enter this compound, the chairman had been able to enter uninvited and found young men digging the grave-like pits behind the old house. When he asked them what they were doing, they refused to talk to him and referred him to Fr Kataribabo who explained that one was for a toilet and another for a bathroom. Not satisfied with this explanation, Katureebe arrested the men who were digging the pits. They were from Jinja, Rukungiri, Kabale and Fort-Portal. He had heard rumours before the operation that Fr Kataribabo had been digging pits to build them into boats of Noah's Ark in case the earth perished. According to Kataribabo's elder brother, Fr Kataribabo joined the cult in 1990. As a result, he was dismissed from the priesthood and excommunicated from the Catholic Church in 1992 by Bishop John Baptist Kakubi (retired) of Mbarara Diocese.

Kataribabo's property

Fr Kataribabo had sold his property, including a piece of land and a good house, at 5 million shillings to his nephew Bartazar Beinomugisha who was working in Kasese. This was before it was established that people had been buried there. A sale agreement, which the team was able to see at Bushenyi Police Station, had been signed between the seller and the buyer on 11 March 2000.

2.8 Joseph Nyamurinda's place

Joseph Nyamurinda joined the cult in 1993/94. His place is about 20 kms from Ishaka town in Bushenyi District. The site is in Nyakishojwa village or Rushojwa in Ruhinda County, Bushenyi District. This Nyamurinda family lost 16 people including relatives. Here 81 bodies were exhumed. According to the witnesses, the bodies were still too fresh to have been buried for a month. Joseph died with his two daughters and four sons in the Kanungu inferno. He was survived by three married daughters and one son who at the time was living in Kigali, Rwanda. Of the 81 bodies exhumed, 56 were female while 25 were male. All these people were packed like sardines, all with their heads facing down, according to Safra Kasande (42 years), one of Nyamurinda's daughters who refused to join the cult. She also blocked Nyamurinda from selling the remaining piece of land which he had not yet sold off. The bodies were also exhumed and reburied. On 30 March 2000 when the team went to the place, more than two weeks later, there was still a stench and a lot of flies around the mass grave implying that the bodies had not been properly buried. This problem was drawn to the attention of the policemen from Bushenyi Police Station who were assigned to the team.

Joseph Nyamurinda's property

According to his relatives and neighbours, Joseph Nyamurinda, had sold off all his property and was staying at the home of his nephew (Sabina Kabajungu) whom he had brought up. Kabajungu regarded Nyamurinda as a father. That is why Kabajungu built a house and furnished it for the old man. But Nyamurinda had sold even the property that was in that house.

2.8 Augustine Rwamutwe's place

The late A. Rwamutwe's residence is in Rubumba, Kilembe, Mitooma, Ruhinda, 9 kms from Ishaka town. He died with eight members of his family (seven children and his wife). Only three members of his family survived. These were two sons and a daughter who lived in Kampala. When the Commission officials reached the place, it looked deserted, as there were only two workers. It is said that Rwamutwe was persuaded by his wife with whom they had separated to join the cult but had later deserted. A few days before the inferno, Rwamutwe's wife had come back and persuaded him to go for a party in Kanungu. He went a day before the inferno and he "has never come back". Cult members had camped at Rwamutwe's place in 1998 but they were later chased away by one of his sons through the LCs and their church at Rwamutwe's place closed. According to the neighbours and Ephraim Bamugyeya who is a parish councillor of the area, Rwamutwe's wife, Olive, was very influential and powerful.

Rwamutwe's property

Rwamutwe's property was not sold thanks to the vigilance of some of his children and the LCs of the area. At one time some of Rwamutwe's children and their mother had connived to sell 10 of Rwamutwe's Friesian cows in his absence. However, when the son was taking the cows from Ruhinda to Kanungu, the LCs detained him. His mother managed to get

him out of prison. The fact that Rwamutwe was not happy with this incident indicates that Rwamutwe never subscribed fully to the cult.

2.10 John Kamagara's home site

This is a home that also lost six people and where the cult members had camped before. The family members who died were Fr Joseph Kasapurari, Andrew Tumusiime, John Tumuhairwe, Lydia Arinaitwe, John Kamagara (their father) and Scholar Kamagara (their mother). Only three members of the family survived. These are Martino Nuwagaba who was with the cult but abandoned them, Barnard Atuhairwe who at the time lived in Spain and Maria Atuhairwe who was already married. The place is located in Butaka village, Ryeishe parish in Bumbaire, Bushenyi District. The team interviewed Martino Nuwagaba who worked with the cult from 1989 -1991. He had joined the cult in Kakoba, Mbarara in 1989 and left in 1991 when they shifted to Kitabi, Bushenyi. He said he disagreed with their methods of preaching.

John Kamagara's property

The biggest part of Kamagara's property was sold. However, his son, Nuwagaba managed to rescue the family property. According to Nuwagaba, his father was more committed to protecting property rights than his mother. Father Kasapurari had also been dismissed from the priesthood and ex-communicated from the Catholic Church by Bishop Kakubi (retired) of Mbarara Diocese.

2.11 Kayondo's place–Buziga, Kampala

Kayondo was not a member of the cult. A total of fifty-five bodies were exhumed from his house, which had been rented by Fr Kataribabo, on 22 April 2000. The house is located in Buziga, Kampala. Twenty-two of these were female adults, ten female juveniles, fifteen male adults and eight male juveniles. The bodies, according to the pathologists' had spent about 1½ months in the grave. The grave had been dug between the garage of the house and the perimeter fence of the whole house. They constructed a chicken shed over the graves and started rearing chicken. The bodies, unlike in other cases in western Uganda, had no signs of strangulation.

Buziga residents talk of a priest tenant (Fr Kataribabo) who was friendly to the neighbours. He participated in community work. It is said he even used to provide soil (murrum) to fill the potholes on the feeder roads in the neighbourhood. For this, neighbours, including the police at a nearby police post, saw Fr Kataribabo as a friendly man, a good priest and very useful resident. Nobody bothered to ask where the murrum soil was coming from.

