



JUSTICE AND PEACE NEWS

Newsletter of the Justice and Peace Commission of Archdiocese of Gulu - "If you want peace, work for Justice"

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Peace talks not dead

"There is a lack of effective communication, and that is what the LRA leader wants. There are people who are assisting in establishing that effective communication, and once that clarification is made the peace process will be back on the road," Joaquim Chissano said.

Joseph Kony, (above) had been expected to sign a final agreement in Ri-Kwangba in April 10th. He failed to show up.

An LRA spokesman said Kony remains ready to sign, but wants guarantees of his safety.

Northern Situation now

The communities in northern Uganda have smelt what peace is like after over 20 years of living in IDP camps. Many people have been able to get back to what used to be home. Some were able to trace the ruins of their huts. Others were able to trace the graves of the departed. Even if the 'home' they had been longing for is now nothing other than the relics of the sweet heydays, it is never the less the feeling, not what is left that matter.

This unprecedented opportunity began way back in 2006 with the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement between the government of Uganda and the LRA that saw the bulk of the rebel force retreat to their hideout in Graramba. But as the year 2007 was winding down, and with the January 31st 2008 deadline set by the Uganda Government and its neighbour in whose soil the LRA are domiciled fast approaching, the communities was increasingly growing uneasy with the thought of a possible resumption of war, that would visit on them another wave of suffering.

These fears have passed. Another uncertainty has come again. "Will Joseph Kony sign the final peace agreement?" He has not done so in the first two dates set by his negotiating team and the government of Uganda.

This scepticism is hampering the return process. Many community members constructed their huts at their original homes or transit sites with close proximity to home but continued to maintain contact with the camps, just in case there would be need to run back. Some people kept part of the family in the camps, while others simply didn't go away.

According to the latest Northern Uganda Humanitarian Situation Report, 659,459 IDPs are still in camps. Another 407,155 are still in transit sites. Most of these people say it is a matter of prudence that they do not get back to their original villages as of now, because the prolonged lull in the LRA activities is not yet peace. But others think many people are getting addicted to the camp life where they get aid from humanitarian agencies.

The communities, having lived in camps for internally displaced persons for over two decades, have lost touch with their roots and traditional ways of organization, and are totally lacking any sense of their societal values, duties, obligations and a sense of responsibility towards self, one another and the state.

But the communities still continue to face a number of challenges, even when the end to the northern war is nigh. Respect for human rights still remains of concern.

At the height of the mass displacement, many humanitarian agencies established themselves to provide interventions to human rights issues, but much of the efforts were centered on the systematic violations and abuses perpetrated by the parties to the armed conflict against the civilians, leaving civilian to civilian abuses relatively unaddressed. Emphasis had been on civil and political rights such as the right to life, freedom of movement, freedom from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment and such other rights contained in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the Ugandan 1995 progressive Constitution.

Economic, social and cultural rights, perhaps due to the enormity of the problems facing the people, were not being given adequate attention, yet the ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his civil and political rights, as well as his social, economic and cultural rights. Both rights cannot be exercised in isolation, because without civil and political rights the communities cannot assert their economic, social and cultural rights and similarly, without livelihoods, the communities cannot make use of civil and political rights.

Besides, the communities in Acholi are lacking a functionally robust police and legal protection that had traditionally reinforced the indigenous cultural value systems upheld by elders. The official law enforcement system has been rendered ineffective alongside many other public services once provided by the now over stretched local governments. As a result, corruption and abuse of office in the local authorities have become more common, making many community members consider the authorities more of a threat than a source of protection.

The local police do not get adequate facilitation in terms of budgetary allocation to enable them arraign suspects in court to be charged within the mandatory 48 hours, as the sub-county Magistrate's Courts that sought to bring justice closer to the people have since collapsed. Additionally, the police seem to have smuggled an illegal interpretation to Article 23(4)(b) of the Constitution so as to exclude weekends from the computation of the 48 hours.

More so, when cases of abuses of human

rights are reported to the police, before they take action, they demand from the desperate victims 'transport' in monetary terms, and failure to comply will mean no action taken against the perpetrators. Further, in the sub-counties, police bond, which is legally not meant to be paid for, is a luxury that can only be procured at a cost many locals cannot afford. These practices are not peculiar to only the sub-county police, because often complaints also arise from the Central Police station as well.

Ignorance or disregard of key constituents of human rights by law enforcement agencies and the public themselves, who aid and abet abuses either actively or by being passive, remain a big challenge to human rights actors.

An indicator of this is the manner in which crime suspects are treated by the authorities in their localities. In almost every village where we have had sensitisation and discussion with the communities on human rights, there were reports that LCs still order for the torture of suspects to extract confessions or hand down corporal punishments when our laws banned the practice. In some cases this has resulted into fatalities. In one incident at Paloga Camp, a man suspected to have stolen 22 bags of cement from a construction site where he worked as a labourer, but was denying the allegation, was tortured into a comma on the orders and in the presence of the LCI.

