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Uganda – Religious marriages and their registration procedures in Uganda

Introduction

The following note describes the conditions and requirements for entering Islamic, Christian and Hindu marriages in Uganda, the subsequent registration at the Ugandan Registration Services Bureau (URSB) as well as the issuance procedures for the related marriage certificates.

The note includes a section with a particular focus on the marriages celebrated at Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church in Kampala.

The note is primarily based on interviews conducted in Kampala and Wakiso in October and November 2022.

Following an amendment to the Registration of Persons Act (2015) in 2024, the function of marriage registration was transferred from The Ugandan Registration Services Bureau (URSB) to the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA), in October 2024.¹ According to a report from Landinfo, the section of NIRA responsible for registering marriages is physically located in URSB's offices, and there are no immediate plans to move the section to NIRA's offices.²

The below information concerning URSB can be considered applicable up until the transfer of their functions on 1 October 2024. To NIDC's knowledge, the practical implementation of registration- and issuance procedures currently remain unchanged despite the formal transfer of responsibility to NIRA.

Marriage in Uganda

Until 1 October 2024, The Ugandan Registration Services Bureau (URSB) was the directorate of civil registration with the responsibility covering registration regarding inter alia marriage, business and intellectual property.

In relation to marriage, URSB is among other things mandated to:

¹ Kamurungi & Akullu, 2 October 2024.

² Landinfo, 17 December 2024.

- Solemnise civil marriage for residents of Kampala
- Register all Church, Islamic and Hindu marriages
- License churches to celebrate marriages
- Maintain all customary marriage registers.³

There are five types of legal marriage in Uganda: civil, customary, church/Christian, Islamic and Hindu.⁴

Each type of marriage has its own type of marriage certificate.⁵

For information about civil and customary marriages, please refer to our note: “Civil and customary marriages and their registration procedures in Uganda”.

Marriage registration

Marriage registration in Uganda is mandatory, but the specific conditions depend on the type of marriage. Marriage is, however, legal before registration as long as it abides by the rules and requirements for that particular type of marriage.⁶ No matter how long ago a couple married, it is always possible to have the marriage registered. In case of late registration, the couple will be subjected to a fine.⁷

Eligibility criteria

The following criteria must be honoured, in order to enter into a legally valid marriage in Uganda no matter the type of marriage:

- Bride and groom must be 18 years or above*
- Marriage must be consensual
- Marriage must be heterosexual
- Marriage must be monogamous except for customary and Islamic
- Persons cannot be related by kindred or affinity.⁸
- Proxy marriages are not allowed in any circumstances no matter what type of marriage is celebrated.⁹

*If bride or groom is below 21 years and not a widower/widow, written consent from either of the parents or guardian is required for church and civil marriages and for customary marriage in cases where the party below 21 years does not belong to an indigenous tribe of Uganda.¹⁰

According to URSB, it is important to underline that marriage is for life except by dissolution due to death or by court order. In that case, divorcees can remarry.¹¹

³ URSB, 24 November 2021.

⁴ URSB, 24 November 2021.

⁵ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

⁶ URSB, Kampala, October 2022; Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 November 2020, p. 3.

⁷ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

⁸ URSB, Kampala, October 2022; URSB, 24 November 2021.

⁹ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

¹⁰ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 November 2020, pp. 6-7; CAO, November 2022.

¹¹ URSB, Kampala, October 2022; URSB, 24 November 2021.