Of course the murrum came from the grave which he and his followers had dug in the compound. Neighbours used to see different people go in and out of the house without talking. The characteristics of enclosures and bonfire at Buziga were typical of other sites where the Kibwetere cult operated before the inferno.

3. THE CULT'S ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS

3.1 Introduction

According to the police and intelligence reports in Rukungiri, around 1980 a woman called Blandina Buzigye claimed a heavenly revelation. She claimed that she had a vision from the Blessed Virgin Mary telling her about the end of the world (apocalypse). The vision instructed her to form a movement for the restoration of the ten commandments to prepare its followers for admission into heaven. The place where the revelation supposedly occurred is at Nyabugoto Rock on Rwanyabingi Hills in Nyakishenyi – Rubabo County, Rukungiri District. This place is reported to have later turned into a sacred place for the members of the cult.

As years passed by and word spread about the “*end of the world*” and the “*revelations*” and “*visions*” and the “*new faith*” at Nyabugoto Rock, people started flocking in. Among the pioneers were Credonia Mwerinde, Angelina Mugisha, Gaudensia Kamuswa, Fulumera, Robert Mugisha, Gaudensia Rutandekire, and Ursula Komuhangi. It is said that most of the pioneer followers were women of strong Catholic background.

The pioneers of the cult tried to establish a permanent camp at Nyabugoto rock but they met hostile resistance from the residents of the area in Nyakishenyi. Their offer to buy land and establish a church in the area was rejected. It is said that there were incidents of setting fire to the camp site and stoning of the cult congregations by villagers to chase them away from the place.

By 1988 more followers were coming in from different corners of the region and, as far as Buganda. In 1989 new influential members joined on the persuasion of Credonia Mwerinde. These new members were Joseph Kibwetere, Fr Paul Ikazire, Fr Dominic Kataribabo, Fr Joseph Kasapurari, Mary and John Kamagara. Pending establishment of a permanent home, these individuals provided accommodation in their respective homes. There was, therefore, a camp at each of the above individuals' homes. When a permanent home (headquarters) was established in Kanungu, some of these areas and others already mentioned served as transit camps where, in some instances, murders were later committed.

3.2 Growth of the cult

As the cult expanded it also became complex to govern and rifts emerged within the leadership. It is said that at one time there was disagreement between the “founders” and the new converts. At one time one of the followers, Angelina Mugisha, claimed that she had had a vision directing the believers to follow new rules. These were:

Silence

The rule of silence. This, according to her, was to safeguard followers from temptation of saying anything sinful. But as will be explained later, the explanation changed with time.

Sale of property

Selling of properties and surrendering proceeds therefrom to the cult. This was based on the principle of sharing with others. This explanation however also changed and it drew more from the misreading of the Bible and quoting it out of context as will be shown later. They also started teaching against matrimony and property ownership by falsely quoting the Bible as a justification. These new developments did not augur well among the influential cult leaders. As a result some of them like Fr Ikazire, abandoned the cult and went back to the Catholic Church. This left Credonia Mwerinde and Joseph Kibwetere essentially in charge. In 1996 the group established its headquarters on a piece of land offered by Mwerinde Kateete, Kanungu. This land belonged to Kashaku, Mwerinde's father who had died and was buried in the same place.

3.3 Who is Credonia Mwerinde and Joseph Kibwetere?

The cult was officially called “The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God”, popularly known as Kibwetere cult implying that Kibwetere was the leader of the cult. On closer scrutiny and from what the local residents and leaders told the team, however, Mwerinde was the most powerful personality in the cult and Kibwetere was used as a trade mark because of his historical high profile.

Credonia Mwerinde

Credonia Mwerinde was popularly known as “Programmer” among her followers and was religiously known as *Ekyombeko kya Maria* (the Virgin Mary's structure). Whenever one would say that “programmer has come” everybody would fall face-down. She represented a message from the Blessed Virgin Mary, according to the Deputy RDC Rukungiri, Mugisha. This was corroborated in the team's subsequent other interviews. According to Kibwetere's son, Juvenal Rugambwa, he had never seen Credonia Mwerinde laugh or smile for the years he stayed with them at the Kibwetere home.

According to Nalongo Rukanyangira, the childhood friend of the cult leader, Mwerinde was born in Kanungu at Kateete, Nyabugoto the very place where Kibwetere's cult camp was situated. Credonia was almost the same age as Nalongo (48). According to Nalongo, Credonia used to go dancing a lot in and around Kanungu during her childhood days. This was when Nalongo was a student at Nyakibale. Credonia was a prostitute and used to sell tonto (banana wine) in Kanungu. She had been married five times to different men, the last one being Eric Mazima. A one Bimbona was the father of her only son called Mujuni. She also had a daughter whose father's name Nalongo could not readily recall. Rubale, a Health Inspector, was also once Credonia's husband.

While they lived together, Rubale had also fallen in love with Credonia's sister called Perpetua Barigye. When Credonia learnt of it she burnt a lot of Rubale's property in the house, divorced him and got married to another man before Eric Mazima of Kashojwa Parish, Rugeyeo, Rukungiri married her in 1979.

Those who belonged to the cult before she joined it in 1988 say she separated from her husband Mazima and shifted to the camp in Nyabugoto in Nyakishenyi. When the cult was denied land in Nyabugoto, she donated her father's land at Kateete, Nyabugoto in Kanungu where they shifted and established its headquarters called *Ishayuuriro rya Maria* meaning Mary's Place of Salvation. From then on she became a key figure in the cult leadership and was put in charge of all programmes. Those who knew her talk of a beautiful, authoritative, eloquent, dictatorial, extremely cunning and shrewd woman who commanded respect but also instilled fear in her followers. She is the one who recruited Kibwetere into the cult.