The following day, he disappeared and is presumed dead. In another case in Okidi camp, Amida Sub-county, four women suspected of involvement in sorcery were put to trial by the community, mobilised by the LCs. The members of the community cast a ballot to determine their guilt and thereafter brutally lynched and burnt their lifeless bodies beyond recognition.

Child protection still remains a formidable challenge to the communities, and the authorities as well. Defilement and other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, despite massive campaign against, continue to be rampant. Even when the penal laws explicitly prohibit and make deterrent sanctions against the perpetrators of such acts, many more children remain increasingly exposed to these acts. Many reports from the communities indicate that whenever incidences of abuses such as defilement occur and are brought to the notice of the parents and care givers of the victim children, most of them opt to settle the matter through monetary compensation, leaving the perpetrators go untouched.

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Situation in the north

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In other words, parents and care givers, due to abject poverty and under the guise of culture, covertly trade the rights of their children for monetary gains. There has been debate regarding the need to enact a legislation criminalising such practice, but to date it is yet unclear whether it will be passed into law soon.

Child labour, in all its various forms, continues to be a common occurrence, with countless children struggling alongside their parents to make ends meet. In fact, as many of our Paralegals attested, parents seem to be directing much of their attention to drinking and substance abuse, leaving their children of tender age to fend for themselves. Such parents load their children with work that is way beyond their capacity that may pose a grave danger to their physical and psychological development. The work that they are made to do also exposes them to various risks relating to their health and safety.

Concern for the protection of the very vulnerable, such as the handicapped, is still very inadequate. Most times they are openly discriminated against on account of their disability. They are often times separated from the others, making them feel dejected and anguished.

Also, considerable proportions of the formerly abducted reportedly complain of various forms of discrimination from the public due to the fact that they were in the captivity of the LRA. They experience name calling by their peers, suffer from trauma and feel isolated in the communities. Some are reported to have found it very difficult to adjust to the life in the communities and instead chose to return to the bush. Others have suffered great depression and committed suicide.

Further, as the peace process continues in Juba, Land rights remain improperly understood and is responsible for numerous inter-community conflicts as people resettle in their homes. In particular, those members of the community who lack knowledge about their land rights are being manipulated by those who may take advantage of their ignorance. This can perhaps explain the hyper sensitivity of the local population on any matter relating to land.

Every attempt that may threaten their land, even if meant for their own good, is often viewed with suspicion. Ordinarily, we can observe that due to building community tensions, concerns over land are undeniably of

greatest interest and has been responsible for a number of community conflicts, including some cases of fatalities. Having spent over 20 years in the camps, homes have become bushes and common land boundary features like footpaths, trees, ant hills, streams etc have disappeared.

The eventual return of the various communities will entail re-establishment of boundaries, and ascertainment of rights of access to land, against the backdrop of a disjointed custom destroyed by the camp life and exacerbated by poverty, bitterness, vengeance, charged emotions, violence and destructive perceptions that have accumulated over a long period of time.

The problem of domestic violence, too, still persists almost everywhere. Physical violence has become a routine response to domestic conflicts. Patterns of behaviour has generally been characterised by misuse of control by often men as heads of the family, and violence originating from the presumed position of power by men over women.

All these resulting into physical and psychological abuses, including intimidation, harassment, assault, damage to property, threats, and financial abuse among others. Economic abuse, where the male spouse has control over the family's resources, and has discretion over its use, is commonplace. In many interviews with victims of domestic violence, especially women, it was repeatedly asserted that male spouses sought to control economic resources even when they did not work for, and resistance to such control precipitates into violence.

Because the majority of the women are dependant on their spouses for economic wellbeing and have children to take care of, it increases the burden on them should they chose to separate from an abusive partner, leaving them with fewer options and few resources to help them cope with or change the abusive situation. Dealing with domestic violence is made difficult by the amount of silence, fear and shame that results from it within the families and relationships, and its apparent contrast with the Acholi culture. Most advocacy efforts by many agencies witnessed so far has tended to put popular emphasis on women and children as victims of domestic violence.

While it is generally believed that most documented cases involve men as perpetrators, we should acknowledge that men, too, suffer from abuses in various forms, but only find it difficult to speak out. Even to the

women, abusive patterns of behaviour tend to seem normal having lived in them for a length of time. Law enforcement responses to domestic violence has been lacklustre, because it has historically been considered as private family matters that need not involve any external intervention.

The police has been said to show reluctance to intervene by making arrests, often choosing to instead simply counsel the couple. Much focus has been on the consequences of domestic violence, without exploring the underlying causes.

