

### Introduction

**W**hen Winston Churchill called Uganda the 'pearl of Africa' he wasn't just referring to its outstanding natural beauty. A country of colourful people and breathtaking landscapes, Uganda is a nation rich in natural resources and economic potential.



### History

Prior to the arrival of European explorers and missionaries in the early 1860s and the establishment in 1839 of Uganda as a British protectorate, the country had a history of organised settlements.

In 1962 Uganda gained independence from Britain. What followed were years of political turmoil. In 1971 Idi Amin seized control of the country from Milton Obote, and for the next eight years his despotic rule resulted in the expulsion of Asians from Uganda, the persecution of the Christian population and the murder of between 800,000 and two million people. Amin was overthrown in 1979 and Milton Obote was restored to power. However, the country continued to be divided by inter-tribal warfare and government incompetence.

It was not until 1986 that Yoweri Museveni restored some stability, which has brought a measure of peace and prosperity, although ethnic conflict and rebel activity in the north of Uganda is a continuous threat to the peace. The rebels, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), have for the last 20 years tortured, abducted and murdered thousands of people, resulting in over a million civilians being forced to leave their homes.

Attempts to rebuild the shattered country have left Uganda one of the most heavily indebted countries in the world. However, Uganda has now had some of its debt burden lifted and this has meant that free primary education has been started.

### Current challenges

- ▶ There is hope for the end of the conflict in the north of Uganda where the LRA has terrorised communities with rape, massacres, theft, burning of property, and abduction of children to act as child soldiers and sex slaves. The LRA has been a threat not only to the internal peace and stability of the country but also to its economic recovery.
- ▶ Despite being praised by the International Monetary Fund for achieving consistent economic growth over the past few years, Uganda remains considerably poor and is still hugely in debt to the international community.
- ▶ Although Uganda is the first country in the world to have its enormous Aids problem halved, the effects of Aids remains devastating. With approximately three million people infected and almost two million orphans, the country's social and economic structures have been greatly affected.

### BMS involvement in Uganda

BMS World Mission's first involvement in Uganda came in the summer of 2001 when a BMS Summer Team was involved in children's work, evangelism, and support of people living with Aids. They worked with the Baptist Union of Uganda (BUU), which is led by General Secretary Alex Wanyama. Relations have grown with further short-term teams and full-time workers. Some of the projects with which BMS is involved are as follows:

#### Access to justice

BMS workers Caroline and Steve Sanderson, and Matthew and Anna Price are involved with the Ugandan Lawyers' Christian Fellowship (ULCF) which assists and advises Christians on a wide range of legal situations. They will be joined in the summer of 2008 by Graeme & Jenny Riddell who will be serving in the west of the country. Graeme will be involved in educational work and Jenny in legal work seeking to improve the lives of many disadvantaged people, especially women and children. UCLF has grown rapidly in the last few years and now has over 100 Christian lawyers and a number of student groups, as well as links throughout Africa.

## Improving education opportunities

BMS couple Chris and Christine Leach, both teachers, are working alongside the education co-ordinator of the Baptist Union of Uganda to improve the opportunities for young Ugandans to receive a good education, based on Christian ethics.

Arthur and Nicky Magahy have recently relocated to Uganda from Guinea. They are involved in teaching theological education at the Kampala Evangelical School of Theology.

## Background Information

### The land

Uganda is a landlocked country in central east Africa. Nearly a fifth of Uganda is swamp, great lakes or rivers. Among these are the River Nile and Lakes Victoria, Kyoga and Albert. The south is thickly forested, the north largely savannah and in the northeast there is some semi-desert. The soil is fertile and agriculture accounts for most of the country's export earnings – coffee, cotton, tea, tobacco, sugar are all grown, as well as a wide variety of food crops. During Amin's rule the mining of various minerals almost ceased, now copper and limestone are available. Uganda's many national parks and game reserves are tourist attractions.

### Religion

While the majority of the population is Christian (88.65 per cent) there is a strong Muslim minority (6 per cent) and also a number of indigenous beliefs. The Christian community is roughly equally divided between Roman Catholic and Protestant. During Amin's rule there were severe restrictions and persecution of Christians, but since 1986 there has been a renewed revival with extensive prayer movements and incredible church growth.

The Baptist Union of Uganda (BUU) has, as one of its goals 'Building strong, self-sustaining Baptist churches in Uganda'. There are over 1,700 BUU churches, with 60,000 members

## Prayer points

- ▶ Pray for the government, that it may be wise in how it uses its authority, particularly towards the LRA.
- ▶ Although the infection rate of HIV is falling, the impact of the virus on the country is considerable. Pray for the Church as it attempts to tackle the far-reaching effects of the disease in the local communities.
- ▶ Pray for the many internally displaced people (IDPs), child soldiers and rape victims who have been traumatised by the rebel uprisings in the north of the country.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

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