

## FREQUENT QUESTIONS ON INSPECTION AND CLOSURE OF PRAYER HOUSES

### 1. Why are prayer houses being closed when the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda guarantees freedom of worship and association?

It's true, the Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda guarantees freedom of worship in its article 37. The Constitution also guarantees the right to freedom of association in article 39. No one forbids people to get together and pray. However, these rights must be exercised in accordance with the law. The law requires people to pray in a place that meets certain requirements in order to prevent them from putting their lives in danger.

In recent years there's been a rapid rise in churches and prayer houses that operate in places that puts peoples' lives at risk and cases of preachers engaged in exploitation of people through extorting money and property by promising miracles, encouraging harmful practices such as sowing divisionism, promoting anti vaccination ideologies and other conspiracy theories

The Government has decided to intervene to protect the safety of people. A country wide inspection of prayer houses has been carried out and many of the houses inspected were closed for non-compliance with established regulations including registration, building codes, safety, hygiene/sanitation, and financial or other exploitation of followers.

### 2. What is the status of inspection as of now? How many churches have been closed so far?

More than 14,000 prayer houses have been inspected across the country so far. Of those, more than 8,000 prayer houses (70%) have been found non-compliant and were closed. The inspection is still ongoing to ensure all prayer houses meet the necessary safety standards.

It should be noted that the closure of a prayer house does not necessarily entail the closure of the church the prayer house is affiliated with.

### **3. What are the criteria based on during the inspection of the worship places?**

The faith-based organization (FBO) is required to have the following:

- ▶ A certificate of legal personality issued by RGB
- ▶ A valid letter of collaboration with the district for their branch(es)
- ▶ Valid degree in theology or a degree in another domain with a valid certificate in religious studies for church managerial level
- ▶ The church must have its own building
- ▶ The prayer house must meet the requirements and standards stipulated by the building code of its working place.

Those includes but are not limited to the following:

- It should not be an open space or tent
- It should not be a multipurpose building
- It should have toilets, soundproof, and enough parking/accessibility space where necessary
- It should be sufficiently ventilated
- It should be equipped with a lightning Conductor, water, washrooms and other sanitary requirements as necessary.

### **4. Are the requirements for prayer houses similar throughout the country, when the conditions and context are different?**

The requirements for prayer houses are determined by considering the basic needs to maintain peace, safety, and good health of worshippers - this is the right of a Rwandan anywhere in the country.

### **5. Is it true that each worship place should measure at least half a hectare and have a wide parking space even those in rural areas?**

Every worship place should follow the local construction code. The parking space requirement is to ensure access to emergency vehicles to help in case of need. The safety of people is important wherever they are located.

### **6. Were the people operating these prayer houses given notice of the inspection?**

RGB organizes frequent discussions and consultative meetings with church leaders, and we remind them to comply with laws and regulations. So, they were not surprised by this inspection.

For example, on 05/12/2023, RGB held a meeting with representatives of Rwanda Inter-religious Council (RIC) from the national level to the district level. Also, on 18/05/2024, RGB wrote to the religious umbrellas (unions of faith-based organizations) asking them to show the list of their members and their addresses. All this was a reminder that these organizations should comply with the law and the regulations in place.

### **7. In general, what were the key findings of the inspection that led to the closure of many worship places?**

The key findings include:

- ▶ Lack of required documentation such as registration certificate or degree in theology for relevant church leaders,
- ▶ Substandard buildings that do not meet local building code
- ▶ Poor sanitation
- ▶ Lack of soundproof measures
- ▶ Lack of compliance with basic safety standards
- ▶ Lack of legal personality from RGB before operating as a church;
- ▶ Lack of collaboration letter from the district where applicable;
- ▶ Conducting worship activities in other unauthorized areas (caves, mountains, rivers, forests, etc).

### **8. What do you think is the reason for the large number of churches that do not meet the requirements?**

Some of the reasons include the fact that there are those who establish churches not for evangelization but for their own profit. They establish prayer houses in order to get money and property from the people, preach misleading messages, and engage in exploitation of people. Some preachers have turned churches into business and do not put in place measures to ensure the safety of people who come to pray.

### **9. What happens after closing prayer houses and what are the procedures to apply for reopening?**

The church owner must fulfil what he/she was requested to do, then after he/she sends his/her request to the nearest local authority, and waits for the request to be evaluated by the relevant authorities.

### **10. Those doing evangelism through the media, what are they requested to comply with?**

All evangelists are required to comply with the law. However, some of those doing evangelism through the media do not come from registered religious organisations and they often give teachings that mislead the people. Media managers are recommended to be prudent when providing time and space for these teachings to ensure the law is respected.

### **11. How do you evaluate the collaboration between church leaders and government institutions in this issue of closing prayer houses?**

The collaboration between church leaders and government institutions is positive since religious leaders are willing to solve the highlighted anomalies. We also request them to take regular measures and to do self-evaluation in order to comply with the laws.

### **12. Have you given sufficient time to the people that are required to have a degree in theology to acquire it?**

The law governing Faith Based Organisations set a grace period of five years for those who wish to study theology. This grace period ended in September 2023. Therefore, sufficient time was given. we encourage others to complete the course to be able to continue preaching.

### **13. What is being done to find a lasting solution to avoid chaos in both churches and worship practices**

The Government is committed to ensure the safety of people who pray by educating the public to be vigilant and avoid misleading teachings, intensifying monitoring and regulation of Faith-Based Organisations, and improving collaboration and interaction between the government institutions and Faith-Based Organizations.