With increased advocacy for the rights of women and children, the communities have found that these concepts conflict with culture and indeed threaten their survival. Men have particularly felt that their input in their long held tradition of shaping the future of their families have been ignored, and many have made no effort to hide their anger against any attempts to make their spouses assert themselves as equals.

The Acholi culture continues to radiate men's supremacy, bestowing upon them automatic headship of the family. The culture assigns clear roles and duties of men, women and children that determine the rights and entitlements of each. Property rights, such as inheritance and access to land, that at present stands as the principal resource of the Acholi still continue to be determined by gender. The cultural notion of women and children include a sense of loyalty and foregoing personal freedoms for the sake of social stability.

Feedback from the communities as a result of our earlier engagement in human rights education and advocacy indicate that selective human rights education targeting women and children, without involving the men who are key players in human rights issues, may translate into, or even be used to justify, more domestic violence as a response to the women's and children's demands brought about by the awareness created.

Any sensitization, information and education on human rights must therefore be all-inclusive, avoiding as much as possible any tendency to appear as if to render the men less powerful in the family. Human rights education should also be accompanied by an elaborate examination of the roles, responsibilities and obligations of every human being toward self and one another, so that excesses of these rights that could easily provoke a violent response are limited.

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Current north situation

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An appropriate approach should aim at transforming the communities towards a rights culture so that they begin to appreciate the benefits of respecting and upholding human rights values, see any form of violations and/ or abuses as evil and should willingly work toward eliminating such abuses and stand up to denounce any form of abuses that they can identify.

This will require concerted efforts to provide information and education to the masses regarding human rights, their duties, roles, responsibilities and obligations, as well as showing them where they can get help in case their rights have been violated and / or abused.

This should also draw people back to following the due processes of the law, and not to consider mob violence / justice as any viable alternative or substitute to the established procedures of handling crimes and suspects contained in our laws.

A crucial issue that must be explained properly when disseminating information about human rights and their enjoyment is the fact that these rights, although guaranteed in the Constitution, are not necessarily without limits. There may be limitations though this must be only under narrow circumstances where it does not go beyond what is acceptable and demonstrably justifiable in a free and democratic society.

Whereas the prolonged lull in the conflict

may not lead to an eventual era of peace and tranquillity without a comprehensive peace agreement, it has had the desirable effect of reducing incentives to commit atrocities and cover up human rights abuses and violations for security and other reasons. At the same time, access to the masses by humanitarian agencies is unhindered, easing the potential for effective delivery of information and education on human rights.

The JPC's efforts in the year 2008 shall aim at contributing to an emerging culture that is conscious of upholding the core values of basic human rights. There are increasing demands from the public for more accountability by the government and its agencies. Members of the communities can now stand up to challenge the actions of their leaders as well as fellow community members that infringe on their rights.

Community members too are no longer very passive about human rights abuses and violations that take place amidst them. The challenge, though, is now to broaden the scope, coverage and impact of human rights education in the fluid context of return and resettlement.

The JPC shall continue to provide a balanced human rights education to the masses to inform their attitudes and largely determine the manner in which they settle conflicts and maintain relationships. Knowledge of human rights, however basic, will enable the communities to identify, promote, protect and uphold its values, standing up to condemn any infringements.

When the communities are well sensitised to understand the different roles of men and women clearly, with each working to complement each other in the family instead of relating in an adversarial manner, domestic violence will be greatly reduced.

Knowledge of key human rights principles will also enable the communities contribute to policing themselves, aiding the work of law enforcement. More so, promotion of human rights values and incorporating the concepts in our culture contributes to making families and communities live in peace and harmony, mindful of the legitimate aspirations of the other, and resolving conflicts in ways that will maintain healthy relationships and harmonious coexistence. This will no doubt increase the potential for bringing lasting peace in Kitgum District and in northern Uganda at large.

A thorough understanding of the dominant landholding obtaining in Acholiland and contextually relevant provisions of land legislation and policies will narrow the space for land disputes while at the same time make it easy to resolve those that may arise.

The JPC shall also prepare the communities for the reconciliation and reintegration of returnees into the communities to help speed up the healing process and can contribute to building a culture of forgiveness and peace. This will minimise the potential for revenge and discrimination against returnees.



President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace at the Vatican, His Eminence Renato Cardinal Martino Raffaeli visited IDP camp in Pagak in August 6th, 2007.

He promised support for the health centre in the camp.

Suspected soldiers burry old man alive

A SEVENTY-YEAR old man was on Good Friday found buried alive with only his head sticking out of the ground at Lapono Pa-bali village in Anaka sub county, Amuru district.

The LCIII chairman of Anaka, Mr. Denis Okema told the press that Mze Ojera Lawoko was buried by men who were dressed in military uniform similar to that of the Uganda People's Defense Forces (UPDF).

