

THE CROSS-BORDER MEETING HELD AT
YAMBIO, WESTERN EQUATORIAL STATE,
SOUTH SUDAN

TOPIC: 'DWOGO CEN PACO' (COME BACK
HOME) PROGRAMME

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The Cross-Border meeting organized by Conciliation Resources, UK between Religious, Cultural, Elders and Political leaders in the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) war affected areas namely, South Sudan (SS), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR) and Uganda. The cross-border meeting is aimed to bring mutual understanding about the LRA contemporary dynamics and their implications to stability and peace in the Great Lakes Region.

1. Introduction

Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) is an inter-faith cooperation for peace-building and conflict transformation. It comprises four different religious denominations, namely, Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and Moslem communities. ARLPI, therefore, is called to participate effectively in transforming violent conflict, not just in Northern Uganda, but in many different parts of the world. ARLPI was a religious response to security crisis facing the Acholi population, as result of violation of their human rights and desecration of their human life and human dignity. It has brought unity, mutual understanding, and solidarity among our different denominations, in spite of our human differences. The focus is always put on our human communality such as peace, unity, harmony, love, and peaceful co-existence.

ARLPI came into existence in August 1997, as a result of the LRA massacre in Lokung, Palabek, and Padibe, in Lamwo County, Kitgum District. Lamwo is now a new District in Acholi sub-region, which is curved from Kitgum District. ARLPI, as an inter-faith organization works for sustainable peace and development in Northern Uganda by transforming violent conflict through dialogue, negotiation, mediation and reconciliation. It operates majorly in Acholi sub-region (Agago, Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, Lamwo, Nwoya and Pader, districts). However, its operation area is much wider than just the Acholi sub-region, as far as advocacy is concerned. As a matter of fact, the presence of ARLPI is greatly felt at local, national, regional, and international levels. For example, ARLPI has received an international recognition from Niwano Peace Foundation in Japan in May 2004, and from Paul Karus Award through a Parliament of World's Religions in Barcelona, Spain, in July, 2004.

2. DWOGO CEN PACO (COME BACK HOME) PROGRAMME

The protracted war of insurgency between the LRA and the Government of Uganda had left behind it terrible devastation and ruins. Very many people have lost their dear lives and others have their limbs, like, ears, noses, lips, arms, hands, and legs, cut off, and leaving them handicapped permanently for life. Infrastructures were left in a sorry state of devastation and ruins throughout Northern Uganda. The abducted children were made to become child-soldiers or sex-slaves. Worse still, the abducted children were forced either to kill themselves or to kill their own parents or people.

On the other hand, the soldiers in the UPDF who were hunting the LRA soldiers in the bush were mostly Acholi children. So it was, as if, Acholi killing Acholi in a war which did not have the 'Lapir' (Justification) from the Acholi community. In other words, the war between the LRA and the Government of Uganda never received the blessing from Acholi community. The LRA rebellion, therefore, was and is not an Acholi rebellion. However, the saddest thing to note is

that the people of the Central Luo of Northern Uganda have borne the brunt of the war of insurgency between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, as it is clearly indicated above.

3. BIGOMBE'S ATTEMPT, TO END THE LRA WAR 1991/94.

Betty Atuku Bigombe hails from Acholi sub-region, the daughter of the Central Luo of Northern Uganda. She is married to a gentleman called Bigombe from Western Uganda. When the NRA/M came to power by the barrel of the gun, Betty Atuku Bigombe was appointed as the Minister for Pacification of the North resident in Gulu. In 1991/94 Hon. Betty Atuku Bigombe, made an attempt to bring an end to the war of insurgency between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, was persuaded and agreed to come out of the rebellion by peaceful means. He told the delegation of the elders, cultural and religious leaders, led by Hon. Betty Bigombe, that, 'LRA has fought with the gun for seven years, but failed to defeat the UPDF soldiers and UPDF soldiers have also fought with the gun for seven years, but failed to defeat the LRA. We now want the gun to be kept silent for the sake of peace and stability in the sub-region'.

However, when President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta paid a surprise visit to Gulu, the situation changed drastically. The President came to Gulu during the celebration of the anniversary of the Pope's visit to Northern Uganda on February 20, 1994. As a courtesy, the President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, was formally asked to greet the gathering. The President was exceedingly delighted to greet the gathering. However, the President surprisingly continued to give 7 Days Ultimatum to the LRA rebels to come out of the bush or else they would be flushed out. This ultimatum from the President of Uganda took everybody by surprise, especially, Hon. Betty Bigombe, the Minister for Pacification in the North resident in Gulu, who was already embarked on Peace Negotiation with the LRA in the bush since 1991. No doubt, her tireless efforts to bring an end to the war of insurgency between the LRA and the GOU were well known to the President of Uganda. The world's philosophers usually say that there is no better surprise in life. No doubt, this ultimatum from the President of Uganda was the beginning of the LRA brutality against the civilian populations of Northern Uganda for the last two decades. However, after three days of the ultimatum the LRA rebels reacted very aggressively against the civilian population of Northern Uganda, by wanton killings, ambushes on all the roads, and abductions of innocent children throughout Northern Uganda. All these wanton killings, ambushes, and abductions of the innocent children, resulted to loss of human lives and destruction of property. Worst of all, the abducted children were made to become as child-soldiers, sex-slaves, and instruments of death to their own people and communities.

Over 30000 innocent children were abducted and taken into captivity by the LRA. Some of these abducted children later either escaped or rescued by the UPDF soldiers. Some were, of course, set free voluntarily by the LRA and sent back home through the churches. The case in point is Catholic Church Pajule in Pader District that was used, as a Reception Centre for returnees from the LRA captivity. Hundreds of abducted girls were voluntarily released by the LRA and sent directly to Catholic Church in Pajule. The Catholic Church Pajule, therefore, became a Reception Centre for LRA formerly abducted children from LRA captivity.