Cohabitation does not give any legal rights.¹²

Single status certificates are needed for Ugandans to marry e.g. in Denmark. You and one of your parents swear that you are unmarried in front of a Commissioner of Oaths.¹³

Church marriage

Church marriages are monogamous and can be celebrated in any licensed and gazetted church. The church must be licensed/gazetted in order for its marriages to be legally valid in Uganda.¹⁴ According to URSB, their website include a “*more or less*” updated list of licensed and gazetted churches. As of November 2022, there are 3,525 churches on the list.¹⁵

Announcement of marriage/ notice of marriage

According to URSB, the Marriage Act governs church marriages, but at the same time there is room for smaller variations so each denomination can follow its own norms and traditions, which i.a. is evident for the procedures regarding announcement/notice of marriage.¹⁶

According to the chief administrative office in Wakiso, the church must announce the marriage, on behalf of the couple to be, three or four times during mass. The congregation is asked during three/four different services if anyone has objections to the marriage.¹⁷ These announcements must occur within a 21 days period prior to the wedding.¹⁸

URSB described the procedure regarding announcement/ notice of marriage slightly different. According to URSB, notice of marriage in church marriages is done in form of announcing banns during church services in the following churches:

- the church of residence of each of the parties to the marriage
- the churches where they were baptised
- the churches of residence of their parents.

The banns are also posted on the churches’ notice boards and in printed Sunday bulletins where they exist.¹⁹

According to URSB, both parties are required when registering for marriage in the Catholic Church. However, a few exemptions allow only one party to be present.²⁰

¹² URSB, Kampala, October 2022; URSB, 24 November 2021.

¹³ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

¹⁴ URSB, 24 November 2021.

¹⁵ URSB A, 2022.

¹⁶ URSB, 25 November 2022.

¹⁷ CAO, Wakiso, November 2022.

¹⁸ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 November 2020, p. 6.

¹⁹ URSB, 25 November 2022.

²⁰ URSB, 25 November 2022.

It is a requirement for at least one of the parties to the marriage to have resided within the district in which the marriage is intended to be celebrated for at least 15 days preceding the solemnisation.²¹ This requirement follows the Marriage Act.²²

Registration of church marriages

Church marriages must be registered with URSB and it is the responsibility of the minister/priest to fill out the marriage return form (Form F) with the relevant details i.a. the names of the couple and witnesses, sign the form and send it to URSB. Recently, URSB has implemented a digital alternative where the minister/priest can upload a screenshot of the completed Form F directly to URSB's system.²³

According to URSB, church certificates are not enough to register a marriage with URSB. The URSB must receive Form F. However, it does not have to be the official form from the booklet, but can be a similar paper containing the same information as is required in Form F.²⁴

A church return form does not include pictures of the bride and groom.²⁵

URSB
UGANDA REGISTRATION SERVICE BUREAU

No. Form F

When Married	Names and Surnames	Date of Birth	Condition	Occupation	Residence	Father's Names and Occupation

Entered this day of 20 at District Registry of Marriages.

Licensed place Registrar.

Image 1: Church marriage return form/ Form F. (NIDC specimen)

²¹ Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 November 2020, p. 6.

²² URSB, 25 November 2022.

²³ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

²⁴ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

²⁵ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.



UGANDA REGISTRATION SERVICE BUREAU

No. Form F

When Married	Names and Surnames	Whether Full Age or Minor	Condition	Occupation	Residence	Father's Names and Occupation

Entered this day of 20 at District Registry of Marriages.

Licensed place Registrar.

Printed by Uganda Printing and Publishing Corporation

Image 2: Church marriage return form/ Form F, available online.²⁶

Church marriage certificates

Churches issue a church marriage certificate in their own design.²⁷

Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church

There is a significant Eritrean diaspora in Uganda and many Eritreans transit through Uganda on their way to Europe.²⁸ The Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church has been in Uganda since 2006 and is a cultural gathering point for the diaspora.²⁹

According to the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, the church has been licensed by URSB to perform legal marriages in Uganda since November 2019.³⁰ As of November 2022, the church appears on the official list over licensed and gazetted churches.³¹ Marriages celebrated before November 2019 in the Tewahido Church are not accepted as legally valid in Uganda.³²

If you are part of the congregation, you should have a membership card.³³

Requirements for marriage in the Tewahido Church

If a couple belonging to the Tewahido Church congregation wants to marry, they must present three witnesses each who must know the party for whom they are testifying. All six witnesses must come to the church at the same time for an interview and to sign a sworn statement testifying that the parties to the forthcoming marriage are both single and without children. This meeting is separate from the solemnisation of the marriage.³⁴

²⁶ URSB B, 2022.