"He was buried by soldiers because they were putting on military uniform. Only his head remained sticking out of the ground." Okema told the press.

Okema said he reported the incidents to the UPDF detach at the sub county headquarters and they promised to investigate its authenticity.

However, the 4th Division UPDF spokesman, Capt. Ronald Kakurungu told this writer that Mze Lawoko's attackers are not UPDF soldiers. He said the attackers could be thugs, commonly referred to as Boo-kech.

"We have made inquiries and established that our soldiers were not involved. They could be thugs whom we are also looking for." He added.

Okema said the old man had just returned from an Internally Displaced Person's camp to resettle in his remote village when the incident happened.

He said Mze Lawoko yelled for help for over three hours before other villagers came and rescued him.

He said the incident is likely to force several people to flee back to the main camp at Anaka sub county headquarters from their villages.



Soldiers puting in army uniform like the one seen above were suspected to have been the one who burried alive a 70-year-old Denis Lawoko of Lapono Pa-Bali village in Anaka recently.

This is a human rights vialation by the 'Poeple's Army' that is supposed to protect wanandinzi's lives and property.

EDITORIAL

Peace talks
still possible

Joseph Kony delayed signing a Final Peace Deal.

This development presents a setback to the negotiations process. But caution and creativity on the part of negotiators and mediators can still encourage Kony to sign the agreement.

If the LRA leader ultimately discontinues his engagement of the process, the Government of Uganda, with the support of its international partners, should act unilaterally to implement key components of the Final Peace Agreement (FPA), a move that would sustain the progress toward peace made during the past two years.

It seems likely that Kony was apprehensive about signing an agreement without clearer guarantees for his own personal security. International involvement in this particular area needed.

Uncertain delay in Juba peace Process

The much anticipated peace deal between the government of Uganda and the rebel Lords Resistance Army has yielded nothing but uncertainty after over two years of painful efforts in Juba, Southern Sudan. The people of northern Uganda were disillusioned. Fear is beginning to creep back into their hearts. The hope of a total return of peace and tranquillity is stealthily beginning to wane. With military jets doing airspace drills over Gulu just days after the peace flop, many people cannot deny the fact they are shrouded in a thick mist of uncertainty.

Their hopes have now been replaced by a mere anxiety! Peace was so near and yet it now seems so far. There is an aura of near frustration at what happened on 10th of April 2008. To understand the people's reaction, we need to put the peace process into perspective.

At the beginning of the talks, no one considered the rebels serious enough to want to end the war through a peaceful settlement. The rebels had said similar things before, and failed to live up to their word. Although the government has also been blamed for some outburst. The leader, Kony, is particularly known for being uncertain.

In previous attempts, the most notable being that initiated by Ms Betty Bigombe in 1994, Kony agreed to negotiate with the government. He asked for a general amnesty for his fighters and categorically stated that they would not surrender but simply 'return home.' He asked for six months to enable his fighters to regroup. The government's stance was, however, that Kony was not showing any plausible commitment but was simply buying time.

In February 1994, the LRA broke off negotiations, charging that the government's intention was to entrap them and then claim victory over

them. The rebels then sought sanctuary in the Sudan from where they got military and other support. The government however, came out with some datelines which by then was uncalled for.

A series of other initiatives were made to have the LRA come to the negotiating table, but every such gesture had the involvement of mainly lower ranking officers of the LRA that did not have the clout to direct the course of events in their camp.

The Juba Peace Talks, which began in around July 2006, resulting into a ceasefire agreement by August, was looked at as the most serious since the failed 1994 initiative of Ms Betty Bigombe.

The LRA began making contact with the people through radio Mega, and many fighters who were strewn across the bushes of northern and north eastern Uganda moved to their designated assembly points of Ri Kwangba and Owiny ki Bul, meeting and interacting freely with the civilians on their way. This was the time the local population began to get the feeling that the LRA meant business this time.

From the beginning of 2007, thousands of people began to move into decongestion camps, and by mid 2007 many had moved to areas with close proximity to their ancestral homes, to their actual homes.

The progress of the talks were marked with deadlines, accusations, counter accusations and walkouts over issues such as lack of commitment and the ICC indictment of top commanders including Kony himself.

Right from the onset, Kony made it clear that he would not sign any peace agreement and disarm without a guarantee of immunity from prosecution, entailing lifting of the ICC indictments and arrest warrants

issued against him and four of his top commanders.

The government on the other hand maintained that the ICC indictments can only be lifted after the conclusion of the peace talks and signing of the comprehensive peace agreement. This raised the first concern that the peace talks may not bear fruits. The talks continued to be punctuated by demands, counter demands and walkouts, but it proceeded anyway with agreements reached in key items on the agenda.