However, half of these abducted children have not yet been accounted for up to now. Their fate is not yet known even to their own parents, who are still anxiously longing to know what had happened to their children. Are their children still in captivity of the LRA or they are already dead in the jungles of Northern Uganda, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) or Central African Republic (CAR).

4. THE MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM IN ACHOLI SUB-REGION

The religious leaders from Acholi sub-region were forced, by the magnitude of the problem facing the Acholi community, to appeal to the Government of Uganda, for amnesty to be granted to all the formerly abducted children of Northern Uganda and the LRA top leaders inclusive. Thanks God, the andGOU heeded the appeal from the religious leaders and granted the amnesty unconditionally to all the formerly abducted children and the LRA top leaders inclusive. This was a landmark in an effort to bring to an end the war of insurgency between the LRA and the GOU, by a peaceful means. Amnesty Law, therefore, becomes one of the mechanisms for conflict resolution in Northern Uganda. However, this does not mean that Amnesty Law in Uganda condones impunity. Amnesty Law was put in place specifically to bring an end the war of insurgency between the LRA and the GOU. However, it was not meant to exonerate those who have committed serious crimes against humanity during the war of insurgency in Northern Uganda. Amnesty Law does not prevent any aggrieved party to seek redress of any serious crime against humanity from the Court of Law, if Uganda is already under the Law and Order. In a situation of lawlessness and disorder chaos prevails, but in a situation of Law and Order peace reigns supreme in the hearts of all the citizens of Uganda. The Law and Order restores the respect for human rights, the purity and sanctity of human life, and human dignity of every human person.

The war of insurgency between the LRA and the GOU reached its peak or climax in 2002/2003. As a result, the entire Acholi population was given 48 hours only, by the UPDF, to vacate their respective homesteads and villages and run to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps or create new IDP Camps immediately. Over 2.0 million people were forcibly uprooted from their

lives and forced to live in the IDP Camps throughout Northern Uganda. It was also a period when the Acholi children were forced to become 'Night Commuters'. The Night Commuters had to walk six or ten kilometers every day from the IDP Camps in order to spend the night on the streets or in the Bus Park of Gulu or Kitgum or Lira. Hundreds of thousands of Night Commuters also used to spend their nights in the Churches or Hospitals, like, St. Mary Hospital Lacor or Gulu referral Hospital or Independent Hospital in Gulu Municipality.

The next morning the children had to walk back to the IDP Camps the same distance in order to attend classes in their respective schools. The Night Commuters used to run to towns and spend the nights on the streets because of fear of being killed or abducted by the LRA. Worse still, it was also a period when Acholi children had become invisible children from the eyes of the international community. Some of us are still wondering whether this was a deliberate act by the international community. Was this a sin of conspiracy of silence by the international community against the Acholi population? This was the beginning of misinformation about the situation in Northern Uganda at global level. This misinformation is quite in line with the government attitude towards the people of Northern Uganda. According to the Government of Uganda, the prevailing situations in Northern Uganda were domestic or local affairs that needed to be resolved locally. As a result, we have the problem of localization of the situations of Northern Uganda. According to this negative attitude towards the people of Northern Uganda, the high rate of death of the children of Northern Uganda at the rate of over 1000 children per week was not an issue to be made known to the world because it was a domestic affair. How can the children of Northern Uganda who were dying at the rate of over 1000 per week could become invisible children from the eyes of international community. Only God is our true witness in this case. Jan Egland the UN Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency and Relief Coordinator, who visited Northern Uganda September, 2003, spent the night in one of the IDP Camps in Acholi sub-region. Jan Egland described the situation of Northern Uganda, as the worst forgotten humanitarian crisis in the whole world in our modern time. He said the situation of Northern Uganda was worse than the situation in Darfur, West Sudan.

5. DWOG CEN PACO (COME BACK HOME) PROGRAMME

The precarious situation in which the formerly abducted children found themselves in the LRA captivity made the cultural and religious leaders from Acholi sub-region to come together and fervently appeal to all our abducted children in the LRA captivity to come back home (Dwog cen paco). The appeal was made over Radio Mega FM 102, in Gulu, Northern Uganda, fervently appealing to all the abducted children in the LRA captivity to dwogo cen paco (come back home) The Dwogo cen paco (Come back Home) Programme had become very popular

throughout Acholi and Lango sub-regions, simply because the response from the formerly abducted children was overwhelmingly unexpected. As a result of these overwhelming numbers of the formerly abducted children from the LRA captivity seeking amnesty, quite a number of Local Organizations sprung up in readiness and willingness to deal with these unexpected situations. Surprisingly, the community's attitude towards the formerly abducted children from the LRA captivity was very healthy and positive. This healthy attitude towards the formerly abducted children was coming from both Acholi and Lango communities. The impact on the civilian communities in both Acholi and Lango sub-regions was overwhelming. The formerly abducted children from the LRA captivity had the freedom to escape from the LRA captivity through either Acholi or Lango community, without any fear or risk from the communities.

This community healthy attitude towards the formerly abducted children becomes one of the 'push factors' for the formerly abducted children to dwogo cen paco with a lot of hope for their future destiny in Uganda.

- a. Gulu Support Children Organization (GUSCO) was formed by women group in Gulu
- b. Kitgum Concerned Women Association (KICWA) was also formed by women group in Kitgum
- c. Christian Counselling Fellowship (CCF) Pader was also formed by Christian committed women in Pader
- d. World Vision International Gulu (WVI)
- e. Catholic Church Pajule (CC) Pajule, as a Reception Centre for returnees from the LRA captivity.

