



Universal Periodic Review 54th Session – Joint Stakeholders’ Report

Uganda: Freedom of Religion or Belief

13 July 2026

Joint Submission by:

The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) was founded in 1846 and is a network of churches in over 160 nations that have each formed an evangelical alliance, and over 100 international organizations joining together to give a world-wide identity, voice, and platform to more than 650 million evangelical Christians worldwide.

The **Evangelical Fellowship of Uganda (EFU)** serves as the national umbrella organization for evangelical churches, organizations, and ministries across the country. Headquartered in Kampala, it coordinates national prayer movements, theological training, and community outreach programs.

For additional information, please contact the Geneva Office of the World Evangelical Alliance at geneva@worlddea.org, or visit <https://un.worlddea.org>; World Evangelical Alliance C/O RES CP 23, 1211 Geneva 8, Switzerland

Introduction

1. This submission highlights key concerns regarding the protection of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in Uganda. It focuses on:

- (a) the proposed Qadhi Courts Bill, which seeks to establish a nationwide system of Sharia courts and raises serious concerns regarding its potential impact on religious minorities, women, and individuals who convert from Islam;
- (b) the Protection of Sovereignty Act, which contains provisions that may unduly restrict FoRB, as well as freedoms of expression and assembly, particularly for religious communities and organisations perceived as influenced by foreign actors; and
- (c) the demolition of Pentecostal churches, which has deprived many believers of access to places of worship and raises concerns about discriminatory enforcement measures affecting a rapidly growing segment of the Christian community.

These issues have arisen since the previous Universal Periodic Review cycle and therefore were not addressed at that time.

Legal framework

2. Uganda ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention (UNHCR) and its 1967 Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Under its constitution, Uganda is a secular state (Article 7) and guarantees freedom of thought and religion (Article 21, Article 29).

Qadhi Courts Bill

3. The Qadhi Courts Bill, gazetted on 27 February 2026 and introduced for parliamentary consideration in April, seeks to establish Sharia courts nationwide. If adopted in its current form, the bill raises significant concerns regarding potential violations of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB).

4. Although the Ugandan Constitution provides for the establishment of such courts under Article 129(1)(d), the bill appears likely to conflict with other constitutional guarantees, including Article 21 on equality before the law irrespective of religion or gender.¹ Religious freedom advocates have expressed concern that Sharia-based adjudication could adversely affect individuals who convert from Islam, particularly given that such systems do not generally recognise religious conversion.²

5. While the limited application of Sharia law exists in some neighbouring African countries, the breadth of this bill creates risks for non-Muslims who may become subject to Qadhi court jurisdiction without their consent. The use of broadly defined provisions could allow cases involving Muslims to draw in non-Muslim parties—for example, in matters of marriage or family law—thereby exposing them to rulings under Sharia law. For example, the bill could lead to interpretations where non-Muslim persons married to a Muslim could be subject to a Qadhi court and similarly presents risks for individuals who converted out of Islam. This raises particular concerns for converts from Islam, as well as for women, children, and Christian minorities, who may be disproportionately affected.

6. The bill's broad and ambiguous provisions create legal uncertainty and increase the risk of discrimination, social tension, and inadequate protection of fundamental rights. It may also set a

precedent for similar legislative initiatives in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa that could further undermine religious freedom.³

Protection of Sovereignty Law

7. The Protection of Sovereignty bill was passed on 5 May and given presidential assent on 17 May 2026.⁴ In its original form, it raised significant concerns over freedom of religion and assembly as it sought to protect Uganda from “foreign influence” and could have led to the prosecution or discrimination of religious actors or organisations. Following public criticism, substantial amendments were introduced. These included narrowing key definitions such as “foreigner” and “foreign agent,” to focus primarily on “political” activities, and introducing exemptions certain entities, including many faith-based organisations.⁵

8. Despite these amendments, several provisions remain problematic, particularly in relation to freedom of assembly and expression. The law retains features similar to legislation used in other countries to restrict fundamental rights.⁶ In particular, the final version of the bill includes broad restrictions on “unlawful assembly,” maintains a threshold of 400 million UGX (approx. 106,000 USD) per year for foreign funding, which appears to be a low threshold. Higher amounts are subject to government approval. It also establishes penalties of up to 10 years imprisonment for offenders.⁷

9. Concerns about the law have been echoed at the international level. In June 2026, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights observed that, “the new Protection of Sovereignty Act strengthens state control over civil society organizations.”⁸ The breadth and ambiguity of the law’s provisions create uncertainty as to its scope and application, increasing the risk of restrictions on freedom of religion or belief, as well as on freedom of assembly and expression.

Demolition of Churches

10. Recent demolitions of places of worship have triggered significant concern among Uganda’s rapidly growing Pentecostal Christian community. These actions appear to be linked to the “Trade Order in Local Governments” issued on 10 March 2026, which aims to restore order in public spaces by addressing illegal and unlicensed trading. The directive primarily targets informal trading structures and seeks to promote compliance with planning, building, and licensing requirements.⁹ In practice, however, it has been broadly interpreted to encompass a wide range of unplanned or informal structures, including places of worship.

11. This development has had a particular impact on Pentecostal churches, many of which have expanded rapidly in recent years and often operate from temporary or makeshift premises.¹⁰ The government has justified demolitions as part of broader efforts to enforce urban planning regulations, reduce congestion, and address safety and environmental concerns associated with unregulated structures.¹¹ According to officials, these measures are necessary to ensure orderly and compliant urban development.