²⁷ CAO, Wakiso, November 2022.

²⁸ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022; IRRI, July 2018, p. 3 and 7.

²⁹ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

³⁰ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

³¹ URSB A, 2022.

³² Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

³³ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

³⁴ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

Single status certificate

The Tewahido Church follows the URSB requirement of 21 days' notice of marriage. Photos of the couple are displayed for the public to object to the marriage. Nationality is also on display.³⁵

If a party to the marriage is neither Ugandan nor Eritrean, one of the witnesses must be from the party's country of residence. The said party to the marriage must also bring a single status certificate from the country of residence. Without the single status certificate, it is still possible to marry, but you will receive a different marriage certificate with a slight deviation in design and no EOTC number in red in the top right corner (see Image 4). Without the single status certificate, the marriage will not be registered with URSB. If the couple subsequently hands in the single status certificate, the Tewahido Church will issue a new, regular marriage certificate, and the marriage is now eligible for registration with URSB.³⁶

Proxy marriage is not legal.³⁷

Marriage certificates from the Tewahido Church

During the church ceremony, where the couple publically gets married, they have the church marriage certificate issued. The certificate is signed by the bride and groom together with the priest. The certificate is also signed by three people as mentioned in the certificate as "best man". These are not the same people as the witnesses that have had the meeting with the couple and the priest. These "best man" are friends. There can be one, two or three; this has no consequence for the legitimacy of the marriage.³⁸ The church stamps the marriage certificates.³⁹

The church files the marriage according to the date of the marriage. The church collects all the relevant documents i.a. the letter from LC1 and send it to URSB and the URSB stamps it.

The return form (Form F) used for registration with URSB is in triplet: yellow for URSB; white to the married couple and blue to the church archive. URSB makes a copy of the yellow form, stamps it and returns it to the church.⁴⁰ See image 3.

³⁵ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

³⁶ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

³⁷ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

³⁸ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

³⁹ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

⁴⁰ Eritrean Orthodox Tewahido Church, Kampala, November 2022.

Image 3: Tewahido church marriage return form/ Form F. (NIDC specimen)

Image 4: Marriage certificate from Tewahido church with single status certificate, cover. (NIDC specimen)

Image 5: Marriage certificate from Tewahido church with single status certificate, inside. (NIDC specimen)

Special license

Where an intending couple is unable to wait for the 21 statutory days, or where they desire to have their marriage celebrated outside a licensed place of worship or registrar's office, the couple can apply for special license from the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Affairs. The decision is based on affidavits.⁴¹ A reason for wanting to waive the 21 days could be that one party to the marriage is in Uganda on a tourist visa, which will expire before the 21 days. According to URSB, if other criteria are fulfilled the special license will normally be granted.⁴² Special license is governed by the Marriage Act Cap. 251, which governs civil and Christian (monogamous) marriages.⁴³

Muslim marriage

The system of marriage license is not applicable for Muslim marriages and URSB has no additional requirements as to how the marriage is celebrated as long as it abides by the customs and rites of the Islamic faith and that of the relevant Islamic denomination. If the religious community recognises the marriage, so does URSB.⁴⁴

Just as church marriages, Muslim marriages also have to be registered with URSB and the registration is likewise based on a return form, which is filled out by the imam. The return form has attached pictures of the bride and groom. Contrary to church marriages, registrations with URSB should be signed by both the husband and the wife as well as by two witnesses to the marriage.⁴⁵

Proxy marriage is not legal in Uganda and according to URSB; Moslem marriage law does not allow marriage by proxy.⁴⁶

Islamic marriage certificates

URSB does not issue any marriage certificates when a Muslim marriage is registered.⁴⁷ A Muslim couple can have an extract from the marriage register issued by URSB or have their Muslim marriage certificate certified with two URSB stamps.⁴⁸

⁴¹ URSB B, 2022.