Joseph Kibwetere

Joseph Kibwetere comes from Kabumba village, Nyabihoko Sub-county, Kajara County, Ntungamo District. He was a primary school teacher by profession. He was one time an Assistant Supervisor of Schools in Mbarara Catholic Diocese. He once owned a school called Nyakazinga Secondary School. He was a member of the Uganda Land Commission in the 1970s where he served with prominent men in Uganda like James Kahigiriza and Ignatius Musazi. He was once a Chairman of the Public Service Commission in the Ankole Kingdom government. He later retired to business and farming. He had a stint in Ugandan politics in the 1960s and in 1980 multiparty politics as a member of the DP and a campaign manager for prominent politicians at the time. He was also a member of DP District Branch. He owned a beer business in Kabale and a maize mill.

He was originally a staunch Catholic who even built a church on his farmland. It is still there to date. He had about 16 children including three he had got outside marriage. Credonia Mwerinde recruited him together with two other women - Angelina Mugisha and Ursula Komuhangi. He was “ordained” as the Bishop of the cult the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God in 1991. He was the right hand man of Credonia Mwerinde because of his high public

profile, shrewdness and experience. He separated with his wife in 1992. The family last saw him in 1995 when he came home from Kanungu to bury one of his sons, Ben Byamugisha.

There was suspicion that Kibwetere may have died before the inferno. Nalongo Rukanyangira, who knew all leaders of the cult very well, said she last saw Kibwetere in February 1999 and that he looked very sickly. Some people, who had joined the cult but left it, intimated that Kibwetere and Mwerinde had a love affair. They speculated that Kibwetere may have been killed by Mwerinde in 1999 after suspecting Kibwetere of having HIV/AIDS or he could have naturally died of HIV/AIDS.

4. THE CULT'S DOCTRINE

4.1 Introduction

The whole cult revolved around a belief that some people were talking with God through visions and had received warnings from the Blessed Virgin Mary about the end of the world by the year 2000 (apocalypse). The followers were not supposed to go to hell if they strictly followed the cult (The Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God). For the devout Christians the whole concept of *okubonekyerwa* (getting heavenly visions) was very appealing. To some of the conservative priests, like Fr Ikazire (82 years), the idea of "restoring the ten commandments" was long overdue.

Generally, the name of the cult was appealing to Christians. The practical characteristics and the methods of operation within the cult, however, had nothing to do with what the name of the cult represented. This led to some of the followers raising doubts and abandoning the cult but it also saw the cult leaders using some of the most vicious and criminal methods of oppression to keep the cult together.

The cult talked of the doomsday. According to their former preacher, Martino Nuwagaba, they preached as far back as the Easter of 1992 about how on that "last day" snakes as big as wheels of tractors and big blocks of cement will fall from heaven onto the sinners. They preached of three days of consecutive darkness that will engulf the whole world and how only their camps were supposed to be safe havens, something reminiscent of the biblical Noah's Ark. It is said that even sealing the church doors and windows by nail before setting the church on fire was to create that darkness situation that was a prelude to the apocalypse. It was also meant to deny the non-cult members in the neighbourhood a chance to snatch a last-minute opportunity to join the "Ark". Whenever they were found digging graves, they would say that they were supposed to be for the safe haven "Ark" when apocalyptic storms started.

They promised their followers that when all this happened, everybody would perish except their followers and that whatever remained on earth would be theirs alone and that they would then start communicating directly with *Jesus*. Followers believed in this so much so that they considered themselves the most privileged people on earth.

4.2 Characteristics of the cult that enabled it do what it did

1. Leaders warned the cult members about the end of the world and the visions.
2. The cult and its leaders violated human rights (the right to education, health, property, marriage, freedom, speech, parenthood, childhood, etc.).
3. The leaders rarely recruited close relatives or neighbours.
4. They separated families, including children, and took them to different camps in a new environment where they would not socialise easily.
5. They used to erect fences around their buildings/camps. The fences would be opaque enough to prevent those outside from seeing what was happening inside.
6. They created total detachment between their followers and the society around them.
7. Producing children and having sex among followers even between spouses were strictly forbidden.
8. Leaders instilled too much fear among their followers.
9. It relied on deception, prophecies and lies through selective readings of the Bible. The Bible was usually read out of context.
10. Apart from the leaders, other members of the cult were not allowed to talk. They used signs to communicate among themselves and to their cult leaders.
11. They had a tight day's schedule that kept the followers extremely busy so that there was virtually no time to discuss, not even in signs.

12. They tried to keep within the law and be close, very friendly and generous to the authorities, which helped them to avoid any suspicions from the state.
13. They usually travelled at night so they could not easily be noticed even by neighbours.
14. They did not own their own transport/vehicles. They usually hired vehicles to travel, they were therefore not easy to identify.
15. They used to command all followers to sell all their property and bring all the proceeds to the cult leaders.
16. They used to burn property under the pretext that the Blessed Virgin Mary was annoyed with the owners.
17. They created a propertyless and helpless society of followers who became totally dependent on the cult and had nothing to fall back to.
18. They fully exploited the general view among Ugandans that religious people are always innocent, humble, harmless and peace-loving which helped them plan and carry out mischief and crimes without being detected at all.
19. Cult members got completely detached from their 'non-believer' relatives. Therefore the latter could not follow, know or detect what was going on in the cult camps.
20. All cult camps were terminus so that there would be no passers-by.

4.3 Unanswered questions

What remained unanswered, however, was to properly identify who exactly was killing people whose bodies were exhumed in various sites and how. We established that cult members dug some of these graves but these members did not necessarily kill and bury their victims. Those who were digging the 'graves' certainly did not know they were to be used as graves. Gregory Katurebe's (LC-I Chairman, Kigabiro, Rugazi, Bunyaruguru) story is testimony enough to show that the grave diggers were probably innocent actors. It would appear therefore that only one person or at most a few core leaders of the group knew what was happening. But again was it only the few core leaders who killed and buried so many people? The fact finding team was not able to answer this question.

