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PURIM OF UGANDA

WINS RELIGION COMMENTARY

RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM* OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

One of the prayers recited during the just-concluded Purim holiday reads in part like this, "In the days of Mordecai and Esther, in Shushan the capitol, when the wicked Haman rose up against them, and sought to destroy, to slay, and to make perish all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, on one day. Then did you in your abundant mercy bring his counsel to naught, frustrated his design, and return his reward upon his own head; and they hanged Haman and his sons upon the gallows." Substitute the name of Idi Amin for Haman and you have all the tragic elements for a Purim of Uganda. As Haman in his cruelty and lust for power, sought to exterminate the Jews of Persia so Idi Amin is now in the midst of exterminating the Christian tribes of Ancholi and Lango. Idi Amin is a member of the Muslim Kakwa tribe who represent barely 5% of Uganda's population. Some 85% of the 11 million Ugandan people are Anglican and Roman Catholic. The minority of imported Muslim and Sudanese tribesmen are trying to impose their rule over a predominantly Christian majority of Ugandans by sheer brute terror and massacre. As great as is the agony over the wholesale loss of human lives by this mini-Hitler, no less vexing to the conscience is the unbelievable spectatorship of the United Nations and the black African nations. Where is the Security Council? Where are the sanctions of the third world nations? Or are these UN specialties reserved only for Israel?

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UGANDA GROUP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Briefing No. 1 5 pence

THE UGANDAN ECONOMY UNDER IDI AMIN

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Ugandan economy. Not only does the agricultural sector generate 60% of the gross domestic product (GDP) it also dominates the export of the country with coffee, cotton and tea accounting for nearly 90% of the total exports. Moreover, 90% of the population derive their livelihood direct from agriculture. Only 15% of the labour force is in wage and salary employment and about one quarter of this is employed in commercial agriculture. The rest of the labour force is engaged in producing foodstuffs for their own consumption on peasant holdings and this subsistence sector accounts for about 25% of GDP. Commercial agriculture accounts for 35% of the GDP, commerce for about 15% and the other services account for about 20% of GDP. Only 10% of the GDP is generated in the industrial sector.

During Uganda's first independence decade the economy was relatively prosperous compared with the situation prevailing elsewhere on the African continent. GDP at constant prices rose from £150m in 1961 to £425m in 1971, when per capita income was nearly £40. The share of manufacture in GDP increased from 4% to 8% over this period and, reflecting this development, the share of agriculture in total GDP fell from 65% in 1961 to 55% in 1971 and in exports agriculture as a proportion of GDP fell from 35% in 1962 to 27% in 1971.

The rate of growth of the economy at constant prices was 6% per annum over 1961-66, and 4% per annum over 1966-71. Since the average rate of growth of the population was 2.5% over this period, real income per capita was increasing by at least 2% per annum and sometimes, as in 1969, by as much as 9% per annum. In addition to this growth, dynamism of the economy was not prone to balance of payments problems and usually there was a healthy visible trade surplus. After an initial price stability prices began to rise, the rate of inflation over the decade up to 1971 was, on average, 7% per annum.

In 1971 Idi Amin inherited an economy which was relatively prosperous. But, by combination of economic mismanagement, the use of siege economy measures and Amin's sheer inability to grasp the economic facts of life, the Idi Amin regime has all but destroyed the economy within six years. Amin immediately embarked upon a massive expansion of his regime's military power, doubling the size of the army and constructing military bases all over the country and, above all, acquiring the most sophisticated military hardware in Central and East Africa. As a result of this, the import bill increased by nearly 50% which reduced the foreign exchange reserves to disastrously low levels by the end of 1971. The visible trade surplus was only £5m in 1971 compared to £50m in 1970. The rate of growth of real GDP was 2.5% in 1971 but it fell to 1.2% per annum in 1972 when, for the first time since independence, the real income per head began to fall.

Within a few months of his coup, Idi Amin scrapped his predecessor's plans for the nationalisation of the export-import trade and Government acquisition of 60% of the shares of Banks, Insurance Companies, Transport Companies and large manufacturing establishments. Predictably this move was widely acclaimed by business interests in Uganda and in particular by Asian and foreign business men. However, due to the political instability in the country, business confidence never really recovered.

