

BY VISION REPORTERS

Ugandans welcome new year in style

Deafening roars of 'happy new year' filled the air and night skies of Kampala cracked with spectacular fireworks as the clock struck midnight on Thursday.

In various entertainment joints and big hotels such as Sheraton, Serena and Hotel Africana fun-lovers had a full dose of entertainment amid tight security. As glasses clinked to merriment toasts, they hugged and danced until the wee hours.

The centre of attraction was at Sheraton Hotel, where musicians such as Bebe Cool and Jose Chameleone worked the crowd into a frenzy.

But majority of Ugandans ushered in 2016 with night prayers sacrificing their sleep to express their devotion and gratitude to God for seeing them through 2015.

The national anthem and the *Balokole* stanza of *Tukutendereza Yesu* (We Praise You Jesus) were sung at Mandela National Stadium, where Pastor Joseph Sserwadda of Victory Christian Church in Ndeeba hosted the night prayers attended by President Yoweri Museveni.

The ululating crowds waved white envelopes containing prayer requests as midnight approached.

At St. Peter's Catholic Parish Gardens, Nsambya, there was a mixed atmosphere of reverence and celebration as religious activities like confession prevailed alongside groovy gospel music and dance as the people bid farewell to the 2015 and welcomed 2016.

The mega prayer event dubbed *Omuukisa Gu'omwaka* (the blessing of the New Year), was also graced by the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kampala, Dr. Cyprian Kizito Lwanga.

Catholic clerics such as Fr. Michael Ssenfuma and Fr.



Kabaka Ronald Mutebi and Katikkiro Mayiga ushering in the new year in Lubiri. Photo by Josephat Sseguya

Joseph Luzindana excited the congregation as they pronounced oracles of hope, progress and holistic prosperity in the new year.

Archbishop Lwanga asked Christians to reciprocate God's unrivalled mercy and generosity by being merciful and generous to each other. He also asked Ugandans to work for peace and maintain it during and after the elections.

At Namirembe Diocese,

Bishop Wilberforce Kityo Luwalira asked the Christians to make 2016 the year of love and peace.

"We have a living God and what we need is to call him with a pure and sincere heart and everything will be realised according to his will," he said.

The UPDF political Commissar, Felix Kulayigye lit up the diocese as he preached about the positive changes that Ugandans require in their

lives in 2016.

"We are our own enemies. We have to decide today to make the change in our lives by desiring to work for what we require to achieve. No one is going to come to your home and lift you up, but let us change our thinking and mind," he told the congregation.

At Kololo independence grounds, Pastor Jackson Ssenyonga of Christian Life

Ministries, urged those who will lose in 2016 polls to accept the outcome in order for the country not to slide back into the political turmoil that characterised Uganda before 1986.

Gospel musicians also graced the crossover prayers and entertained the Christians as the counted down to the new year. Betty Nakibuuka, Pastor Wilson Bugembe, Herbert Twino

and Joseph Ssegawa kept the congregation on their toes with their gospel songs.

Businessmen around Kampala took advantage of the event to make a killing as chapatti, food and beverage stalls were erected at every corner of Kololo airstrip to attract the cold and hungry revellers who were attending the prayers.

Security was tight in all the main venues with both plain-cloth and uniformed officers seen patrolling.

At Queen of Peace Shrine in Kiwamirembe, Kajjansi in Wakiso district, Shrine Rector Fr Edward Kabanda urged the believers to keep peace in the New Year.

At Mount Zion Bukalango, Msgr Expedito Magembe asked the faithful who turned up in big numbers to keep praying to God to make their lives easy.

At Rubaga Miracle Centre Cathedral, Pastor Robert Kayanja called on Ugandans to keep peace if they are to prosper in the new year.

At his palace in Lubiri, Kampala, Kabaka Ronald Muwenda Mutebi symbolically ushered in the New Year with a giant key during the annual *Enkuuka y'Omwaka* (end of year fete).

In his New Year message that was read by Katikkiro Charles Peter Mayiga, the Kabaka urged his subjects to desist from activities that lead to moral decay. He also asked them to elect responsible leaders in coming elections.

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