4.4 The Cult's "visions" and leadership

The so-called vision or revelation was supposedly from the Blessed Virgin Mary. The cult wrote books about their philosophy and preaching. There are versions in Runyankore/Rukiga, Luganda and English. The believers were taught and strictly expected to follow without questioning because questioning would be tantamount to disobedience of orders directly from God. All programmes of activities were taken as instructions from the Blessed Virgin Mary passed on to believers through the cult leaders. It was only the cult leaders therefore who were supposed to know what was to be done at any one time. The doctrine was against possession of personal property. The followers were supposed to sell all their properties and hand over all proceeds to the cult leaders.

After his 'ordination' the followers started referring to Kibwetere as *Bishop wa Nyina Itwe Bikira Maria* (The Blessed virgin Mary's Bishop) and to Credonia Mwerinde as Jude Tadeo one of the apostles of Jesus Christ – according to Martino Nuwagaba of Bumbaire and Fr Kasapurari's brother who abandoned the cult in 1991.

5. THE CULT AND VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The cult violated all human rights especially the freedom to speak; freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment; right to private property; right to health; right to marriage and rights of children etc. This contributed to many defections of its members and massive rejection of the cult and its leaders by people who lived near the cult headquarters and transit camps. Tereza Kibwetere summarised everything when she revealed to the Commission team that, "*if they (the cult leaders) had not become dictatorial, I would have burnt with them*". Even the right of worship/religion that was supposed to be respected was trampled upon. Freedom of worship is based on freedom of belief. But belief in the camps was manipulated and abused to the effect that there was no free conviction. Indoctrination was a *sine qua non* for conviction. The cult denied people the right of free movement, speech, association and owning or possessing property.

5.1 The cult violated children's rights

They separated children from their parents. Also cases of kidnap were reported. Pius Kabeireho the LC-I Chairman of Kanungu told the Commission team of a case where some "Baganda women" who sought his assistance to look for their children in 1998. He went with them to the cult headquarters and four of the children were retrieved, and taken back to Kampala the next day. The children were not allowed to talk. They were kept in appalling and inhuman conditions. The children like all the other believers, were not allowed to sleep on mattresses. They slept on mats on the bare floor. They were poorly fed and were sickly and malnourished. Children were so cruelly treated through serious beating that amounted to torture. According to Tereza Kibwetere, whenever a child cried at night, he/she was taken out into the dark and cold until "*it stopped crying*". The punishment of children was carried out by the so-called caretakers. There was

discrimination in the treatment of children. The children of cult leaders and their relatives were handled with care. According to Tereza, if a parent bought clothes for his/ her children, those clothes were given away to other children, claiming that all children were the same. Tereza recalls one incident when a one Abudoni, who had bought clothes for his children, protested when they were given away to other children. Credonia burnt the clothes. In protest Abudoni took away his children and left the cult.

The burning of clothes and the harsh punishments meted out to followers plus the mistreatment of children are some of the things that made Tereza quit the cult. They removed her children from school and used to punish them by beating them cruelly including banging their heads on the cemented floor. One of the reasons the school (Ishayuuro rya Maria) was closed by the then RDC of Rukungiri, Yorokamu Kamacerere, was because of its unsatisfactory hygienic conditions. The school was closed in 1998, though it continued to get Universal Primary Education (UPE) funds until the tragedy on 17 March, 2000.

One of Kibwetere's sons, Juvenal Rugambwa, who evicted the cult from his father's house, tells the story of how he left the home to go to Kampala and was later joined by his mother. He stayed and worked in Kampala for some time. Then he went back to his father's home to evict the cult members from the family home. He got a drum and a whistle on the way. He came in the middle of the night and beat the drum and blew the whistle near the house very loudly for about 30 minutes. Everybody in the house went scampering and ran away except the children and the elderly. The children had been locked up in a separate room.

He entered the house only to find young children frightened but not crying. When they saw him they started signalling by putting small fingers on their heads implying that he was Satan. They were extremely malnourished. Children had scabies. There were no drugs. Sick persons were treated with water which was put in food and was supposedly blessed. Rugambwa says that at one time, before he went to Kampala, he reported the cult members to the Chairman LC-I for violating children's rights. But the Chairman claimed he had already visited Kibwetere's home and saw no malnourished sickly children as had been reported to him.

The cult withdrew Kibwetere's five children from school. As a result, one of Kibwetere's daughters had to marry prematurely. According to Tereza, Credonia once beat Kibwetere's daughter so badly in his presence without him restraining her.

5.2 The cult discouraged ownership of property

They burnt people's property on the pretext that they had been sinful and God had punished them. For example, Tereza Kibwetere had her good clothes burnt by Angelina on Mwerinde's orders.

When Tereza complained about the burning of her clothes, Mwerinde retorted that the "fire had come from heaven and burnt them". Credonia Mwerinde then threw a tablet of soap but missed Tereza who ran out of the congregation. Credonia chased Tereza out of the congregation and would have assaulted her if the former (Credonia) had not fallen down. All this suggests that Credonia was a ruthless and violent woman.

When Tereza Kibwetere first met Credonia Mwerinde and Angelina Mugisha, the two women were very poor. Tereza used to buy them clothes and was surprised that they turned against her.

5.3 Making enclosures around the cult camps and buildings

The cult's strategy was to completely conceal their activities. They did this by building enclosures around their premises so that any by-passers or visitors could not see what went on in the camps. The camps were strategically situated to apprehend would be intruders.

The cult headquarters in Kanungu, for example, were so secluded that one person would not get there without being noticed from a distance whichever direction she/ he came from. The headquarters were on an isolated hill with a clear view of all the approaches. There is only one road leading to the place, which was constructed by the cult members off the road to Kanungu trading centre. The road stopped at the headquarters. The roads to all other camps were a terminal and had no way through. This enabled the leaders to plan all their activities without outside suspicion or interference including killing people.