12. Pentecostal leaders, however, have raised concerns that these actions may disproportionately affect their communities and undermine their right to freedom of religion or belief. Representatives of Born-Again Pentecostal Churches have questioned the legal basis for the demolitions and called for their suspension, arguing that they amount to indirect discrimination against their faith. Some have further alleged that affected congregants have faced pressure to abandon their religious affiliation.¹² Concerns have also been raised about the manner of implementation, including limited prior notice and insufficient consultation with religious

leaders, as well as the lack of reasonable time for churches to comply with regulatory requirements.¹³

13. Government responses have been mixed. The Minister of Local Government, Raphael Magyezi, announced a suspension of the Trade Order to enable churches to meet building requirements. However, other members of government have contradicted this statement, stating that the Order would continue to be enforced.¹⁴ The most recent statements seem to point towards a continuation of the demolitions if they breach the Order.¹⁵

14. Within this broader context, some religious leaders have expressed concern that the demolitions could signal a shift toward more restrictive regulation of religious institutions. There is apprehension that the current approach may establish a precedent for future measures that could impose disproportionate compliance burdens or enable further restrictions, with potential implications for freedom of religion or belief and freedom of assembly.

Recommendations

We respectfully recommend that the Republic of Uganda to:

15. Ensure that any legislation establishing Qadhi Courts complies with the ICCPR and guarantees strictly voluntary jurisdiction, excluding non-Muslims and converts from Islam.

16. Amend or implement the Protection of Sovereignty Act in full compliance with freedom of religion or belief, including by removing undue restrictions on funding, expression, and activities of religious organisations.

17. Immediately suspend demolitions of places of worship and adopt clear, proportionate regulations developed in consultation with religious communities, ensuring reasonable timelines for compliance.

¹ Karagwa, Rebecca. "Legal Reforms Should Unite Not Divide" *Monitor*, April 2026. Online: <https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/oped/commentary/legal-reforms-should-unite-not-divide-5433248>.

² *Christian Daily International*, "Rising Concerns over Uganda's Sharia Courts Bill Spark Religious Freedom Debate," 12 June 2026. Online: <https://www.christiandaily.com/news/rising-concerns-over-ugandas-sharia-courts-bill-spark-religious-freedom-debate>.

³ Myrick, Anna Rose. "Ugandan Bill to Establish Sharia Courts Sparks Urgent Religious Freedom Concerns." *ADF International*, 7 April 2026. Online: <https://adfinternational.org/news/ugandan-bill-to-establish-sharia-courts>.

⁴ *President Museveni Assents To Protection Of Sovereignty Bill, 2026 Into Law* - State House Uganda. 17 May 2026. Online: <https://statehouse.go.ug/president-museveni-assents-to-protection-of-sovereignty-bill-2026-into-law/>.

⁵ Oyo, Charles. *The Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026*. Parliament of Uganda, 5 May 2026. Online: https://ccgea.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/The-New-Protection_of_Sovereignty_Bill_2026.pdf.

⁶ "Uganda: Sovereignty Bill Threatens Speech, Assembly," *Human Rights Watch*. 23 April 2026. Online: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/04/23/uganda-sovereignty-bill-threatens-speech-assembly>.

⁷ Oyo, *The Protection of Sovereignty Bill, 2026*.

⁸ Türk, Volker, "Türk says ultimate trajectory for human rights is larger freedom," Global Update to the 62nd session of the Human Rights Council, 15 June 2026. Online: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2026/06/turk-says-ultimate-trajectory-human-rights-larger-freedom>.

⁹ Onyango, Robert. "Government Maintains Trade Order Enforcement," *Uganda Broadcasting Corporation*, 28 April 2026. Online: <https://ubc.go.ug/2026/04/28/government-maintains-trade-order-enforcement/>.

¹⁰ Ssengendo, Joel Walusimbi, *An investigation into the spatial needs of the Pentecostal religion in Uganda. (A case study of selected Pentecostal churches in Kampala)*, (Unpublished undergraduate dissertation). 2021. Makerere University, Kampala, Uganda. Online: <https://dissertations.mak.ac.ug/items/90cb896e-e727-4ba6-9b78-70fce016d612>.

¹¹ Uganda Today, "Kampala's Street Trade Order Crackdown Resumption: Between Urban Order and Livelihood Survival," 30 April 2026. Online: <https://ugandatoday.co.ug/kampalas-street-trade-order-crackdown-resumption-between-urban-order-and-livelihood-survival/>.

¹² The Joint Leaderships of Born-again Pentecostal Churches, Letter to The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Local Government, 14th April 2026.

¹³ Mugisha, Ivan. "Born Again Pastors in Ibanda Protest Abrupt Enforcement of New Trade Order." *NilePost*, 15 May 2026. Online: <https://nilepost.co.ug/news/341979/born-again-pastors-in-ibanda-protest-abrupt-enforcement-of-new-trade-order>.

¹⁴ Male Kayongo, Fred. "Government Backtracks on Trade Order, Halts Church Demolitions ". *Uganda Radio Network*, 28 April 2026. Online: <https://ugandaradionetwork.net/a/story/government-backtracks-on-trade-order-halts-church-demolitions>

¹⁵ Semakula, John. "Uganda Demolishes 'Unapproved Churches' In Effort To Clean Up Cities ". *Religion Unplugged*, 30 April 2026. Online: <https://religionunplugged.com/news/uganda-suspends-new-trade-order-after-backlash-over-church-demolitions>.