6. UNBELIEVABLE TESTIMONY GIVEN BY RETURNEES

The formerly abducted children who came back alive from the LRA captivity gave unbelievable testimony how they were forced either to kill themselves or to kill their own parents or people. It was, therefore, not a surprise to see that both Acholi and Lango communities looked at the formerly abducted children, as victims of circumstances. This healthy attitude from the two communities helped very many children to return home safely through the communities without fear or risk. This healthy attitude from the local communities towards the formerly abducted children also helped international community to respect and give credit to the GOU for what it was doing through Amnesty Law. The international community was also helped to understand that Amnesty was meant to rescue and save the lives of the innocent children from the LRA captivity. Amnesty, therefore, was given unconditionally to all the formerly abducted

children from the LRA captivity and the LRA top leaders inclusive (Vincent Otti and Joseph Kony, the Deputy and the Chairman of the LRA, respectively). Some of the LRA top commanders who came back, as a result of the Dwog Cen Paco Programme are the following.

- Brigadier Sam Kolo
- Brigadier Kenneth Banya
- Lt. Col. Apire
- Lt. Col. Okwonga Alero
- Lt. Col. Lotada of Patongo came out with 26 formerly abducted children

This healthy attitude from the communities towards the formerly abducted children gave credit to the Luo justice system of 'Mato Put' (Timo Kica or Reconciliation). It also helped the international community to have high respect for the GOU for its good intention to rescue and save the lives of the formerly abducted children from the LRA captivity. It also helped the GOU to have confidence and trust in the formerly abducted children to be reintegrated into the UPDF ranks and files.

7. THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO LRA WAR OF INSURGENCY IN UGANDA

The Government's first reaction to the LRA rebellion in Northern Uganda was very negative in a sense that this was a local problem that needed to be solved locally. This was the beginning of the problem of localization of the problem of the situation of Northern Uganda. There was a deliberate policy to conceal all the information about the prevailing situations in Northern Uganda from the international community. The people of Northern Uganda were framed, as murderers, swine, uncouth, 'anyanya' (deadly snake like cobra). In this context there were two Uganda, one peaceful and prosperous South and another war-ravaged and impoverished North. The education disparities are very alarming in the North, as compared to the South. For example, an intake to Makerere University, Kampala, stands as follows: Central at 56%, Western at 28%, Eastern at 22%, and Northern Uganda at 07% only in the last five years. This is a clear indicator that Uganda is no longer one Country, one Nation, and one people. On the other hand, economic imbalances are even worse in Northern Uganda. Parents who used to own cattle and were able to send their own children to schools and universities are no longer able to do so due to poverty levels in Northern Uganda. For over two decades the people of Northern Uganda were most unable to feed themselves, but entirely depended on the handouts from the World Food Programme (WFP). Consequently, redundancy and dependency syndrome has become the order of the day in their daily life. Indulgence in alcohol consumption is widespread among the youth, women, and men, throughout Northern Uganda. As a result, very many young people, adults, and parents, all have become very irresponsible

because the majority of our people are drunk all the time. The cultural values and norms are no longer important in their daily lives, and no one is available within the community to guide and guard the young ones to appreciate the cultural values and norms in their daily lives. This negative attitude to life, hope, and future destiny, is 'too paco' meaning an alienation of the homestead. This is another clear indicator that the Acholi community is already dead alive (dong otto lacungo). I am, therefore, calling upon the young people of Acholi community to wake up from their indulgence in worthless things that ultimately lead to their own alienation.

The Local Communities in Acholi sub-region were called to form the first, 'Arrow Brigade' to deal with the LRA rebellion. This negative approach brought further division between the LRA and the Acholi population. The LRA rebels reacted very aggressively against the civilian population in Acholi sub-region, by cutting the people's ears, noses, lips, tongues, arms, hands and legs. The amputation of people's limbs left many people handicapped permanently for life. The civilian population soon realized the futility of using arrows and bows against the firepower of the guns. This was a suicidal attempt on the part of the civilian population in Acholi sub-region. On the other hand, it was a neglect of the highest order, on the part of the Government of Uganda, on Acholi people. The GOU seemed to think that this was an Acholi war, Acholi fighting Acholi, because Kony is an Acholi and the abducted children are the Acholi.

Thus, it did not matter for the GOU, if the abducted children were killing their own parents and people and vice versa. Acholi are killing Acholi., abducted children are killing their own parents and people, and parents are killing their own children in LRA captivity. The question is how can an Acholi stab his or her own stomach or pierce his or her own eye? The Acholi community, like, any other ethnic groupings in Uganda, has allowed its children to join the army, police and prison department, which are the arms of the Government of Uganda. Unfortunately, the GOU, wanted the Acholi community to fight its own war, as if we do not have the national army to protect the whole population of Uganda from both internal and external aggressions against the people of Uganda. The GOU has constitutional obligations and responsibilities to protect the lives and property of the people of Uganda without any discrimination or self-interests. As a matter of fact, the Acholi community felt neglected, rejected, and a sense of abandonment by its own government and its own children in the position of powers.

The second attempt made by the GOU to bring an end to the LRA rebellion, was Operation North in March, 1991. This negative attempt only resulted to creating more gap and further division between the civilian population and the LRA. The LRA reaction and brutality against the civilian population only resulted into the creation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps in 1996/97, throughout Northern Uganda. The Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps were commissioned by the Government of Uganda, as a mechanism for protection of civilian populations from the LRA atrocities against the civilian populations in Northern Uganda. The

impact or effect of the war of insurgency between the LRA and the GOU, on the civilian population was further loss of human lives and destruction of property. Infrastructures were left in a sorry state of devastation and ruins throughout Northern Uganda. Over 1000 children were dying every week, as a result of inhuman and deplorable conditions prevailing in the IDP Camps. The inhuman conditions in the IDP Camps killed more people than the war itself. Children were abducted and even killed from within the IDP Camps which were meant for protection from the LRA atrocities. The inability or lack of capacity to protect the lives of the innocent children of Northern Uganda from being killed or abducted from within the IDP Camps, by the LRA rebels, gave wrong impression to the communities about the intention of commissioning the IDP Camps, as a mechanism for protection.