Contentious issues, such as the withdrawal of the ICC indictments, needed the input of the people who have long suffered the brunt of this insurgency, and as such the delegations made consultations with the affected people. The LRA team led by Martin Ojul toured northern Uganda, met with the victims and asked them to forgive the LRA. During the tour there were notable theatrics, such as when Ojul would weep in full view of large crowds.

This somehow endeared the delegation to the local people, who overwhelmingly supported to withdrawal of the ICC warrants against the LRA commanders. The people's greatest desire was to have a definitive end to the insurgency through negotiation. They showed a willingness to sacrifice anything just to let the war be brought to an end.

There was another concern, though, that lent credence to some measure of scepticism. In around October 2007, a disturbing rumour began to surface that Vincent Otti, hitherto deputy to Kony and the regular voice of the LRA besides the talks, had been executed over an internal power wrangle.

The LRA vehemently denied this, but when the former operations commander, Opio Makasi surrendered, he gave an exclusive story to a daily

newspapers detailing how Otti was executed, it became increasing clear that Kony had killed him. The LRA still insisted that Otti was alive!

In December 2007, the government set an ultimatum for the talks to be concluded by 31st of January 2008, threatening the resumption of a military offensive against the LRA. Many Acholi leaders begged for patience. By mid January, Otti's death was confirmed, and many people began to read an ulterior intention of Kony, but remained hopeful.

Their fears were allayed by the resumption of talks on 30th of January, reaching a breakthrough on 3rd February 2008 regarding accountability and reconciliation. A deal was penned on 19th stating that a special division of the high court of Uganda be created to try war crimes, thus bypassing the ICC and thereby removing one of the biggest obstacles to the final peace agreement. Shortly thereafter, an agreement on disarmament and demobilisation was signed, leaving the only hurdle being the comprehensive agreement.

All was now left to Kony to put his pen to paper on March 28th 2008. Two days to the d-day, the rebels asked for date to be extended to April 3rd to enable the leader travel to the venue of the talks where he would sign the papers from.

This was again moved to April 5th, then to April 10th ostensibly due to an illness. It also emerged that he would sign the agreement from the bush. On the 10th, the rebel leaders once again postponed the signing of the agreement indefinitely, as he sought clarification on how Mato Oput would be used and how the special division of the High Court would function and what kind of punishments he and his fighters would face. He also reportedly wanted an assurance on his finan-



Sustained international involvement and outside-the-box creative thinking by the government of Uganda is needed to keep dialoguing directly with Kony and induce him to come out of the bush

cial security. He further claimed that he was misled by his delegation whose head, David Matsanga, he fired. Two days later the press reported that the new deputy of LRA, Odhiambo, was executed by Kony. The news of Odhiambo's execution was believed right away.

This raises the third concern. Does Kony really trust anyone – his deputies, advisors, including members of his peace team? He sacked Martin Ojul, claiming that that he was compromised. He also sacked Matsanga for similar reasons.

He began to question agreements earlier on signed on his behalf by his

peace team. If he fails to put any bit of trust in his team and deputies who served him for such a long time, will he trust the government that for long wanted his head?

The government now says they are not interested in extending the ceasefire, and as if to signal a preparation for war, have started doing airspace drills over Gulu. No mention has been made of what will happen next. In a distant corner of their minds, some people still think that there would be a change of heart.

Many people obviously feel fear, anger, frustration and uncertainty. They are calm, though.

US tell government and LRA to sign peace deal

Despite postponement twice of the signing of the Final Peace Agreement by the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels, the U.S. State Department issued a major press statement by the end of March urging the two parties to sign it to end their 22-year war.

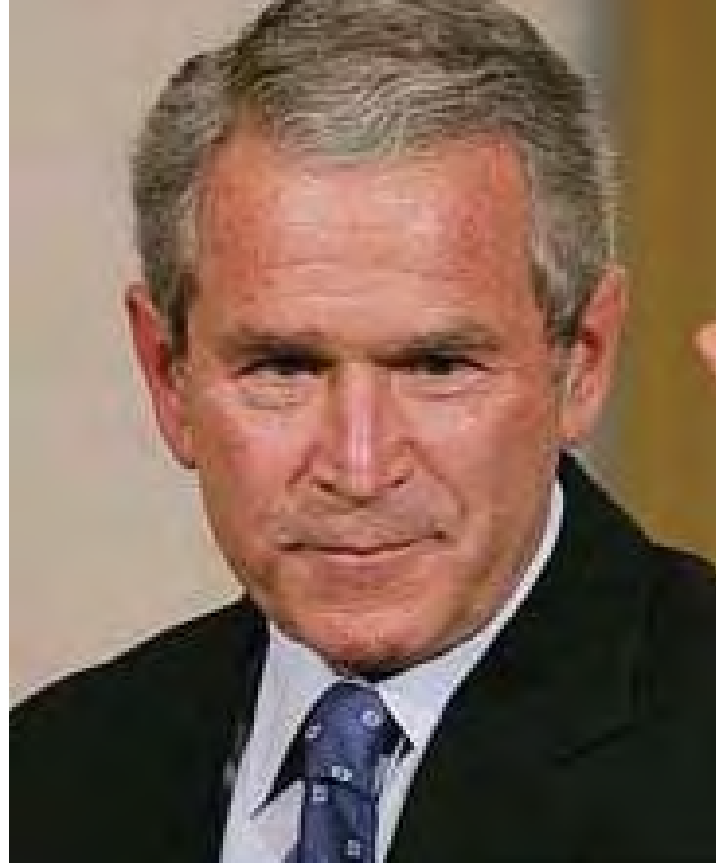
The spokesman Sean McCormack said the U.S. fully supports and welcomes the recent rapid progress in the Juba Peace Process. We urge the parties to sign the Final Peace Agreement on or before March 28 to demonstrate their commitment to peace and to send a strong signal of that commitment to both the international community and northern Ugandans.