⁴² URSB, Kampala, October 2022; URSB, 24 November 2021.

⁴³ URSB, 25 November 2022.

⁴⁴ URSB, Kampala, October 2022; URSB, 24 November 2021.

⁴⁵ URSB, Kampala, October 2022; Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 November 2020.

⁴⁶ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

⁴⁷ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

⁴⁸ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

Uganda Muslim Supreme Council

P.O. Box 1146,
Plot: 23 - 25 Kampala
E-mail: majilis@yahoo.com

TEL: 0312-2108115
MC NO 1 [REDACTED]




Certificate of Marriage

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, MOST GRACIOUS AND MOST MERCIFUL
'MARRY A WOMAN OF YOUR CHOICE'

- Name and tribe of the bridegroom
Name after conversion (if any)
Address of the bridegroom
Names of his Parents
Parents' residence
- Name and tribe of the bride
Name after conversion (if any)
Names of her parents
Parents' residence
- Whether the bride is a spinster
A widow or divorced and her age
- Name of the brides guardian/agent
Relationship
- Names of two witnesses and their addresses: 1
2
- Amount of dowry/ Mahare
- Date on which marriage was contracted
- Special conditions, if any
- Name of village or town and District in which the marriage took place

A. Signature of the couple
1 Bridegroom
2 Bride

B. Signatures of the brides guardian/Agent

C. Signatures of the two witnesses to the marriage
1
2

D. Name & Signature of the District Kadhi/
his Deputy/ Secretary for Religious
Affairs/Designated Officer

MANGO KISENYI III PARISH
LIZIGE MOSQUE
KAMPALA UGANDA

IMAM SHEKH
AKUBA
KAMPALA

IMAMU LIZIGE MOSQUE
Date: [REDACTED] 2021
MANGO HILL RD. KAMPALA

Image 6: Muslim marriage certificate. (NIDC reference material)

Hindu marriage

Hindu marriages follow Hindu traditions and are solemnised in a temple and afterwards registered at URSB. The marriage return form include the same key information as the other types of marriages.⁴⁹ If Hindu marriages are celebrated in accordance with the customs and rites of Hindu faith, URSB consider them legally valid.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ URSB, Kampala, October 2022.

⁵⁰ URSB, 24 November 2021.


श्री सनातन धर्म मंडल
SHREE SANATAN DHARMA MANDAL
 (HINDU TEMPLE)
 

Plot No. 8-10, Snay Ameer Street, Nakasero Market, P.O. Box: 9448, Kampala-Uganda
 यतो धर्मं स्ततो जयः । सत्यात् नास्ति परो धर्मः ॥



Marriage Certificate

(Ceremony conducted under the Hindu Customs)

No. 07 Date: / / 2020

Bride Maiden Name: <u> </u> Father's Name: <u> </u> Mother's Name: <u> </u> Age: <u>21</u> YRS Nationality: <u>INDIAN</u> Religion: <u>HINDU</u> Profession: <u>STUDENT</u> Residential Address: <u> </u>	Bridegroom Name: <u> </u> Father's Name: <u> </u> Mother's Name: <u> </u> Age: <u>24</u> YRS Nationality: <u>KENYAN</u> Religion: <u>HINDU</u> Profession: <u>SALES EXECUTIVE</u> Residential Address: <u> </u>
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I, VIPUL V. BHATT of SSDM TEMPLE, certify that on the day of , 2020, at KAMPALA I performed a marriage ceremony according to the customary rite and ceremonies of the Hindu religion between the parties shown above.

Signature of Bride: Signature of Bridegroom:

Witness' Name: Signature:
 Witness' Name: Signature:

Signature of the Priest: V.V. Bhatt



Image 7: Hindu marriage certificate. (NIDC reference material)

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