5.4 Separating families, prohibiting having children and sex

The Kibwetere cult never allowed members of the same family to stay together in one camp. Husbands, wives and children were separated to minimise the number of children in the camp. The cult did not want parents to see the harsh and inhuman conditions to which their children were subjected. Anyone found playing sex with his/her spouse or boy/girlfriend was severely punished. Pius Kabeireho, the LC-I Chairman, recalls how John Sunday of Kanungu was severely punished because he was caught having sex with his wife in the bush. They were severely caned. The woman deserted and got married to another man, while the man remained and probably died in the inferno. Also Musinguzi of Buhunga was found having sex with a girl friend. They were caned and the two deserted the cult. There were several such incidents. The religious justification for this separation and prohibition of sex, according to Nuwagaba (op.cit), their former preacher, was based on a verse in one of St Paul's letter in a Runyankore/Rukiga Bible, where it is said "that there is the very short time remaining for those with wives to be like those who have none" (*Nihaburayo obwire bukya*)

oine omukazi kuba nka otamwine). According to Nuwagaba, they used to read this verse from the middle and misinterpret it to say “*oine omukazi abe nka otamwine*” (*whoever has a wife should be like that one who has none*).

These restrictions and laws did not apply to all the members of the cult equally. According to the close members of the cult who defected some “*big*” people in the cult violated the rules with impunity. Nuwagaba remembers when he found Kibwetere and Credonia Mwerinde in bed when he had gone to awaken one of them for prayers. When he opened the door and saw them in bed, he was shocked and immediately closed the door again. They noticed he had seen them. When Nuwagaba demanded an explanation from his mother, who, at that time, was supposed to be one of the disciples, he was told that Kibwetere and Mwerinde were free to sleep together because it was an order from God. Kibwetere and Mwerinde took it upon themselves to give the same explanation to Nuwagaba. Another example is the case of one of Kibwetere's sons, who was caught having sex. Although the case was reported to Angelina Mugisha nothing was done to punish him. This kind of discriminatory treatment led to some of those who were in the know to doubt the teachings of the cult and to defect.

5.5 Prohibition from speaking

It is said this prohibition was the worst instrument that silenced and cowed the followers. The Runyankole saying that *Ekirakwite Kikwigaza Akanwa* (what is to kill you blocks your mouth/tongue) was quoted to the Commission team quite often. All the followers used signs. They were prohibited from speaking. According to Henry Sempa, who still believes in the cult but was not in Kanungu at the time of the inferno, stopping people from speaking was justified because through speaking sins are committed. Even children would not speak. They used signs. Those who were caught speaking were punished/tortured. This prohibition was so effective that even with as many as 5000 people in a house there was not a single voice to be heard. By silencing their members, the cult leaders were able to conceal most of their atrocities committed at night including killing and burying people. Outsiders never made friends with the followers since there was very little or no communication at all between them. No one dared to do so. Prohibition against speaking also insulated the cult leaders from embarrassing questions from some doubting members.

According to Nuwagaba, the cult leaders used to preach that those who kept quiet would get a message from the Blessed Virgin Mary and hear God's voice. Those who spoke would get *Iraka rya Sitani* (Satan's voice). But people like Nuwagaba wondered why, if this was true, people like Mwerinde were allowed to talk.

One of the reasons why Nuwagaba abandoned the cult was that he rejected the no talking prohibition. He recalled an occasion one time when their vehicle broke down at a place called Orusindura. When some Bakiga men tried to help, they soon realised that only Credonia Mwerinde was talking, these men called the group fools who would allow a woman to talk on their behalf. They abandoned the group. Nuwagaba said this incident was instrumental in his decision to leave the cult three months later.

5.6 The cult's busy schedule

The cult leaders ensured that their followers were busy with no time to relax and discuss among themselves; not even in signs. They were either praying, working in the gardens or on the farms, cooking, or travelling at night. By the end of their busy schedule they were too tired to discuss anything.

5.7 The cult was law abiding and close to the authorities

Originally, the state did not approve of Kibwetere cult activities. As far back as 1994, Yorokamu Kamacerere, the RDC of Rukungiri, refused to support the cult's registration as an NGO. He had also closed its school but when he was transferred to Kasese, within two months of his departure, the cult's leadership had already convinced his successor, Kitaka Gawera into supporting it and laying a foundation stone on one of their buildings at the cult's headquarters. Yet Kamacerere had verbally briefed Kitaka Gawera about the cult, stressing that it should not be registered as an NGO.

The cult leaders deliberately kept as close as possible to Government officials, especially the local leaders. They established their camps near police posts. This was the case in Kanungu and even in Buziga where the police posts were a stone's throw from their camps. They participated in community activities like *Chakamchaka*, clearing roads, development activities like farming, paid graduated taxes and rent promptly and even voted overwhelmingly for the Movement candidates in the 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections and in the 1997-98 Local Council elections, according to informed sources in Rukungiri. They won the support of the Assistant RDC of Kanungu - Reverend Mutazindwa Amooti who, used to resolve any security or political hurdles that would come their way.

Through Mutazindwa Amooti, the cult was registered as an NGO in 1997 and a certificate of incorporation was issued in 1998. Yet its Articles of Association did not qualify the cult to be registered as an NGO. It appears that the relationship between the cult and Mutazindwa Amooti was mutually beneficial. It is common knowledge in Kanungu that the cult had assigned two “nuns” to do domestic work at A/RDC Mutazindwa's residence permanently. It is also true that on the fateful day i.e. 17 March 2000 Rev. Mutazindwa had travelled to Kanungu from Lyantonde – his new station – to attend a farewell party organised for him by the cult leadership.

The cult leaders were known for their “generosity”. Former RDC Kamacerere informed the team that after closing their school and refusing to support their application for registration as an NGO Kibwetere, Mwerinde and Kataribabo tried to bribe him. They went to his office and offered him “a big envelope” which he rejected. Presumably this was extended to other leaders/authorities in Kanungu and Rukungiri.