The third military attempt made by the Government of Uganda was, of course, Operation Iron Fist launched against the LRA bases in Southern Sudan in March, 2002. This attempt brought further escalation of the war or aggression to Sudan. The LRA rebels came back to Northern Uganda as a swarm of bees and further extended their unspeakable brutality to Teso sub-region in Eastern Uganda. The spread of the LRA rebel activities to Teso sub-region only resulted to further abductions of innocent children in Acholi, Lango, Madi, and Teso, sub-regions. The level of brutality inflicted upon the innocent people of Teso, by the LRA rebels, had resulted into creating bitter ethnic sentiments against the Acholi people of the Central Luo of Northern Uganda. The LRA rebellion was greatly politicized, especially in Teso sub-region. For example, one of the prominent politicians from Teso sub-region made a political statement that, 'If one finds an Acholi person in Teso sub-region, who is below 18 years, one has the right to kill him or her outright'. According to this prominent local politician in Teso sub-region, the LRA rebellion was, indeed, an Acholi rebellion.

This is simply because Joseph Kony is an Acholi. It is true Joseph Kony is an Acholi, but he is solely responsible for his own actions. To put the blame of Joseph Kony's brutality upon the people of Acholi of the Central Luo of Northern Uganda, is to miss the point. Acholi, as a people, cannot be blamed or condemned for the atrocities committed by Joseph Kony or even by the abducted children from Acholi community. Such children, in the first place, are the victims of circumstances of the LRA war of insurgency. This idea of Acholilization simply because Joseph Kony is an Acholi is a crime against humanity. Unfortunately, however, the GOU became reactive to the LRA escalating activities in other new affected areas, like, Teso sub-region. As a result, the GOU ordered the formation of local militias throughout all the LRA affected areas. In Teso sub-region there was the Arrows Brigade. In Lango sub-region the Amuga (Rhino) Group was formed. In Kitgum District the Frontier's Guards were formed. In Pader District, the Armed Guards were also formed, and all were to fight the LRA rebellion in their respective areas or sub-regions. As a result of this reactive policy, the entire people of Uganda witnessed the militarization of the whole regions of Acholi, Lango, Madi, and Teso, in

2003. However, it was only Gulu District Council that refused to form the local militia to be known as the Elephant Group. This is because the local militias usually do not have loyalty to other people of Uganda rather than to their own ethnic groups, like, Acholi or Lango or Madi or Teso. As predicted much earlier on, some of these local militias later turned the guns against their own people for personal interests or gains. This reactive approach only left all the peoples in the different sub-regions very much divided and bitter against each other.

8. AN INTERVENTION BY ARLPI, 2002/2003

After the launch of Operation Iron Fist against the LRA bases in South Sudan, in March, 2002, the LRA rebels came back to Northern Uganda, like swarm of bees, and committing atrocities throughout Acholi, Madi, and Lango, sub-regions. While in Northern Uganda, the LRA took the initiative to contact ARLPI and requested the ARLPI to play the role of a 'bridge' between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. This was a golden opportunity for the ARLPI to have an access to mediate between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. This was also the first time the LRA contacted the ARLPI since it left Northern Uganda for South Sudan in March, 1994. ARLPI took this golden opportunity and contacted the President of Uganda, His Excellency, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni about what had transpired between the LRA and the ARLPI. The President of Uganda gave ARLPI the green light to make contact with the LRA. Within ten days, the contact between the LRA and the ARLPI was established. The Government of Uganda gave instruction to the Security operatives in the Country not to interfere with the mediation process between the LRA and the Government of Uganda through ARLPI. Thus, ARLPI was very free to contact the LRA Second High Command from time to time to discuss the way forward for peaceful solution. However, ARLPI made it categorically clear to the LRA that minutes of its meetings with the LRA would be recorded and copies would be given both to the LRA and the President of Uganda.

The LRA Second High Command agreed with all these arrangements of being transparent to both sides. This transparent manner of dealing with such sensitive issues between the LRA and the Government of Uganda had cleared any suspicions and doubts that might have been harbouring in the minds of all those who were concerned on both sides. As a matter of fact, ARLPI had held more than twenty meetings with the LRA Second Command. All the minutes of those meetings were recorded and given to both the LRA and the President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, for their information and positive actions. This transparency gave the President of Uganda a lot of confidence and trust in the role of the ARLPI, as a bridge between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. As a result, the President was able to appoint the Presidential Peace Team (PPT) with the mandate to meet with the LRA Second High Command, in order to chart out the way forward for peaceful resolution. However, an incident one time