Kony however failed to sign on April 10th, claiming according to press reports, he wanted to understand more about the special court that would be created

by the government of Uganda.

We appreciate the mediation efforts of the Government of Southern Sudan and the facilitation role played by African and other international observers during the Juba Peace Process. These efforts have created the best opportunity to date to end peacefully the 22-year conflict between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army that has seriously harmed civilian populations and destabilized the region.

As an observing party, we intend to participate fully in the proposed Oversight Forum, which would be formed to assist with implementation of the agreements. We will continue collaboration with the Government of Uganda to provide development support for northern Uganda and demobilization, disarmament, and resettlement assistance for ex-combatants.



Karimojong killed another two people



Karimojong cattle rustlers have shot dead two people again in separate attacks in Pader district.

The incident took place in Omia-Anyima sub-county in Chua on Sunday 13th. This brings the number of civilians killed by the rustlers in the district to six since February.

The district chairman, John Komakech-Ogwok, said the army pursued the warriors and recovered 500 animals that included cows, goats, sheep and donkeys.

Photos in the left is of Karimojong men

JPC introduces peace clubs in Pader & Amuru Schools

Peace building through peace clubs in schools is an initiative developed by the Justice and peace Commission to raise awareness among teachers and students in Post-Primary schools and communities on Human rights, Justice and Peace.

The program aims at building the capacity of students/teachers to promote friendship, harmony, reconciliation and peaceful co-existence in the community.

It first started in Gulu in 2003 where most of the secondary schools in the district benefited from the programme. The funding however, ended in late 2005.

From 2006 up to date, Kitgum district under the ecclesiastical province of Gulu is still implementing the programme.

This year, CODE AID is funding the programme in Pader and Amuru district, while that of Kitgum is being funded by Conciliation Resources, UK.

The activities of this project includes human rights and peace building trainings, in schools sensitizations, cultural festivals based on topical issues of human rights and peace building.

Peace clubs are owned and controlled by schools while JPC provides technical support and guidance.

The first quarter of the project began in January 2008 in Pader and Amuru, and a number of activities have taken place.

Among others include the Formation of Peace Clubs in schools. Peace clubs were already formed in post-primary schools within Pader through the support received from Conciliation Resource in the year 2006. However 10 schools were identified and activities are being implemented in them. The head teachers have shown commitment to support the program. JPC plans to extend the program to cover all the post-primary schools within Pader.

The programme, which is now also active in post-primary schools in Amuru district, aimed at promoting human rights awareness in post primary schools. It also aimed at stopping violent strikes, riots and occasioning unimaginable havoc to the schools, the students and the general public.

The goal of the project is to empower students, and they in turn help others, address

issues that would easily involve violence and human rights abuses peacefully; by appreciating the values of human rights and its importance as a foundation for freedom, justice and peace in the greater society.

Other activities under the project included training of matrons, patrons and student

leaders of peace clubs on the essentials of human rights, holding sensitisation meetings, interschool debating competitions on human rights related motions, essay writing competition on a human rights topic and monitoring and evaluation to assess the impact of the project.



Programme assistant Rose Adong (right squoting) and part of the Patrons and Matrons of Peace Clubs pose for photograph after training at Layibi Spirituality Centre April 11th.

Gov't should take lead in home return

The idea that the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) must go back to their original homes is welcome. Life in the displacement camps in northern Uganda has been one of the worst in human history.

Without the intervention of the humanitarian agencies, although government did not accept declaring the zone a disaster area, mortality rate would have surpassed the estimated one thousand per month.

But the speed and pace of the return and resettlement process is a challenge as government emphasizes that "IDPs must leave the camps and return now that there is peace".

The returning community should be assisted with resettlement package in a transparent manner that leaves no room for wrong elements to profit from the items or the process.

