Sheema leaders in drive against sectarian politics

The initiative was unveiled during the district's first-ever interfaith prayer breakfast.

BY HILLARY TWINAMATSIKO

Political and religious leaders in Sheema District have launched a joint campaign to end sectarian politics and promote reconciliation following what they described as a divisive 2026 General Election.

The initiative was unveiled during the district's first-ever interfaith prayer breakfast held at Senevin Gardens in Kabwohe at the weekend.

The gathering brought together elected leaders, former political actors and clergy from different denominations, all calling for unity and a renewed focus on service delivery and development.

The meeting followed a tense electoral season reportedly marked by candidates appealing to voters along religious lines in a bid to secure sympathy votes — a trend leaders warned could undermine social cohesion and stall progress in the district.

The Sheema South MP-elect, Prof Ephraim Kamuntu, said political divisions pose the greatest threat to the district's socioeconomic transformation.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand. If the district gets divided because of politics, it won't develop," Prof Kamuntu said, noting that political competition naturally produces winners and losers.

"If there are six candidates, five will fail. Whoever does not want to become a failure should never join politics, because politics and conflict are inherent," he added.

He urged those who lost in the elections to rally behind the winners in the interest of unity and collective progress.

"Nothing can fail the people of Sheema because it has people of integrity. If we unite, more can be done by improving social and economic infrastructure," he said.

Prof Kamuntu added that leaders must now shift attention from campaigns to fulfilling key government pledges, particularly infrastructure projects promised by President Museveni, including the Kabwohe–Rukungiri and Kabwohe–Bwizibwera roads. He said delivery on such commitments would not only boost connectivity but also strengthen public trust in leadership.



Veteran politicians Chris Rwakasiisi (with microphone) and Prof Ephraim Kamuntu (right) together with religious leaders during the prayer breakfast in Kabwohe Town, Sheema District, at the weekend. PHOTO/HILLARY TWINAMATSIKO

Mr Chris Rwakasiisi, who served in the government of Milton Obote and spent more than two decades in prison before receiving a presidential pardon in 2009, used the occasion to share a deeply personal testimony about overcoming political resentment.

"I was a prisoner on the cement, and Museveni was being praised with national anthems and salutes. I hated him so much that I even had spare hatred for him, like a spare tyre for a car," Mr Rwakasiisi said.

He recounted how, during his incarceration, he struggled to forgive President Museveni and only found peace after making a deliberate decision to pray for him and his family.

"My healing started when Museveni began using my pardon as a public symbol of mercy," he said, cautioning newly elected leaders against allowing grudges and ego to cloud their judgment.

Reflecting on his time in high office, Mr Rwakasiisi warned leaders about hypocrisy and the dangers of mismanaging success.

"I enjoyed what these leaders are enjoying today long ago, but I have learned that the most important thing for a politician is how to manage success," he said.

Mr Joseph Mukasa, who lost the Sheema Municipality parliamentary seat, criticised what he described as duplicity among some political actors.

"There are political leaders who are with you during the day and turn against you in the night. I don't love such politicians because I always want leaders who speak the truth," Mr Mukasa said.

He urged politicians to abandon selfish ambitions and focus on serving the electorate rather than pursuing personal enrichment, arguing that leadership should be anchored in integrity and transparency.

Rev Fr Venesio Nuwagiira, one of the organisers of the prayer breakfast, said the interfaith initiative was inspired by the belief that all people are created in the image of God and should work together regardless of religious or political leaning.

"We recognised that the just-concluded elections caused many people to collide. We planned this event so that people may unite, forgive one another, and live together as members of one family," he said.

Fr Nuwagiira noted that political divisions had in some cases spilled over into places of worship, creating tension among congregants.

He appealed to leaders to set a tone of reconciliation that would trickle down to the grassroots.

Organisers expressed optimism that the interfaith engagement would mark the beginning of sustained dialogue aimed at healing divisions, strengthening coexistence and redirecting public energy toward development priorities in the post-election period.

LOOKING BACK

Sheema District has previously experienced tension between political competition and religious identity, at times straining community relations. Carved out of Bushenyi in 2010, the largely Christian district – with a significant Anglican majority – witnessed religious undertones in the 2016 General Election. Candidates and their supporters were accused of mobilising voters along Anglican–Catholic lines, fuelling mistrust within congregations and the wider electorate.

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