occurred that revealed that there was still high level of mistrust between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. The case in point is, there was a priest in Kitgum who was approached by a commander of the LRA to meet him in the bush, as usually permitted by the Government of Uganda. The priest concerned was sickly, and he wanted another priest from Gulu to accompany him into the bush to meet the LRA. The Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese was contacted and permission was granted for another priest to go with him into the bush. Then ARLPI immediately informed the all the organs of security and the Local leadership in Kitgum, like, the Army, the Police, The Resident District Commissioner (RDC), and the Chairman LC5, Kitgum Council. No doubt, permission was granted at all levels, and the two priests went into the bush to meet one of the LRA commanders. Unfortunately, however, the venue of their meeting was attacked after 15 minutes, by a military Unit at Pajimo Barracks in Kitgum District. The LRA commander escaped death narrowly and the two priests were almost killed in the attack. The LRA accused ARLPI for allowing itself to be used by the Government of Uganda, as a bait to kill the LRA rebels. This nasty incident occurred in August, 2002, and by October, 2002, the LRA and the UPDF both went on the offensive against each other until the end of December, 2002. The Peace mediation between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, by ARLPI, was derailed for months. Fortunately, the LRA came back to ARLPI at the end of December, 2002, and requested ARLPI to continue playing the role of a bridge between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. ARLPI gladly accepted to play the role of a bridge between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, as it used to do in the recent past. ARLPI immediately contacted the President of Uganda concerning the new development. The President gave his blessing for ARLPI to go ahead with the mediation peace process between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. After resumption of meetings with the LRA , by ARLPI, the President of Uganda was so convinced that he enlarged the number of the Presidential Peace Team (PPT) to include more Members of Parliament and Civil Society. The confidence and trust levels between the LRA and the Government of Uganda seemed to be healthy and good at the moment. As a result, all possible arrangements were made for the PPT to meet the Second High Commanders of the LRA at Koyo Lalogi, Lapul sub-county, Pajule, Pader District. This historic meeting between the LRA and the Government of Uganda was scheduled to take place on March 4, 2003, at Koyo Lagi around mid-day or noon. The cultural and religious leaders were all invited to come and witness this historic event between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. However, we were all taken by surprise to hear that the venue for the meeting with the LRA Second Higher Commanders at Koyo Lalogi was bombarded by the military unit at Pajule Barracks.

No doubt, this new development once more derailed the peace mediation between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, under the auspices of ARLPI. Once again the LRA accused ARLPI for allowing itself to be used by the Government of Uganda, as a bait in order to kill the LRA rebels. Once more both the LRA and the Government of Uganda went back on the

offensive against each other. This time the LRA rebel activities spread from Acholi, Madi, and Lango, sub-regions, to Teso sub-region in Eastern Uganda. The LRA continued to inflict heinous brutality upon the innocent people of Teso sub-region. Wanton killings, ambushes, and abductions of the innocent children went on unabated in Teso sub-region. The gravity of brutality inflicted upon the innocent people of Teso created bitter ethnic sentiments against the Acholi and Langi. Some local politicians thought that the LRA rebellion was an Acholi rebellion. This is simply because Joseph Kony is an Acholi and from Acholi sub-region. This bitter sentiment against the Acholi is quite in line with the proverb in the Bible 'The parents have eaten unripe grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'. (Ezekiel 18.1 -4) As long as the Lord lives, this proverb must not be repeated in Israel. 'Look, all life belongs to me, the father's life and the son's life, both alike belong to me. The one who has sinned is the one to die. The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of his father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son', declares the Lord. The Acholilization in this context is meant to demonize the innocent Acholi people, as a people for the sin committed by Joseph Kony. This is wrong and it is immoral in every respect.

9. BIGOMBE'S SECOND ATTEMPT TO END THE WAR, 2004

After LRA and the UPDF went on the offensive against each other, ARLPI did not give up, but came out with a proposal for a 'Third Party Principal Mediator' to be submitted to both the Government of Uganda and the LRA for their consideration. ARLPI proposed the names of Hon. Betty Bigombe former Minister for Pacification in the North resident in Gulu, Gracious Marchele Mandela of South Africa, Professor Washington Okumu Jalango of Kenya, and Saint Egidio of Rome, as the Third Party Principal Mediator, between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. However, Gracious Marchele Mandela of South Africa did not respond to the ARLPI's proposal. Saint Egidio of Rome responded immediately, and used to frequently visit both Kampala and Khartoum for consultations with the Government of Uganda as well as the Khartoum Government. Professor Washington Okumu Jalango of Kenya responded and he was accepted by the Government of Uganda to become a third party principal mediator between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. However, Professor Okumu was not accepted by the LRA because someone who was coordinating the ARLPI with the LRA was not genuine and sincere. Hon. Betty Bigombe was unanimously accepted by both the Government of Uganda and the LRA, as the third party principal mediator between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Within 47 days only, Hon. Betty Bigombe successfully succeeded in bringing the two warring factions to meet face to face with each other for the first time, in the history of the war of insurgency.

The Government of Uganda was officially represented by none other than Dr. Ruhukana Rugunda, the Minister for Internal Affairs. On the other hand, the LRA was officially represented by Brigadier Sam Kolo. Surprisingly, when the two representatives of the Government of Uganda and of the LRA met each other face to face, for the first time, they did not see in the face of each other, the face of an enemy. Instead, both Rugunda and Kolo saw in the face of each other, the face of a Ugandan and, indeed, the face of a human being, made in the image of God. The two representatives embraced each other very warmly, as if, there was no enmity between the two warring factions (LRA and the GOU). No doubt, this historic event was greeted with a lot of enthusiasm and relief from the entire Acholi community. This historic event took place on December 29, 2004, in the jungle of Paluda (Tim Paluda) in Palabek, Kitgum District. On December 31, 2004, the cultural and religious leaders, elders, civil society, and political leaders, were all invited to witness the signing of the peace agreement between the LRA and the Government of Uganda in the jungle of Paluda. The signing ceremony was to take place on a Sunday, December 31, 2004. The children, women, and men, all lined up along the Gulu/Kitgum road from morning up to mid-night singing and dancing and praising the peacemakers, who went to witness the signing ceremony of the peace between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Unfortunately, the signing ceremony did not take place simply because the Government of Uganda wanted the LRA delegation, led by Brigadier Sam Kolo to sign a document known as the 'Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which the LRA delegation had not yet seen. The LRA pleaded with the GOU to give its delegation three days at least to study the new document called MOU before it could respond to it. Unfortunately, the GOU took offense against the LRA delegation, led by Brigadier Sam Kolo, and attacked the position of the LRA rebels who wanted to come out of the LRA rebellion, instead of the position of Vincent Otti and Joseph Kony who were not part of the negotiation in the jungle of Paluda, in Palabek, Kitgum District. This new development, once again, derailed the peace process between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Consequently, the two warring factions went on the offensive against each other again. Clouds of gloom, sadness, and disappointment, covered the whole sky of Northern Uganda that Sunday night. Everybody who were lining up along the Gulu/Kitgum road waiting for the peacemakers from the signing ceremony of the peace between the LRA and the Government of Uganda were all silent and disappointed. Nevertheless, ARLPI never lost hope in the Living God with whom nothing is impossible. However, Hon. Betty Bigombe was extremely disappointed by the Government of Uganda for its deliberate failure to recognize her great achievement in the peace process. As a matter of fact, Hon. Betty Bigombe deserves an international recognition for her tireless efforts and great achievement in peace process in Northern Uganda.

