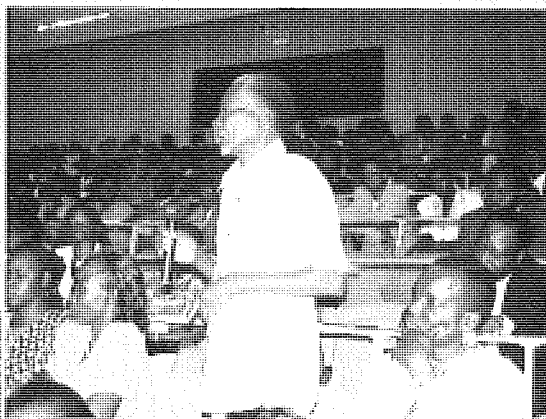


## Kacoke Madit:

### A diaspora role in promoting peace

**Nyeko Caesar Poblicks**



**KM conference 1998**

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In 1996 members of the Acholi community living in the diaspora started the Kacoke Madit (KM) initiative as a means of raising awareness about the conflict and finding a viable means of bringing the conflict to an end. Kacoke Madit translates simply as 'a big meeting' in Luo, the language of the Acholi. KM is probably best known for organising a series of international conferences bringing together the affected northern Uganda community, the Acholi-diaspora community, the government of Uganda, the government of Sudan, the LRA, representatives of the international community and other stakeholders with an interest in the conflict. The first two KM conferences were held in London, UK in April 1997 and July 1998. The last major conference, KM2000, was held in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2000.

A Kacoke Madit conference is an open forum for all sides of the conflict: Acholi people and community leaders, parliamentarians and traditional and religious leaders, government officials and civil servants, representatives of the LRM/A, and overseas members of the Acholi diaspora. It is this inclusiveness, combined with a common concern to see that the conflict is brought to a peaceful end that gives KM an unusual role in promoting and building consensus for sustainable peace.

*"Acholi people who have borne the brunt of the conflict are concerned about being marginalised from a process, which will have far reaching implications for them, whatever the outcome. Until now, there has been limited communication and dialogue between the process and the civilian population of northern Uganda... It is only realistic that the people of Acholi (civil society) are actively involved in a process that seeks solutions to problems that they have been the major victims of. It does not bode well for the prospect of a durable and sustainable solution for the process to ignore the needs and input of civil society as a critical stakeholder with interest in both the process and outcome of the negotiations"* – Excerpts from KM Memorandum to The Carter Center, 2000

Since its early formation the work of KM has been intended to support an inclusive dialogue process, combining the search for peace dialogue opportunities with peace education within the affected communities, as well as other practical efforts to support peace initiatives. KM is also involved in disseminating information about the conflict and peace initiatives around the world, using a variety of methods, including the internet ([www.km-net.org](http://www.km-net.org)) and a weekly email-based newsletter.

***“It is the view of the KM Secretariat that only a sustained dialogue and a peace process leading to a comprehensive settlement, followed by reconciliation, reconstruction and development can break the cycle of violence in northern Uganda and bring about durable peace. The overriding reason for our call for a negotiated peace process between the LRA and the Government is based on our concern for the suffering of civilians rather than the military strength or weakness of the rebels. Before all these can be achieved, it is necessary to create the conditions that will make it possible for such a peace process to take hold and succeed. KM, its partners and other groups and the Acholi people in general have crucial roles to play in this respect.”*** – KM Secretariat Presentation, ACORD/ARLPI Conference, Gulu, September 1999

KM activities are co-ordinated from its Secretariat in London, UK. The Secretariat works with and through a network of Regional Coordinators in Uganda, southern Africa, USA, Canada, Scandinavia and the rest of Europe, as well as with partner groups in Uganda including Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiatives (ARLPI), the Acholi Parliamentary Group (APG), Acholi Development Association (ADA), Peoples' Voice for Peace (PVP), the Council of Acholi Chiefs (rwodi moo) and other local stakeholders.

Since its first meeting in London in April 1997, KM has sought to identify and facilitate opportunities for the conflict parties and interested intermediaries to engage in dialogue. KM has sought to play a facilitative and supportive role.

***“Governments that are concerned about the plight of abducted children and who wish to contribute to their release, protection, reintegration and rehabilitation should adopt clear, unambiguous and effective policies to support and where possible facilitate dialogue as the only viable means of realising those goals.”*** – KM presentation to the international conference on war affected children, September 2000, Winnipeg

Over time, the KM Secretariat has been mandated by the KM conferences to play more of a role in advocacy. Key issues which have engaged the KM secretariat have included advocacy for a peaceful settlement ('Manifesto for Peace' released during the Parliamentary elections, and published on KM's website), inclusion of Acholi (civil society) representatives in efforts to find a settlement, promotion of conflict-sensitive international approaches to the plight of the war-affected children, and lobbying for the Amnesty Act to be implemented in the context of the overall resolution of the conflict – rather than as an end in itself.

In 1999, KM and Conciliation Resources (CR) began working together in a partnership. While KM's programmes remain independent, the collaboration allows for a constructive relationship, which has helped KM to build its own capacities and enhance its role in supporting intermediaries and its partners.

KM walks a difficult path in sustaining a principled position on a negotiated settlement in a conflict characterised by manipulation and misinformation. With its organisational structure – as both a decentralised network and an operational Secretariat, KM has been able to act quickly and flexibly to capitalise on opportunities to move the peace agenda forward, while at the same time guarding against actions which inadvertently enhance the belligerence and militarism of the main actors and therefore prolong the war.

A dialogue process, which presents real alternatives to violence, remains a political and ethical imperative for all those committed to peace in Acholiland. The failure of external agencies to 'deliver peace' has shifted the onus for a resolution back to Uganda and Ugandans. KM and its partners will continue to play their part in meeting this challenge. The task of establishing and helping peace take root will take both patience and skill but the efforts for peace must continue because only sustainable peace and equitable development will guarantee the future of northern Uganda.

Because the majority of the LRA combatants were abducted as children, appropriate response strategies must be sensitive to this reality. KM has found that cultural values are still held in high esteem and can be used as ethical reference points for the challenges of reconciliation. KM will work with its partners in Uganda and beyond to provide opportunities for dialogue to take place, to create platforms for Acholi voices to be heard, and to encourage the relevant governments and international agencies to listen to those who remain in the line of fire.