

By Henry Nsubuga

The Church of Uganda (COU) says it will hold scientific June 3 Martyrs Day celebrations in accordance with the Ministry of Health Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). COU says the development is under consideration of the current public health circumstances.

The Church, in a statement yesterday, said the celebrations will be held at the Uganda Martyrs' Anglican Site, Namugongo, strictly by invitation; attendance at the main service will be limited in line with the health ministry guidelines; all dioceses are encouraged to commemorate Martyrs Day in their respective parishes across the province and the official Martyrs Day liturgy will be shared through the diocesan secretaries in due course.

# Martyrs' Day: COU to hold virtual celebrations

PHOTO BY MIRIAM NAMUTEBI



Kaziimba (left), accompanied by Mushengyezi (right), with other officials inspecting works undertaken by Uganda Christian University at Namugongo Anglican Site on Wednesday. (Scan the picture using the Vision Digital Experience to watch the video)

The Church's decision follows Archbishop Stephen Kaziimba Mugalu saying a day earlier, he had asked the Government to allow the Church to hold virtual celebrations at Namugongo.

Kaziimba, who was on Wednesday visiting the Uganda Martyrs' Anglican Site Namugongo to assess the readiness of Uganda Christian University (UCU) to host this year's Martyrs' Day celebrations, said he had written to health ministry permanent secretary Dr Diana Atwine, requesting permission for a limited number of selected people

to attend the celebrations physically, while the event is broadcast live on national TV and various social media platforms.

UCU was mandated by the House of Bishops to organise this year's celebrations on behalf of COU.

Since assuming this responsibility, the university has undertaken significant improvements at the site in several key areas, including security and safety, beautification, branding, improving sanitation and water supply.

"Given the fact that the day will be

a public holiday, Ugandans will be at home and able to follow the celebrations on national TV stations and through different social media platforms," Kaziimba said.

He added that the site, designed to host over a million pilgrims, could comfortably accommodate about 500 Christians while observing the SOPs to prevent the spread of Ebola.

However, Kaziimba said the Church fully respects the President's decision to postpone the celebrations in the interest of protecting Ugandans from Ebola.

## HANDOVER

While presenting the handover report, organising committee chairperson and UCU deputy vice-chancellor in charge of academics, the Rev. Prof. John Kitayimbwa, said preparations for the celebrations had already been completed before the Government announced the postponement.

"Given the experience we gained during the COVID-19 lockdown, UCU is known as a leading university in organising virtual lessons and functions and we can ably do the same when it comes to organising virtual Martyrs' Day celebrations," Kitayimbwa said.

Kitayimbwa also requested that UCU be given another opportunity to organise uninterrupted Martyrs Day celebrations next year.

## BACKGROUND

The Government recently postponed this year's Martyrs Day celebrations at Namugongo over fears that the annual pilgrimage could accelerate transmission of Ebola virus, whose epicentre is in eastern DR Congo, but has seen Uganda register two imported cases, including a death and further confirmation of six infections.

To stem the spread, Uganda has closed its border with DR Congo.

In addition, UCU vice-chancellor Aaron Mushengyezi said if granted opportunity, the university would have the chance to fully implement its plan of transforming Namugongo into a modern international pilgrimage site. Kaziimba assigned UCU to organise next year's celebrations, saying the site deserves recognition for the already done at the site. The organisers will be announced for next year's celebrations.

UCU vice-chancellor in charge of finance and administration, Dr. Mugawe, who is also the organising committee vice-chairperson, said the university identified inadequate sanitation facilities as one of the challenges faced by pilgrims and new ones and renovated the facilities.