In August 1972, Amin wrought havoc on the economy when he expelled the Asians. They controlled about 80% of the manufacturing commercial establishments. This was part of the so-called "economic war of Liberation" which supposedly aimed at putting the economy into the hands of Ugandans. In fact the businesses abandoned by Asians were distributed to the minions of Amin's regime - a motley collection of Army officers and civilians, most of them without previous business experience and many, in spite of the "war of liberation", were not even Ugandan Nationals. Capital was not an important requisite for taking over a business since the Government provided the funds to enable the new traders to set up shop. Proven support for the regime, tribal and manifest religious affiliations to Amin, and willingness to go into partnership with Amin's military supremos were the qualifications for taking over from the Asians.

Amin's standing among Africans outside Uganda was enhanced by the expulsion of the Asians which was seen as getting rid of exploiters. In fact, far from being a socialist policy the economic war was from its conception a facade for building fascism in Uganda in order to perpetuate Amin's regime.

The African nouveau riche did very well out of the transfer until the stocks left by the Asians ran out and no new stocks were forthcoming, partly because of infrastructural problems but also because business acumen was lacking. The transport system and the distributive trades collapsed. The manufacturing industry ground to a halt because of a shortage of skills, spare parts and essential raw materials. The unprecedented rise in military imports considerably reduced the country's capacity to manufacture consumer goods and produce equipment, or even import them.

The effect on the economy of all this was compounded by the performance of the agricultural sector. A combination of lack of facilities for the delivery of seed to farmers and lower producer prices at the time when consumer prices were rising, led to a 50% reduction in 1972/73 cotton acreage as producers shifted into producing food crops for their own consumption. Lack of transport also led to growing coffee stockpiles and coffee curing fell by 40% in 1973. As a result of all these factors there was a sharp contraction in production causing a fall of 4% in the value of non-subsistence GDP and more than 1% fall in the total GDP.

Since 1973 the Ugandan economy has been trapped in a vicious circle of spiralling inflation, declining volume of output, shortage of consumer and investment goods, capacity under-utilisation, further shortages and spiralling inflation. Amin's resort to the printing press to finance the most massive military development programme in Black Africa, fuelled the inflationary mechanism in this vicious

Taking the consumer price index in 1970 as 100, the index rose to 115.8 in 1971 and after a drop of 3.5% in 1972 the index rose to 139.7 in 1973, 233.7 in 1974 and 273.1 in 1975. During the first two quarters of 1976, for which figures are available from the International Monetary Fund, the consumer price index was 352.7 and 389 in the first and second quarters respectively with 1971 as a base. These figures suggest that the rate of inflation in the Ugandan economy has been well over 100% in the last two years. It must be added that these figures are official compilations pertinent to urban areas. If rural conditions and other allowances are taken into account, the rate of inflation for the last half of 1976 and the first quarter of 1977 is most likely to be 500%.

Like many non-oil producing less developed countries, Uganda has of course been hit severely by the world oil crisis and the inflationary tendencies in the world economy. Nevertheless, Uganda has not been much more affected than her East African neighbours who have experienced only 20% inflation over the last two years. Although Amin inherited inflation tendencies the rate of inflation in the 3 years preceding his reign was 13%. It is quite clear that the problems of the Amin economy are home grown.

Following the lowest harvest for many years, further decline in cotton acreage and in export earnings, the rate of growth of real GDP fell sharply in 1975 by 4% per annum. During 1976 there was a coffee stockpile of more than a million bags because of transport problems and a dramatic increase in coffee smuggling to neighbouring countries.