This return package should contain minimum required items such as household items and agricultural seeds and implements. And should not only target returning persons but family and community as a whole.

The government tried to supply some farm tools and seed but were not enough. Some seeds could not germinate and the farm implements were substandard.

There has also been limited involvement and consultation with the local communities regarding the resettlement and return process. As the IDP camps are getting dismantled and people return home, there is need to think about the many children who because of war have neither parents nor relatives to take care of them.

The challenge remains to provide psychosocial care not only to the formerly abducted persons but the entire community affected by the conflict and work towards transforming the conflict through reconciliation process and promote harmony between the perceived perpetrators and those that suffered the atrocities.

Although the Government is trying the disarmament program, the Korimojong are still illusive and continue committing atrocities against the people in their neighborhood.

Pader district is the most affected with numerous incidences of killing, abduction and rape by the Korimojong reported from December 2007 to March 2008. If this is not curbed, then resettling people in border communities may remain a big challenge. Again children and youth are at higher risk.

The government support to the return resettlement and reintegration process through the Amnesty commission seems to care more for the former prominent LRA combatants as opposed to the formerly abducted children.

Children born in the two decade-long armed conflict in Northern Uganda and those abducted and forcefully recruited as child soldiers have never had an opportunity to know a culture of peace.

As communities resettle and re-integrate into their social settings, victims, perpetrators and perceived perpetrators will return to the same community.

The fact that there has been limited effort by the government other than NGOs towards meaningful reconciliation process, there is likelihood for some victims to opt for revenge, therefore causing yet another wave of violent conflict.

There is uncertainty over total peace, although final peace agreement may be signed in Juba between the government of Uganda and the LRA negotiation team. Will Joseph Kony come out without the removal of the ICC warrants of arrest

The fear of land mines and unexploded ordinances in areas that have not been mapped by security agencies and the UN experts on mines. Children are at higher risks due to their naivety. Although the UN has declared that northern Uganda is mines free, there is still big doubt. There are many places deep in the villages where nobody has reached. There is a big possibility of getting mines as returning communities plough their land.

Limited availability of social services such as schools, health facilities, sanitation facilities and water sources in most areas of return, leading to limited opportunities for children and youth.

Over the 20 years land in northern Uganda has been overgrown by trees and bushes and the boundaries have been lost in some cases.

The situation is worst for child headed household who may not know much about their traditional land boundaries. There are many cases of land wrangle, although steps are being taken by the local government including LCV Chairman Norbert Mao himself to resolve some of the cases.

The situation is worst for child headed household who may not know much about their traditional land boundaries.

There is the issue of generation gap created as a result of staying in camps for a long time. The youth may find it difficult to adjust to a life of "farm work" after so many years in the camp. These group of people will find it hard to go back to the villages and work in the gardens.

Given the above scenario, there is definitely need for a planned programme of return, resettlement and reintegration. This could be a process.

The local communities should be adequately consulted and involved in the planning process and any decisions that may be made for their benefit. The community and their leaders should be allowed to decide what can benefit them and the region. The IDP policy should remain as the principal guiding document even as the camps are being dismantled.

The return, resettlement and reintegration process should have a complete information package. IDPs should have good access to information on what package is available to support the return process. Children and youth should be involved.

The IDPs need to be given education on land rights and land matters in order to support a smooth return and resettlement process. This will be very important given that land matters are potential source of conflict and insecurity if not well handled now.

There should be a mechanism for informing and educating the general community and the local people on the issues being discussed and agreements being signed in Juba, Southern Sudan between the government of Uganda and the LRA.

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Gov't should assist returning IDPs cope up

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Unless the people believe, own and appreciate what has gone on in Juba, there may be little room for sustainable peace in Northern Uganda.

The central, local governments and Donors should support the available district Peace and Reconciliation institutions, to be able to spearhead community mobilization for reconciliation, inter-district dialogue for reconciliation as well as peace building activities to ensure sustainable peace in and among the resettling community.

Justice and Peace commission has however done that. It has mediated over a number of conflicts, between communities and districts especially between Lira, Gulu and

Oyam at Odek and Amuru and Nebbi at Got Apwoyo.

Emphasis should be on put on integrating peace education in the schools curriculum to model children and youth as peace builders and inculcate a culture of peace and tolerance.

Specific attention should be placed on psychosocial rehabilitation of children, youth and women abused/traumatized during the conflict to enhance their successful re-integration.

There is therefore a need for the government to improve on the situation of law enforcement institutions and also sensitize communities on law and order but above all

strive to bring the culprits to justice so as to restore confidence in the current justice system.

it is evident that something has been achieved in the reintegration process over the last couple of years with the support of government and humanitarian agencies. In the WV children of war rehabilitation center alone, over 11,000 children have been rehabilitated and got back into communities. In spite of this milestone, there are probably yet thousands of children and youth who are in dire need of support to enable them start a new chapter in their lives after such traumatic experience. It's a duty bestowed upon the government and all of us to ensure that this new chapter becomes a reality in their lives.