10. THE JUBA PEACE TALKS

When Hon. Betty Bigombe was robbed of her great achievement, for the second time, in trying to bring to an end the LRA war of insurgency, all hopes to end the war by peaceful means were almost lost.

However, hopes were restored by the intervention of the Government of South Sudan, when the President, Mr. Sal Vakir and the Vice President Dr. Riek Machar, of the Government of South Sudan, took the initiative to come to Kampala for consultative meeting with the President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. The President of South Sudan told his counterpart, the President of Uganda that the LRA was a thorn in the foot of South Sudan as much as it was a thorn in the foot of Uganda. President Sal Vakir, therefore, urged President Museveni of Uganda to condescend sitting at the negotiated table together with the LRA. The President of Uganda condescendingly accepted a peaceful settlement with the LRA through peaceful dialogue. As a matter of fact, the Government of South Sudan played a very significant role to bring about the Juba Peace Talks between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. The Juba Peace Talks in the Capital City of South Sudan between the LRA and the Government of Uganda began in earnest on July 15, 2006. However, there were still high levels of mistrust and lack of confidence between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. By the end of December, 2006, the Juba Peace Talks had almost come to a stop still. The LRA accused the Government of Uganda of the breach of the Juba Agreement on 'Cessation of Hostilities' from Agenda Item One of the Juba Peace Talks. The LRA delegation, led by Mr. Martin Ojul wanted to walk out of the Juba Peace Talks, with the possibility to resume hostilities against the UPDF immediately. However, the Paramount Chief of Acholi Ker Kal Kwaro, Rwot David Onen Acana II, intervened by holding a 'Consultative Meeting' with both the warring factions in the presence of both the Chief Mediator, Dr. Riek Machar, the Vice President of the Government of South Sudan, and the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the LRA war-affected areas, Dr. Chissano Joachim, the former President of Mozambique. This providential intervention by Rwot David Onen Acana II of Acholi Ker Kal Kwaro, actually saved the situation. Once again, the Juba Peace Talks resumed still under the auspices of the Chief Mediator, Dr. Riek Machar, the Vice President of South Sudan, The Juba Peace Process went on very well until the end of December, 2007, and most of the Agenda Items were duly discussed and agreed upon. The LRA delegation in the Juba Peace Talks, led by Mr. Martin Ojul, used to brief the LRA top leadership about the progress of the Juba Peace Talks on weekly basis. In November/December, 2007, the LRA delegation was granted formal permission by the Government of Uganda to come home for 'Consultative Meetings' with the civil society throughout the Country. These consultative meetings were successfully held with the different civil society in Central Region, Western Region, Eastern Region, and Northern Region. The LRA delegation received a consensus response from the different civil society throughout Uganda that there must be a peaceful

settlement between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, as an appropriate mechanism to bring an end to the LRA war of insurgency. However, there was already internal conflict within the LRA leadership, especially with its delegation in the Juba Peace Talks. For example, while the LRA delegation was carrying out consultative meetings in Uganda, it was rumoured that the Deputy Chairman of the LRA, Vincent Otti had been murdered allegedly by the Chairman of the LRA, Mr. Joseph Kony himself. Unfortunately, Members of the LRA delegation who were physically present in Uganda, deliberately refused to inform the civil society about the truth or the false of the allegation. It was also rumoured that some of the members of the LRA delegation were involved in money deal with the Government of Uganda, and Vincent Otti was inclusive. It was also alleged that the meeting between the LRA delegation and the Government of Uganda was held in Mombasa, Kenya, and good sum of money was given to Vincent Otti through the LRA delegation.