Amin has now started an air lift of coffee to the Red Sea ports of Djibouti, and has for some time been airlifting tea and coffee to Stansted Airport in Britain. These airlifts are only a desperate attempt by Amin to take advantage of high export prices to earn a windfall in order to ensure that his soldiers are kept in clover. The airlift is on too small a scale to make any difference to the recovery of GDP and the indications are that GDP will have fallen by about 5% in real terms in 1976. Not only is the rate of inflation accelerating but the 1976-77 cotton crop is estimated at 50% below the previous years and the coffee and tea crop are about 35% below the pre-1971 average. Uganda used to export sugar but now has a chronic sugar shortage. The textile mills are operating at 30% below average capacity. Over the entire manufacturing sector capacity utilisation is only 50%, on average, of what it could reasonably have been.

It can confidently be predicted that real GDP will continue to decline and more people move out of the commercial sector into the rural subsistence sector to produce for their own consumption. But to predict the collapse of the economy is to underestimate the resilience of an agricultural economy with a large subsistence sector.

It is possible that industry will grind to a halt again after recovering slightly from the 1973 setback. In the short term, however, this is unlikely to affect the chances of Amin's survival as long as he continues to get his tea and coffee on to the world market, and assuming that Libya and the Soviet Union continue to supply him with economic and military aid.

Trade with Britain accounts for about 30% of Uganda's imports and 35% of her exports. In spite of attempts at diversification, the UK (mainly Britain) and the USA still dominate Uganda's external trade. If these countries were to impose a trade embargo on Uganda, Amin's capacity to survive would be stretched to the limit and his downfall would then be imminent.

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UGANDA GROUP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Briefing No. 2

5 pence

THE GROSS VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN UGANDA

Since Idi Amin seized power in January 1971, thousands upon thousands of Ugandans from every corner of the country have been butchered by the Amin regime. The recent murder of Archbishop Luwum symbolises what has been happening in Uganda for the past six years. Thousands of other Ugandans including teachers, medical doctors, civil servants, students and religious leaders have been compelled to flee their country. Others have fled their homes and are still hiding in the bush. The homes and property of those who have been slaughtered, those who have fled the country and those who are hiding inside the country have been taken over by Amin and his henchmen. Life has become hell for the vast majority of Ugandans.

As soon as he overthrew the Obote regime, Amin started a systematic elimination of all suspected opponents of the new regime. Amin murdered not only members of the armed forces but also civilians. The fate of Benedicto Kiwanuka who had been appointed Chief Justice by Amin is a good example.

The total number of Ugandans who have 'disappeared' during the past six years is not known. Estimates from several sources put the death toll at between 100,000 and 300,000. But in fact Ugandans believe that this underestimates the toll of Amin's reign of terror. In 1973, for example, a Ugandan who had been a Minister of Education in Amin's government and who had resigned in protest against the excesses of Amin and his military clique, in particular the callous disregard for human life, submitted a memorandum to several heads of African governments, citing as a 'conservative estimate' of the death toll in the first two years of Amin's misrule as between 80,000 and 90,000. This was four years ago and the killing has never ceased. In fact Amin's sadist urge to kill, maim and torture has intensified over the years. There are several documentary sources of the gross violations of human life in Uganda. The letter of former President Obote to the Heads of State and governments in Africa in May 1973, the reports of Amnesty International, the All Africa Council of Churches and, recently, the International Commission of Jurists clearly indicates the extent of the ruthless slaughter of ordinary Ugandans under Amin.

The brutal methods employed have been amongst the most horrifying in human history. The cutting off of men's private parts, the bashing of people's heads with sledge-hammers, the use of electric shocks, the skinning of people alive are just some of the common methods of torture in Amin's notorious prisons. A gas chamber has even recently been introduced at Makindye prison in emulation of the gas chambers in Nazi Germany; Amin has publicly expressed his great admiration of Adolf Hitler.

In Uganda the enforcement of law and order has collapsed. The civilian police force was dismantled and merged into the army. The army, and especially the notorious 'intelligence' units, have been given unlimited powers to arrest people, to torture them and

to kill them. The judicial system in Uganda has been rendered useless. People's lives, their property and their families are thus exposed to the barbarities of an undisciplined rabble called the army. The gun and sheer brute force have replaced the law in Uganda. Amin has personally sanctioned the excesses of his army and those who commit the most terrifying crimes are often immediately promoted to the highest ranks in the army.