After registration as an NGO, the cult was free to legally operate in different parts of the country like Rutooma, Buhunga, Nyakishojwa, Rugazi and Buziga in Kampala. These centres were used for retreats and seminars to indoctrinate the followers of the cult. But it was also in these places that people were killed and buried secretly. What is astonishing is that the cult carried out its murderous activities without state detection and people's slightest suspicion.

5.8 The cult's property burning practice

In all the cult centres, remains/ashes of bonfires were found. Clothes and most other properties of the members were burnt. Most of those bodies that were exhumed were naked. According to the police, people were first shaved before being killed or buried. This hair was also burnt. Traces of human hair were found at the remains of the bonfires at most sites. Burning followers' property started a long time ago before murders started. At first, the cult used to burn people's property as punishment for sinning against God. But in reality it appears the purpose was to impoverish and enslave the followers. Once in the cult camps people were reduced to destitutes and it was thus difficult if not impossible, to escape from what was tantamount to captivity.

5.9 The cult's lies, deceptions, inconsistencies and wrong prophecies

Since the fundamental basis of their prophecy was the end of the world by the year 2000 and since the core leadership were themselves not convinced about whatever they preached, lies, deceptions and inconsistencies were abundant. Fr Ikazire, one of the senior disciples who defected back to the Catholic Church, said one of the reasons he left the cult was the habitual blatant lying of its leadership. He said that for example, whenever people came looking for a relative, the leaders would lie that the person in question was not around. Tereza Kibwetere also said that she once went to see her husband whom she had been told had had a mental problem, but she was told he was not present when in fact he was. Fr Ikazire also strongly opposed the cult's marriage and family philosophy.

Steven Mutaremwa, who was in S3 when the cult got him out of school, testified that the cult practiced favouritism, discrimination and segregation. For example, people were given different punishments for the same offence, those who had sold all their property and possessions were treated more leniently than those who had not. On Mondays and Fridays while ordinary members were required to fast, the leaders did not. Similarly, during food shortage, the cult leaders had plenty to eat while young children went hungry.

According to Mutaremwa his own mother used to tell lies. She sold their land and other property in the house without telling him. When he asked what had happened to their household property, she retorted "*how many did you leave there?*" Mutaremwa said there was no transparency and communication between him and his mother. His mother used to claim that his going to school was sinful. He did not believe her. When he insisted that it was not sinful to go to school he was called "big headed" and sent home. Later Credonia herself called him back to Kanungu and to his surprise he was told to go to Buziga in Kampala to "preach the word of God". Mutazindwa rejected Credonia's directive and went back home in protest. This was between April and May 1999. His mother and her five children died in the inferno. His father had died of natural causes in 1994. That is when Mutazindwa's mother, suspecting she had AIDS, joined the cult, which had promised to cure her.

When Father Ikazire too abandoned the cult, the leaders told their followers that Fr Ikazire was a devil and would die in two years. Ikazire left the cult on 27 February 1994 and they said he would die in August 1996. At the time of writing this report Ikazire was 82 years old and still alive. According to Fr Ikazire, Credonia Mwerinde told the followers to stone her if the world did not end. Nalongo Rukanyangira was convinced that after all these lies and false promises, Credonia must have died in the Kanungu inferno. There was no way she could continue to live when her prophecy did not materialise.

6. SIGNS OF RESISTANCE AND DISCONTENT WITHIN THE CULT MEMBERSHIP

6.1 Introduction

By the end of 1999 the cult followers were convinced that the world would soon end. It is reported that the leaders had told their followers that the world was ending on 31 December 1999. When this prophecy did not materialise, Credonia informed the followers that the Blessed Virgin Mary would appear to deliver a message between 6 and 18 March 2000. This raised the spirits of the cult members. The followers and the leaders themselves started selling off their properties.

At the same time, however, there are those who were not convinced about these new predictions, and discontent was growing among many of the followers. Already there had been many defections before 1999. The so-called 12 disciples had fallen to eight. According to Stephen Mutaremwa, of the 12 disciples, Fr Paul Ikazire, Sister Scholastica Bwongyero, Tereza Kibwetere and Henry Sempa had defected. The remaining disciples were: Joseph Kibwetere (who was regarded as the Head of Disciples), Credonia Mwerinde (known as the *Programmer* and a *Defacto Head*), Ursula Komuhangi, Fr Joseph Kasapurari, Fr Dominic Kataribabo, John Kamagara (Father of Kasapurari), Angelina Mugisha, and Scholastica Kamagara (mother of Kasapurari and wife of John Kamagara).

Even among those who remained, there was no obvious unanimity on how things should be done. According to Nuwagaba, the son of John Kamagara, his father, unlike his mother, hated extremities in the cult. He said, Kamagara secretly did everything possible, through Nuwagaba to prevent the sale of family property.

Steven Mutaremwa, recalls one time when one of the followers wrote a 96-page exercise book full of complaints and passed it under Credonia's office door. Later Credonia told other followers that someone had written an exercise book full of "satanic things" which she had burnt. She could not tolerate any form of dissent however moderate or enlightened it might be.

According to some reports, there were, however, stories of increased discontent among followers in regard to the restoration/recovery of their properties. To contain this discontent Credonia promised that the Blessed Virgin Mary would refund the money from the sale of the members' properties. It was also reported that she asked her priests to record the names of those followers who were discontented. Nobody dared to question Mwerinde because it was against the rules of the cult to do so.