As soon as the LRA delegation went back from the consultative meetings in Uganda and reported to the LRA top leadership, the Head of the LRA delegation in the Juba Peace Talks, Mr. Martin Ojul was summarily and unceremoniously dismissed by Joseph Kony. He was replaced by Dr. David Massanga Nyekorac, as the new Head of the LRA delegation in the Juba Peace Talks. Dr. David Massanga Nyekorac, the new Head of the LRA delegation in the Juba Peace Talks took his responsibility with much vigour and enthusiasm. The Juba Peace Talks were immediately resumed in Juba the capital city of South Sudan, under the auspices of the Chief Mediator, Dr. Riek Machar, and Vice President of South Sudan. Surprisingly, both the cultural and religious leaders from Northern, who were previously in the Juba Peace Talks, as Peace Observers and Consultants, were not invited until all the Agenda Items in the Juba Peace Talks were hurriedly discussed and duly signed into Agreements by both parties involved, and witnessed by Chief Mediator, Dr. Riek Machar, and all members of the 'Mediation Team' for peace from AU countries, namely, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan, and Uganda. However, Joseph Kony was, once more, not happy and in good terms with the LRA delegation in the Juba Peace Talks, led by Dr. David Massanga Nyekorac. At this point, the levels of mistrust and lack of confidence between the LRA top leadership and its delegation in the Juba Peace Talks were very high. As a result, Joseph Kony did not show up at Rikwamba where the signing ceremony was due to take place on April 10, 2008. This was a protest and rejection of the highest order from the LRA top leadership against its delegation in the Juba Peace Talks. Dr. David Massanga Nyekorac, was definitely disappointed beyond all measures. He resigned his position, as the Head of the LRA delegation in the Juba Peace Talks, on that same day, April 10, 2008. Dr. David Massanga Nyekorac, was hurriedly replaced by Dr. James Obitta, as the new Head of the LRA delegation in the Juba Peace Talks. It was, indeed, a turbulent situation within the LRA leadership. This high level of mistrust and lack of confidence between the LRA top leadership and its delegation was one of the 'push factors' that was radically leading the LRA, as organization, into disintegration. On

May 10, 2008, Joseph Kony cut off communication with Dr. Obitta and later dismissed him, as Head of the LRA delegation in the Juba Peace Talks. The reason why Joseph Kony refused to sign the FPA is because his question concerning the ICC was not answered either by the LRA delegation or the elders or civil society or the political leaders or the cultural and religious leaders, in Uganda. The question was, 'What is the meaning of reconciliation or mato oput in its relations to the ICC and Special Division of the High Court in Uganda?' According to the Agenda Item number Three on 'Accountability and Reconciliation Agreement' both the Government of Uganda have committed themselves fully to go through the process of truth-telling. In the truth-telling process, there were no denials, no lies, and no deceptions, under all circumstances. Joseph Kony, therefore, chose to continue with the LRA rebellion for survival purposes rather than for political agenda.

At this juncture, let me pay special and glorious tribute to Dr. Riek Machar, the Chief Mediator of the Juba Peace Talks between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, for the significant role he played with distinction. Dr. Riek Machar is, indeed, a pacifist at the level of Mahatma Ghandi of India, Dr. Luther King Jr, Mother Teresa of Culcutta, and Nelson Mandela of South Africa, who is now the icon of the world. Dr. Riek Machar demonstrated a high degree of patience and wisdom of listening when the Juba Peace process hit a stalemate on April 10, 2008.

On May 10, 2008, Dr. Riek Machar together with the cultural, religious elders, and political leaders, patiently remained in Garama for almost two weeks with the intention to re-establish the communication contact with the LRA top leadership. Dr. Riek Machar continued to make several attempts in order to save the Juba Peace process. The last attempt was an International Peace Forum held in Bunyonyo Resort in Kampala in August, 2008. It was resolved that all possible efforts must be made to convince Joseph Kony to sign the FPA by November, 2008. The cultural and religious leaders from Uganda were able to meet Joseph Kony towards the end of November, 2008. Kony told them point blank that so long as the ICC Indictment is still left hanging over their heads, they will never sign the FPA, as demanded by the international community. However, Dr Riek Machar, in his capacity, as the Chief Mediator of the Juba Peace Talks, highly recommended a 'peaceful settlement' between the LRA and the Government of Uganda, as the most appropriate mechanism to bring an end to the LRA war of insurgency in Northern Uganda. No doubt, this recommendation for peaceful settlement, as conflict resolution for the situation of Northern Uganda revealed the characteristics of Dr. Riek Machar as a man of peace indeed. As a spiritual leader, I highly recommend Dr. Riek Machar for international Peace Award to be granted him for the utmost role he played in the Juba Peace Process. The negative peace which is currently being enjoyed throughout Northern and North-eastern Uganda is the result of the Juba Peace Talks. Thus, the biggest credit goes to Dr. Riek

Machar because of his patience and wisdom of listening to the other side of the coin, for the sake of peace for all. Long live, Dr. Riek Machar!

The fourth military attempt was called Operation Return (Operation Rudia 1) that was launched in September 2008. This Operation Rudia 1 was an attempt to force the LRA rebels to abandon their rebellion and surrender to the UPDF. Unfortunately this military attempt was also a failure.

The fifth military attempt was called Operation Lightning Thunder that was launched on December 14, 2008. This was a major military Operation that was launched against the LRA bases in Rikwamba in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) following the failure of the Juba Peace Talks in April, 2008. The cultural and religious leaders, the elders, the civil society, and the political leaders, in Uganda, made several attempts to save the Juba Peace Process, but all in vain. On April 10, 2008, the day appointed for the signing of the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, did not show up. Dr. Chissano Joaschim the former President of Mozambique, the UN Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General, for the LRA war-affected areas, was physically present there with Dr. Riek Machar, the Vice President of South Sudan, and the Chief Mediator for the Juba Peace Talks. The African Union countries' representatives in the Juba Peace Talks, as Peace Observers, were all present. These representatives were from Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Zambia, South Sudan, and Uganda. The Government of Uganda was officially represented by its delegation headed by none other than Dr. Ruhukana Rugunda, the Minister of Internal Affairs. The LRA was also officially represented by its delegation headed by Dr. David Massanga Nyekorac. International, regional, and national, medias houses, were all present for the coverage of the FPA ceremony at Rikwamba. However, the failure of the LRA leader, Joseph Kony, to appear at signing ceremony of the FPA, was, indeed, an embarrassment to everybody, especially to the Government of Uganda. It was this frustration due to the failure of the LRA to sign the FPA on April 10, 2008, that compelled the Government of Uganda to launch 'Operation Lightning Thunder' against the LRA on December 14, 2008.