Unfortunately for the Ugandan people the world at large has remained sceptical about the tragic situation in Uganda. Amin's apologists abroad, such as Major Graham, would have us believe that all is very well in Uganda. No wonder the honourable Major has been appointed by Amin as a consultant on wild life in Uganda. Even responsible journalists and politicians such as Bernard Levin and Winston Churchill are complacent about the gravity of the situation. Bernard Levin had the audacity to write in The Times that Amin should be invited to London and given the best reception possible. Levin in fact compared Amin with Nkrumah! What disgraceful nonsense. Winston Churchill, on the other hand, told us on Panorama that worse crimes have been committed in other countries than in Uganda. It is odd that a member of Parliament should advance such argument. Two wrongs do not make a right. And if Britain cannot solve all the world's problems it does not mean she should do nothing. The liberation of the people of Uganda from the present reign of terror would be an important contribution to the cause of human rights throughout the world. In any case Great Britain is carrying out lucrative trade with Uganda and Amin's planes have been given landing facilities at U.K. airports to airlift goods to supply his army. Britain is in a strong position to influence change for the better by cutting trade links with Uganda.

It is not the first time in history that people have doubted the authentic stories about the crimes committed by certain megalomaniac tyrants in the world. During the 1930s, for example, the world did not believe Hitler's systematic extermination of millions of people. The world now knows better. Undoubtedly the same truth will be revealed once Amin's reign of terror is over. The only difference between Amin and Hitler is that the former is too weak and has no resources or army with which to threaten world peace. If Hitler had not ventured to conquer the whole of Europe Germany would probably still be suffering under Nazi tyranny. Hitler was overthrown by the combined efforts of the rest of the world and we believe that the world should act in the same way against Amin.

Too many lives have already been wasted in Uganda. It is now time that the international community did everything possible to assist the people of Uganda to get rid of the brutal tyranny that disfigures the country. Since many of Amin's killers are foreigners, we believe the situation is no longer an internal matter. We are convinced that British public opinion can compel the British Government to take a more positive action against Amin. We appeal to the students, the Labour Movement, the religious organisations, the political parties and many other groups and individuals who are concerned about the situation in Uganda to assist Ugandans to get rid of tyranny in their country. We also appeal to the international community to exert economic, diplomatic and moral pressure in order to end the senseless killings in our country.

At present most of the district Hospitals have been closed or
operating without a doctor. All doctors have left Uganda to save their
lives from Amin's human slaughters. Children are dying at an unprecedented
rate due to lack of medical treatment. 154 doctors left Uganda in the
last two months.

The article goes on "Vultures are not a common sight over the hills of Kampala, the Capital of Uganda, but there is one promontory over which they can be seen in black menacing profusion usually in the evening. This is Makindye Hill to the west of the city centre. For the most part it is a green, pleasant suburb, but few Ugandans will voluntarily dare to go near it. Makindye prison, before the military coup an ordinary remand prison, has now become the Auschwitz of Idi Amin's Uganda". Finally there was the jetsam of Idi Amin's regime in Uganda, a picture of horrible scenes of mutilated bodies washed up on the shores of Lake Victoria, near Entebbe's International Airport, which bear grim witness to the campaign of terror. This was a sickening sight that no one would ever have expected to see in our civilized world!

Not only the news media has exposed Amin's diabolic regime but Ugandans themselves have worked hard to inform the world that Amin's regime is the greatest enemy to humanity. Early in 1973 a memorandum was sent to all African Heads of State by Amin's Ministers of his own Cabinet, who were disgusted by the inhuman state of Amin's degenerate soldiers. They described similar atrocities and inhuman killings of innocent Ugandans. They categorically informed the African Heads of State that Amin and his dehumanised henchmen were not Ugandans and had no interest at all in Uganda, but were murderous mercenaries plundering Ugandans. There was no response - the world kept quiet and everyone forgot about the thousands of Ugandans who are dying.