Part of the kids found in IDP camps in Acholi sub-region. Some are orphans, many are traumatised. Parents in IDP camps are unable to take their kids in good schools. What could be their future? Now that the IDPs are resettling, the government could come in with subsidy for the schools and teachers in rural Acholi.

Chronology of recent events

March 26:

LRA chief negotiator Nyekorach Matsanga says Joseph Kony is committed to signing final Peace deal in Ri-Kwangba assembly site in southern Sudan but not in Juba.

March 26:

The Independent newspaper, quoting intelligence sources says Joseph Kony unlikely to hand himself over to Ugandan government for trial, even if he signs the final agreement

March 26:

Govt. & LRA sign last documents in preparation to sign Final Peace Agreement by April 5th

March 25:

Acholi leaders head to Juba to meet with LRA negotiating team over final agreement

March 25:

Deadline to sign Final Peace Agreement pushed to 5 April on LRA request to discuss final text with the leadership in the bush

March 24:

LRA negotiating team maintains no Final Peace Agreement signing until ICC arrest warrants removed

March 24:

U.S. press statement urges signing of Final Peace Agreement and commits to assist implementation

March 21:

Uganda Govt. confirms reports of Joseph Kony's move to Central African Republic, but still committed to Juba peace process

March 21:

South African cabinet approves deployment of members of South African National Defense (SANDF) Forces to northern Uganda

March 18, 2008:

Press reports that LRA's Joseph Kony has "established contact" with Chadian rebel leader Mahamat Nouri

March 17:

The February 2008 UN humanitarian brief for Uganda reports that although security continues to improve in the north, over 1.15 million people remain displaced in camps and transit sites, primarily in the Acholi region. The brief cites lack of thatching grass, inadequate basic services in return areas, personal insecurity and landmines as reasons for the slow rate of return

March 17:

WFP announces plans to cut food aid to 600,000 people in Lango and Teso regions in order to transit from distributing emergency

relief supplies to implementing early recovery projects

March 16:

Ugandan military seizes cache of illegal arms during operations in West Nile region. Thousands of sub-machine guns, as well as grenades and mines, were captured in two different operations

March 14:

Chief mediator Dr. Riek Machar says renegade SPLA, not LRA, responsible for Central Equatorial attacks. This follows killings of innocent civilians in Kajo-Kaji, Lanya and Yei Counties

March 12:

LRA Chief negotiator says Kony will sign final peace deal if Museveni guarantees no ICC trial

March 12:

President Museveni says Government of Uganda can "save" rebel leader Joseph Kony from international trial if he signs final peace deal

March 12:

In potential shift, ICC requests information on proposed special courts to try indicted LRA

March 12:

Fresh allegations that group of LRA rebels abducted 80 in Central African Republic's border town

March 10:

Gulu leader Norbert Mao warns that failure to implement agreements could reverse peace process

March 10:

LRA legal team discusses "procedural issues" with the ICC at the Hague

March 06:

UN Security Council set to discuss "northern Uganda peace process" in March, according to its announcement

March 06:

Northern Uganda civil society group, MPs call for UN Security Council's suspension of ICC arrest warrants

March 06:

UNHCR chief vows to support return and recovery of IDPs in northern Uganda

February 29:

Press reports that Joseph Kony will "never assemble" until ICC warrants withdrawn

February 28:

Norbert Mao, Gulu district leader says "Amnesty Intl.'s position on Juba peace talks

smacks of arrogance"

February 24:

The Monitor, Uganda's independent newspaper reports that 189 LRA rebels have arrived in Central African Republic

January 29:

ICC-linked Victims' Trust Fund announces plans to assist victims in Northern Uganda

January 28:

Ugandan defense minister says LRA "regrouping"; raising doubts about peace talks

January 25:

Ugandan govt. minister Okello Oryem threatens that Otti's death may "choke" future peace talks

January 24:

U.S. Congress commits \$5 million to support peace talks

January 22:

Kony reportedly dismisses his lead negotiator Martin Ojul and three others from rebel team

January 21:

Three former LRA commanders Sunday Otto, Richard Odong Kau, Vincent Okema and two other former rebels identified as Alex Ojok and George Okello receive amnesty after defecting from Garamba last year

January 09:

speaking to Deutsche Presse-Agentur, Archbishop Odama worries that mistrust threatens to derail peace process

January 07:

Uganda and DRC armies to pressure LRA rebels. Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have again agreed to pressure the LRA rebels to leave Garamba National Park in north-eastern DRC

January 02:

Archbishop Odama calls for respect of land rights in northern Uganda

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