It was this Operation Lightning Thunder that made the whole world to witness the transfer of of the problem of the LRA from Northern and North-eastern Uganda to new areas, namely, South Sudn, Democratic Republic of Congo (drc) and Central African Republic (CAR). It brought antagonism between the LRA and all the LRA war-affected areas in the three countries already mentioned above. What used to happen to the people of Northern Uganda is now happening to the peoples of DR Congo, South Sudan, and CAR, especially in Ddungu and Wele, Western Equatorial State, and Boo, respectively.

The sixth military attempt was called Operation Rudia II, was launched in March 2009. The last three military operations were specifically launched, as a mechanism, to put an end to the LRA

war of insurgency. Consequently the whole world stands a witness to see the transfer of the LRA problem from Northern Uganda, to newly LRA war-affected areas, namely, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan, especially Ddungu and Wele state, Western Equatorial State, and Boo, respectively. It brought antagonism between the LRA and the populations in all the LRA war-affected areas. The LRA still continues to inflict brutality upon the peoples of the DRC, CAR, and South Sudan, a new Country to be born in July, 2011, especially in Western Equatorial State. To put it in a nutshell, all the subsequent military attempts used, as appropriate mechanisms, to put an end to the LRA war of insurgency, all failed very miserably.

11. THE CONTEMPORARY DYNAMICS OF THE LRA CONFLICT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT) has aggravated the gravity of the LRA atrocities inflicted upon the peoples of DRC, CAR, and South Sudan, especially in Western Equatorial State. The people in the three Countries, namely, DR Congo, Central African Republic, and South Sudan, especially Western Equatorial State, are very bitter against the LRA because of its brutality on the civilian populations. The hostile attitude towards the LRA due to its brutality upon the peoples in the three Countries has become a major pull factor that prevented the LRA rebels to come out of rebellion through the communities in those Countries. Another pull factor is the desire for continuing committing atrocities for survival purposes only. The spirituality of the LRA war is another pull factor for the abducted children based on fears and beliefs that ultimately control their daily life. Human perception gives birth to belief, and belief to value, and value to attitude, and attitude to action. Human action, therefore, protects human perception, belief, value, and attitude at all costs. In this context, the LRA perception gives birth to its belief and its belief creates fear that controls it ultimately. That is why most of the abducted children, if not all, firmly believe that Joseph Kony or Alice Auma Lakwena, the leader of the Holy Spirit Movement, had supernatural power. Even one of the Cabinet Ministers of the Government of Uganda believes that the UPDF cannot win the war simply because Joseph Kony has supernatural power. This means that, if human perception, belief, value, attitude, and action, do not come from the Ultimate, who is God, they merely remain human perception, belief, value, attitude, and action. That is why the LRA spirituality is completely void of divine power in every respect. The truth of the matter is, both the UPDF and the LRA have the power of the gun and human courage to use it rightly or wrongly, as it is the case with the LRA in the DR Congo, Central African Republic, and in Western Equatorial State in South Sudan. The ICC Indictment which is still hanging over the heads of the LRA top leaders is another pull factor that is threatening and preventing the LRA rebels from coming back home. All these pull factors are a double jeopardy to the LRA high commanders who are still in the LRA captivity. On the other hand, the major push factor for the LRA rebels is personal security, which could easily lead to escape or defection from the LRA rebellion. The contemporary dynamics of the LRA are

its zeal to continue committing incredible atrocities upon the innocent peoples in the DR Congo, Central African Republic, and in South Sudan, especially Western Equatorial State. These reprisal attacks on foreign nationalities in their own Countries are very much counter-productive.

Thus, there is a strong feeling of Acholilization or Ugandanization, especially in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan, simply because Joseph Kony is an Acholi or Kony is a Ugandan. Acholilization, therefore, means the LRA rebellion is Acholi rebellion. In this context, any crimes committed by Joseph Kony are considered to be committed by Acholi, as a people. If the LRA does not stop committing atrocities on foreign nationalities in their own Countries, there will soon be retaliation against the people of Acholi of the Central Luo of Northern Uganda simply because Joseph Kony is an Acholi. The same reprisal attacks on the people of Uganda will be carried out simply because Joseph Kony is a Ugandan by birth and descent. No doubt, this is a dangerous new development in the LRA contemporary dynamics in the three Countries affected by the LRA atrocities and brutalities, and Uganda inclusive.

In this context, Acholilization, therefore, is meant to demonize the entire Acholi community and Ugandans at large because of the heinous atrocities being inflicted upon the innocent peoples of the DRC, CAR, and SS, at the moment. The implications of the contemporary dynamics in the three LRA war-affected Countries are lack of advocacy efforts in involving the United Nations, the UN Security Council, the European Union, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and France governments. The issues of civilian protection and return of the formerly abducted children from LRA captivity are of paramount importance.

12. CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, the credit goes to the cultural and religious leaders for their consistency, transparency, and honesty, for love of peace and stability for all Ugandans. A special tribute also goes to Radio Mega FM 102, Gulu, for helping the LRA to understand that the Government of Uganda does not kill anybody who comes back home from the LRA captivity or rebellion. For this reason, the religious leaders in Acholi sub-region give special credit and thanks to the President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, for high respect for human life and human dignity of these abducted children who have come back from the LRA captivity alive. No doubt, Radio Mega FM 102, has achieved its ultimate goal to appeal to the sentiments of the Abducted children that ultimately touched their human hearts to come back home alive.

I say all this for God and for our beloved Country, Uganda!

Rt. Rev. Macleord Baker Ochola II

Retired Anglican Bishop of Kitgum Diocese