We, the Uganda Group for Human Rights, therefore appeal desperately to all Christian Leaders and God-fearing people to exert all possible pressures on your Governments to render help to the people of Uganda to remove this repugnant regime of Amin and stop the extermination of innocent Ugandans.

We strongly urge you to force your Governments to expel Amin's regime from participating in any International organisation such as the United Nations, Commonwealth of Nations, Organisation of African Unity and any other similar organisations.

We urgently request all Church Leaders and God-loving people in the United Kingdom to do their utmost to persuade the British Government to stop trading with this evil regime, and to ban his Boeing 707 from landing on British soil to buy food and hard drinks for his despicable soldiers to keep them drunk so that they are able to butcher innocent Ugandans.

To those who have very courageously spoken out strongly and condemned Amin's recent outrageous murders, we offer our unflinching heartfelt gratitude to you and pray that you will not rest until the evil has been stamped out of Uganda and Ugandans have regained their human dignity and freedom. We are most grateful and greatly encouraged by the following distinguished Leaders, who have forcefully condemned Amin's outrageous murders and his abuse of Human Rights, and who have openly showed their stand and concern for Human Rights without compromise, and we hope that many other world leaders will follow their example. We highly honour their names as follows/

With gratitude to:

President Jimmy Carter of the United States of America
Dr Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury
Andrew Young, United Nations Ambassador
Dr David Owen, British Foreign Secretary

Signed by



On behalf of the UGANDA GROUP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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APPEAL BY UGANDA GROUP FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

"The gun whose muzzle has been pressed against the Archbishop's stomach...is a gun pointed to every Christian...unless urgent action is taken to change this dangerous and evil situation".

We echo these words from the joint letter of the Anglican Bishops of the Province of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Boga-Zaire, which was written shortly before the tragic murder of His Grace Archbishop Janani Luwum of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Boga-Zaire. These words should shake every Christian and all God-loving people who are concerned and care for humanity and who consider human life as the pre-eminent above all earthly powers and other material benefits.

It is a cry from faithful, dynamic and dedicated servants of God to the whole civilised world in quest for help to liberate God's flock in Uganda from the bondage of man's oppression and injustice to freedom and justice for which they were created to enjoy. God is the Liberator calling us to respond to this cry and to give ourselves to the process of liberation. Fighting for liberation of mankind from evil forces is very costly and the above cry comes from men who have known and experienced its demands, and paid the heavy cost for it. They have suffered beyond human measure for the cause of Human Rights and their cry should awaken every Christian and all God-fearing people to join hands with them and wield force against this enemy of humanity and remove the intolerable sufferings from the people of Uganda.

His Grace, the most Rev. Janani Luwum will always be remembered for his great love of God's flock and for his strong desire to preserve the Human Rights, for which cause he has fulfilled His Master's mission and command by laying down his life for His Sheep. The tragedy is that his life ended at the cruel hands of savage, murderous, dehumanised henchmen of Amin!

Uganda's situation has reached a unique era in human history and demands a unique response. It is no longer a matter to be treated as an internal case for Ugandans, but it has become a matter for humanity and therefore requires an international involvement. It has parallels to the obvious situation in Germany in 1933 when Hitler assumed power. It was only when the violence of the Nazis had assumed demonic proportions that some Christians and people of goodwill for mankind decided they must act, but the delay certainly added to the sum of suffering. Ten million people were killed because Hitler was not stopped when he first gained control of Germany.

It should now be obvious to every human being in this civilized world that Amin's regime is a serious danger to humanity and it should be equally clear to all men that the only language Amin can now understand is force, and only force can save the people of Uganda from this inhuman regime. No moral good that patience to endure the wrongs of tyranny is always a great Christian virtue than courage to resist unjust power.

For the last six years of Amin's reign of terror, violent death has been an everyday fact of life to all Ugandans from Amin's unleashed lawlessness and brutality, unequalled in any modern regime. The world has been intrigued and amused by Amin's devious outbursts of lies which have covered his infamous crimes and policy of genocide. The world has for the last six years tended to forget the luckless people of Uganda on whom this monstrous human fireworks has continued to revolve. If help was given and action taken at an earlier stage to stop this human calamity, the lives of thousands of innocent Ugandans would have been saved from brutal murder, and the life of His Grace Archbishop Janani Luwum would never have ended in the hands of Amin's savage and dehumanised thugs.