6.2 Complaint UHRC No.182/98

On 6 March 1998 Goretta Mitima a sister to the late Emmanuel Barisigara, c/o Mwebaze Kiguya P.O. Box 8096, Tel. 534025 (office) Kampala, wrote to the Commission complaining against her late brother's wife – Jane Barisigara who had joined Kibweterere's religious cult. Jane had removed all her six children (late Barisigara's) from school and taken them away from their family home at Kitanga, Kabale District, to the cult camp at Kanungu. The late Barisigara's mother Pulikeria Kamugyeregyere (also Goretta's mother), who was living with Jane – had also joined the cult and went with the rest of the family to live at Kanungu where she later on died under mysterious circumstances. Goretta asked the Commission to investigate:

- The violation of human rights of her mother, which led to her death in the camp without care.
- The violation of the rights of her late brother's children who had been removed from their family home and taken to live in a camp under very hard conditions.
- The progress of the children's education, if any, since they were taken to Kanungu where they were not allowed to mix with the children of other people who did not belong to the cult.

Goretta, who was then a nurse at Nsambya Hospital, attached several photocopies of documents by various authorities in Rukungiri and Kabale Districts and from Kampala.

After registering and processing the complaint, the Commission wrote to Goretta Mitima on March 20, 1998 under Ref. UHRC.182/98 advising her to apply for Letters of Administration which would enable her to take over the estate of her late brother and probably save it from the hands of the cult and the respondent.

Before coming to the Commission Goretta had been to the Inspector General of Government and the Administrator General but had not been sufficiently assisted. She said that when she got this letter from the Commission she became thoroughly frustrated and gave up the struggle to rescue the children. Jane and five of her six children perished in the Kanungu inferno on 17 March 2000 having sold most of the family property left behind by her husband.

6.3 The Kanungu murder and the preceding incidents

During the week preceding the Kanungu incident, the cult leaders were involved in intensive mobilisation of followers. The followers had been told that the Blessed Holy Mary would appear to deliver a special message between 16 and 18 March 2000. The followers apparently believed this because they convinced their loved ones to go to Kanungu on that day. Even women who had separated from their husbands went home to persuade those husbands to return to Kanungu to wait for the message. Women also convinced their children to accompany them to Kanungu. There was a frantic effort to convince those who had abandoned the cult to go back and those who did not belong to the cult were invited to at least go for the party. For example, Katwigi, an ex-cult member who used to slaughter cows for the cult and Johnson Karimansi a Protestant who did not belong to cult were convinced to go for "party". As a result the two men ended up perishing in the inferno.

Some of these followers believed they were a privileged lot who were going to heaven and they needed to cleanse themselves of whatever sins they had committed on earth. About 60 followers, who had not paid graduated tax did so on 14 March 2000. On 16 March, 2000 at around midnight, one of the followers, Karangwa, handed over some sect documents (Land Title, Articles of Association, Constitution and Certificate of Incorporation) for safe custody to Kanungu police post.

The cult leadership, seem to have been preparing for murder. According to Godfrey Bangirana (Detective) Assistant Commissioner of Police/Serious Crime, the cult leadership bought 36 jerrycans of petrol at one of the petrol stations in Kampala on 9 March 2000, yet the cult had no vehicle at all. On 12 March 2000, Fr Kataribabo bought two 20-litre jerrycans of concentrated sulphuric acid from Musisi, proprietor of Musco Agencies in Kasese supposedly for use in the batteries of the cult vehicles. Pathologists found some traces of petrol and acid at the Kanungu site.

On 11 March 2000, Fr Kataribabo sold his house and surrounding land to his nephew, where 153 bodies were later found. On 15 March 2000, according to Rukanyangira (popularly known as Nalongo in Kanungu) whom the cult leaders had hired to take them to Rukungiri in her pick-up for shopping, Fr Dominic Kataribabo mysteriously disappeared from the vehicle when they had stopped at a place called Nyakatojo, seven kilometres from Kanungu. When Nalongo reported that

Fr Kataribabo was missing, Kagangura, the cult's farm manager replied that Kataribabo had hired a taxi to go to Kasese. They bought several crates of soda and bread that day from Rukungiri to feast on prior to the fateful day. When Nalongo delivered things they had bought in Rukungiri, Credonia requested Nalongo to go back to the camp before 9 o'clock on Friday 17 March 2000 to assist in the party preparations.

Between 6 and 16 March all the property of the cult was sold at throw-away prices. The cult leaders claimed that they were selling the property to raise money to buy a lorry and a generator. During those days, they invited many local residents including the Rt. Rev. Ntengereize, the Bishop of Kinkizi and other Kanungu dignitaries to attend a farewell party for Rev. Mutazindwa the outgoing A/RDC, and to welcome the new A/RDC Muhwezi Mugisha on 18 March 2000.

Credonia had asked Nalongo's husband to take charge of the business community. She had requested Bikandema, to take charge of all Credonia's relatives. Surprisingly, a dead man, Tadeo Baguma, was to take charge of Kanungu. Nalongo had however delayed going to the camp early as requested by Credonia. She said that when she was about to go, she got news that the camp was on fire.

6.4 Possible use of drugs

It was common to have bonfires just at every camp shortly before the Kanungu inferno. They used to burn clothes, beddings, coins, hair, razor blades and bottles of the same shape, size and colour. At Kanungu, Buhunga, Rugazi and Nyakishojwa there were heaps of remains of squeezed herbs near the bonfires which were presumably intoxicating. It is likely that the victims found buried in the different places were drugged before they were killed.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Government should establish the true facts that led to the then RDC of Rukungiri, Kitaka Gawera, to fraternise with the cult leadership in Kanungu to the extent that he laid a foundation stone on one of their buildings dedicated to Jesus Christ and Mary in memory of the late Paulo Kashaku on 28 June 1997, notwithstanding his predecessor's letter to the NGO Registration Board advising against the registration of the cult.
2. Government should thoroughly investigate and establish the true facts surrounding the relations between Rev. Y. Mutazindwa Amooti then A/RDC in-charge of Kanungu Sub-District, and the cult leaders.
3. Security agencies like ISO and the Police must be reasonably facilitated to prevent future Kanungu-like massacres.
4. Government, through the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, must be prepared for disaster both at national and local levels to cope with tragedies of Kanungu magnitude.
5. In future local authorities and government should ensure that the disposal of bodies conforms to the provisions of the Public Health Act as well as basic general hygiene standards.
6. The NGO Registration Board should have capacity to monitor and ensure that NGOs operate in accordance with and in fulfillment of their stated objectives.
7. Prisoners should not be forced to do work which violates their human rights, is injurious to their health, like exhuming and reburying bodies. Forcing prisoners to exhume bodies contravenes Article 8(3) of the ICCPR and Article 25(2) of the Constitution of Uganda.
8. If exhuming bodies must be done in future, those involved must be provided with proper protective gear by the employer.
9. Those prisoners and other persons who exhumed bodies without protective gear in Kanungu, Buhunga, Rugazi and Nyakishojwa should be followed up wherever they are, monitored and given thorough medical and psychological examination to ensure their health and safety.
10. Government and all organisations, and individuals should work together to monitor activities of all religious organisations and other similar organisations to prevent the violation of human rights and the recurrence of Kanungu-like incidents.

8. LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

8.1 Interviewees from Rukungiri District Administration

In Rukungiri the team met with the following district officials on 16 April 2000 from 7:30 p.m. to 1:30 a.m. They were:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Athanasius Rutaroh | - | LC-5 Chairman,
Rukungiri |
| 2. Frank Ntaho | - | CAO, Rukungiri |
| 3. Muhwezi Mugisha | - | Deputy RDC,
Rukungiri |
| 4. Patrick Mugizi | - | DPC, Rukungiri |
| 5. Emmy Twagira | - | DISO, Rukungiri. |

8.2 Interviewees in Kanungu

1. Augustine Tumwizeera – Corporal, Kanungu Police Station. This station was a police post by the time of the Kanungu inferno. It was upgraded to a police station after the incident.
2. Henry Sempa - was a member of the cult. He still believes in the principles of the cult. He was one of the preachers in the cult. He translated their book – *A Timely Message from Heaven: The End of the Present Times: Come all of You to the Ten Commandments of God* – into Luganda. He left the cult when he could not raise money to travel back home to bring the LC-1 Chairman's letter from his birth place - Buganda.
3. Pius Kabeireho – LC-1 Nyabugoto, Kanungu.
4. Tumwebaze Godfrey, the GISO of Kanungu who had vehemently blamed the then Assistant RDC Kanungu for his close relationship with the cult.
5. Rt Rev. Ntegyereize, the Bishop of Kinkizi Diocese of the Church of Uganda.
6. Agricola Rukanyangira (popularly known as Nalongo), who was a very good friend of Credonia Mwerinde.

8.3 Interviewees in Buhunga

1. Mary Rubarema, Vice Chairperson LC-I, Muhenda Village, whose house is about 500 metres from the camp of the cult at Busharizi's home. She said that her own son, Musinguzi Denis, who now works with Coca-Cola in Kabale had joined the cult but was later removed "by force".
2. Akimu Tumwujukye - a young man in his late 20s and a son of the LC-I Vice Chairperson. He is a brother to Musinguzi Denis above.
3. Kenneth Twujukye - a pupil in primary school who was passing by. He had been chased out of school that morning for failing to pay "building fund". He is also a neighbour.
4. Gorretti Kenganzi - wife of Josephat Karahukayo, who was passing-by to go to dig in her garden nearby. She said she used to pass-by but did not talk to them a lot because they were never talking any way, except by signals.

8.4 Interviewees at Kibwetere's home

1. Tereza Kibwetere - she separated from her husband in 1992.
2. Juvenal Rugambwa - one of Kibwetere's sons who chased the cult members including his father, Joseph Kibwetere, from their family house.

8.5 Interviewees at Nyamurinda's home in Nyakishojwa

1. Godfrey Mujuni - (15 years old).
2. Fuderi Byamukama - (16 years old) - a son of Lionel Baringa – elder brother of Joseph Nyamurinda.
3. Safra Kasande - a (married) daughter of Nyamurinda.

8.6 Interviewees: Police in Mbarara

1. Steven Okwalinga Regional Police Commander, South Western Region, Mbarara.

2. Kinyala, Regional CID Officer, South Western, Mbarara.
3. Geoffrey Bangirana, Detective Assistant Commissioner of Police/Serious Crime, Uganda Police Headquarters. He was in most of the places where exhumation and reburying bodies took place

8.7 Others

1. Caleb Twikirize ASP/OC, Rukungiri Central Government Prison.
2. Father Paul Ikazire - who was one of the “disciples” of the cult but deserted.
3. The two workers (boys) found at late Rwamutwe's home.
4. Fr Kataribabo's elder brother and neighbour.
5. The LC-1 Chairman, Gregory Katureebe at Fr Kataribabo's home.
6. The four prisoners interviewed at Kanungu Local Administration Prison.
7. Ephraim Bamugyera, who is a Parish Councillor of the parish where the late Rwamutwe lived.
8. John Nuwagaba, was a member of the cult but deserted. He is Fr Joseph Kasapurari's brother and both their parents, the Kamagaras, were preachers in the cult. Both died.
9. Yorokamu Kamacerere, a retired RDC who had refused to recommend the cult for registration for all the time he was RDC Rukungiri.
10. Archbishop Bakyenga of Mbarara Archdiocese, who also knew the Fathers in the cult and had tried to convince them several times to return to the Catholic Church but they had refused.
11. Goretti Mitima – who had complained to the Uganda Human Rights Commission in 1998 about her late brother's wife, Jane Barisigara, who had sold family property and taken the children to Kanungu cult camp where their rights were being violated.
12. Stephen Mutaremwa whose mother, Jane Barisigara, and his one brother and four sisters got burnt in the Kanungu inferno. He had defected from the cult.
13. Josephine Kasya, Deputy LC-V Chairperson, Rukungiri. She also helped us access Agricola Rukanyangira because she was her personal friend.