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## PROFILE

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# SAMSON KISEKKA

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### Dialogue With the Prime Minister of Uganda

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**D**r. Samson Kisekka has led a remarkable life. And in spite of trials and triumphs, he has remained

true to God, his church, and the citizens of his homeland, Uganda. Besides having the distinction of being "the first Seventh-day Adventist prime minister since Daniel the prophet," this 76-year-old Christian physician-statesman is also an agriculturalist, a businessman, and a writer.

How has Dr. Kisekka been able to do so much and help so many? He points to personal determination and commitment to education as the basis for his accomplishments. In his view success or failure depend on how an individual reacts to life's challenges.

Dr. Kisekka is a Christian statesman who takes his religion seriously. If you want to find him on Sabbath

morning, visit the Kampala Seventh-day Adventist church, and you will see him teaching the Sabbath school lesson, counseling members, or listening intently.

Some Christians are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good. Dr. Kisekka, however, has taken as a personal challenge the task of blending freedom and human rights with the pragmatic responsibilities of leading a developing nation towards its full potential. He credits his success to being able to weave the principles of the Word of God into the difficult issues that confront his country.

Here are the highlights of our interview with the Honorable Samson Kisekka, prime minister of Uganda.

**H**ow did you feel when you were asked to be prime minister?

I was overwhelmed with the weight of the responsibility. I couldn't be sad, because it was a chance to help my people. Yet I couldn't be glad, because I didn't know what to expect in the future. But I thought that God could use me since I knew my people's problems, their fears, and their potential. For me this is an opportunity to help them rebuild the country through national restructuring, and also to help them rebuild their own lives through spiritual reformation. I believe Uganda can get better!

**How does one lead a country?**

Like anything worthwhile, it takes thought, wisdom, and hard work. But I strongly believe that part of the master strategy for governing any nation includes effective communication: (1) To give clear

directions about our programs; (2) to encourage people and unite them on a common agenda; (3) to be specific in what we want people to do to achieve success; (4) to support positive action in needed areas; and (5) to develop self-reliance and regularly check progress. Government service is not easy, but when we see even a little progress it is very rewarding.

**What was it like to live in Uganda under two consecutive dictatorships?**

It was dark and terrible. The prospects appeared glum. Liberties were curtailed, people were being killed. We prayed a lot during those years and waited for God to show us what to do. I and millions of other Ugandans felt powerless. If you spoke up or sought to bring about lawful change, you endangered your life and the lives of your family. We

did what we could to help and then just trusted God.

**It was during that period of persecution that you had to go into exile. What was it like?**

It was one of the most disturbing periods of my life. On Christmas 1981 we had to leave behind all our possessions—farms, hospital, belongings, everything! I didn't believe God caused those terrible things to happen, yet allowed them to take place. This was hard for all Christians in Uganda. But I'm thankful God carried us through.

**You often refer to your childhood in your speeches and writings. What lessons did you learn then?**

My father was a chief in Uganda, and he taught us the value of service to others. From him and from my mother we learned lessons of discipline, industry, cheerful contentment, and determina-

tion. Without their example and a Christian upbringing, I would have been nothing.

**Who are some of the people who have been positive models for you life?**

There have been many. I consider George Washington Carver worthy of commendation for his ingeniousness; Booker T. Washington, for his reliance on self-help; Mahatma Gandhi, for his humane civil persistence; Florence Nightingale, for her self-sacrificing service; Martin Luther King, Jr., for standing up for the oppressed and mistreated; William DuBois, for his concepts on freedom and independence. I also think highly of Kenneth Kaunda for his courageous outspokenness; of Julius Nyerere, for his openness in leadership; and of Sandro Pertini, for his magnanimous support of Africa. I have been also inspired by Bible characters such as Joseph, Daniel, Esther, and most notably, by Jesus Christ, who is the supreme example of a true mature Christian leader.

**What motivated you to be a medical doctor?**

I saw the health needs of my people and felt I could be of best

service in this area. I also knew that my father had unnecessarily died of an illness because a colonial doctor chose to go on a safari rather than to give him the medical treatment he needed. That hurt me very badly. I determined that as Ugandans we had to do something to help ourselves. As a professional, I have always tried to give anyone the medical attention he needed when he needed it.

**What made you decide to become a Seventh-day Adventist?**

In 1954 I attended some public meetings that the Seventh-day Adventists held in Kampala, and I became convinced that they were teaching Bible truth. I must confess that I was very surprised when I discovered that according to the Scriptures the true Sabbath was on Saturday, but when my wife and I saw it we accepted it. We were also attracted by the kindness of Seventh-day Adventists, and immediately knew that their Christian teachings were just what the people of Africa needed. I was also greatly influenced by Dr. E. E. Cleveland, a black Seventh-day Adventist evangelist who conducted meetings in Kampala in 1955.

**Dr. Kisekka, we know that through the Seventh-day Adventist Welfare Association (SEDEWA) you played a leading role in preserving the church during the period of persecution in Uganda. What are some of the needs of your church today?**

Several important areas deserve attention. Provide more comprehensive education and training for church leaders. Ensure that new believers thoroughly understand the teachings of the Bible. Involve laypersons in the operation of church organizations. Remind leaders, both young and old, that they must look, talk, and act like leaders if they want to deserve the respect of the members. In education stress the value not only of book knowledge, but also of the practical skills in agriculture and in the technical fields. By meeting these needs the church will be better prepared to face the future.

**What are some of your general concerns now?**

I am getting older and I don't know how much longer I will be in office. My strongest desire is to have good, wise, strong, honest leaders ready to assume the responsibility of leading this nation and my church. I believe that Jesus is coming back to this earth, as he promised, and that when he does he will do away with all the problems we are now facing. But in the meantime, by God's grace, I plan to be faithful as a Christian and as a leader until my last day.

**Delbert W. Baker**

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*Delbert W. Baker, editor of Message magazine, has traveled extensively in Africa. He has recently published a biography of Dr. Kisekka entitled From Exile to Prime Minister (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988).*

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## DOSSIER

**Birth.** Born June 23, 1912, in Mengo, Kampala, Uganda.

**Education.** Graduated from Makerere Medical School. Received numerous awards for scholastic, medical, and leadership excellence.

**Family.** Married Mary Nanfuka in 1940. They had 15 children—seven boys and eight girls.

**Professional.** Worked as a physician and as a businessman; has been also involved in politics. Founded several organizations and institutions, including the Kisekka Hospital in 1978.

**Religious.** Raised as a Christian, was baptized in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1954. Through SEDEWA, a lay organization he established, the Seventh-day Adventist ministry was preserved during the period of persecution in Uganda.

**Exile.** In Nairobi and London, 1981-1986.

**Prime Minister.** Since January 30, 1986.

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