The plight of Ugandans has been ignored by all civilized world in spite of Amin's disgusting abuses of Human Rights and the dignity of mankind. Indeed the world has been aware of all the atrocities and inhuman deeds of Amin's regime, but no human action has been taken to stop human extermination in Uganda. The prevailing horrors and inhumanities in Uganda have been put to the whole world by authentic witnesses.

We hail with great admiration and gratitude the many Journalists dedicated to the cause of Human Rights and freedom, who have unceasingly been concerned for human life in Uganda and never stopped appealing to the world to help Ugandans from Amin's régime, and who have all the way expressed the sentiments of Ugandans to the world. Since January 25th 1971, when Amin's most ruthless trigger of his gun was released against innocent and defenceless people of Uganda, many of those who have been spared from Amin's killer squads at Makindye and other hideous cells where thousands of Ugandans have been butchered and tortured, have given shocking accounts of inhuman conditions and atrocities in Amin's dungeons.

Just to mention a few of the authentic accounts - on September 22nd 1972 an article appeared in the 'Sunday Telegraph' headed "Sledgehammer murders" by a Journalist who was one of the unfortunates to stay in Amin's cells. He was short of words to describe his experience and only had to say "For four days and three very long nights in the cell at Makindye, we witnessed and experienced what can only be described as the total horror of Amin's military Police. We watched these brutalised and lawless soldiers indulge themselves off-handedly in hourly violence on innocent prisoners, most of whom have little hope of release or recourse to any form of justice". The day before, there was another article by a different Journalist who was also imprisoned by Amin, and was headed "Uganda: Land of Terror, Brutality and Gun Law". Another article was headed "Inside Amin's Hell Hole". All these Journalists were eye-witnesses of the inhuman treatment of Amin's régime.

Shortly after these stories, the disappearance of important Ugandans began to appear in most international newspapers. The first of these names was the Ugandan African Chief Justice of Uganda, Mr Benedicto Kiwanuka, who was dragged from his Law Court Chamber handcuffed and without jacket, tie or shoes, taken away and beheaded. Mr Frank Kalimuzo, the Vice-Chancellor of Makerere University was arrested and murdered. Mr Basil Bataringaya, Mr John Kakonge and Mr Alex Ojera, all former Ministers in Milton Obote's Government were murdered. The Mrs Dora Bloch, who was dragged from her sickbed in the hospital and taken in great agony and murdered and her body burnt. We can go on and on mentioning thousands of names of Amin's victims, if only time could permit us to do so. Furthermore the horror is described by the authentic tale of a freezer in Amin's house which contains the heads of his most distinguished victims, including that of the Chief Justice and the former Ministers of Mr Obote, and the story goes on that, to amuse himself, Amin addresses his frozen audience.

On the 4th March 1973 an article appeared in the 'Sunday Telegraph' with the heading "Behind Amin's Terror" and sub-heading "There is a Green Hill...where Vultures scuffle". This article carried an account of Amin's reign of terror. It gave full account of the most inhuman methods of torture and the disposing of human bodies by Amin's executioners who were paid £100 for each killing of innocent Ugandan. Part of the story read: "The people of Masaka were ordered into the centre of the village to watch Maliyamungu (one of Amin's Majors) begin his 'pacification' programme. A schoolboy now out of Uganda was among them. Two soldiers grabbed Mr... (in fact it was Dr. Kiwalyanga) who was a former Mayor, and stripped him naked. Maliyamungu was standing in front of him with a sword and asking him in a loud voice if he liked a cigarette. The man seemed too frightened to reply but Maliyamungu suddenly slashed at his thighs and chopped off his penis, which he then stuffed into the screaming man's mouth. He then asked the man if he would like to see his own stomach and slit open his belly with his sword..."

We know these horrors to be true having ourselves spoken to eye-witnesses.