

The Voice of Peace

News and views from areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army in the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Uganda

Religious and political leaders in LRA-affected areas speak out

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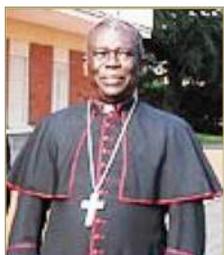
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Catholic Bishop Richard Domba of Dunga-Doruma Diocese, DRC



Anglican Bishop Dr. George Ande Titre of Aru Diocese, DRC



Retired Bishop Macleod Baker Ochola, Uganda

The Obama administration announced on 23 March 2014 it would deploy an additional 150 US special forces and aircraft to reinforce the African Union Regional Task Force (AU-RTF) tracking Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

There is no question that Kony and the LRA have committed terrible atrocities and that stopping them is a worthwhile endeavour. However, political and religious leaders in LRA-affected areas have expressed mixed feelings towards a solely military approach to ending this war that has lasted for over two decades.

The Voice of Peace (VoP) interviewed the following eminent persons: Macleod Baker Ochola, Rtd. Bishop of Northern Uganda; Hon. Ojara Martin Mapenduzi, Chairman LC V Gulu District, Northern Uganda; Richard Domba, Catholic Bishop of Dunga-Doruma Diocese in DRC; Dr. George Ande Titre, Anglican Bishop of Aru Diocese, DRC; Hon. Charles Kisanga, Minister of Information and official spokesperson of the government of Western Equatoria State, South Sudan; Rev. Bishop Samuel Peni of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan, Nzara Diocese and Mr. Jean Marie Zekpio, Sultan of Rafai, CAR.

When asked to describe the current situation in their respective countries, their answers were similar. They all described it as fragile and desperate. This can largely be attributed to the recent conflicts that have plagued their countries. In Uganda the situation is fairly stable but many fear that rising tensions in South Sudan could spill over the border. As Rtd. Bishop Macleod Baker Ochola II said, "The possibility for the LRA to become a very big destabilizing force in the Great Lakes

region is greater than ever before. This is because of the current war in South Sudan between President Salva Kiir, supported by Uganda on the one hand and his former Vice-President Dr. Riek Machar in opposition to the government on the other".

The regional religious and political leaders called for greater efforts on the part of their respective governments to counter the LRA and bring the conflict to an end. They also called for a unified approach with the saying "United we stand, divided we fall". The call was echoed in South Sudan and DRC, while interviewees in CAR called for both the government and society to remain vigilant due to the large number of armed elements operating there.

Problems that need to be addressed vary from country to country and depend on the different social and political situations. In Uganda, leaders discussed healing and reconciliation between local inhabitants and those that have been affected by the LRA given that the LRA started its activities in Northern Uganda.

Richard Domba, Catholic Bishop of Dunga-Doruma Diocese and Dr. George Ande Titre, Anglican Bishop of Aru Diocese, both in DRC called for more efforts to reintegrate displaced people, foster economic development, empower young people through job creation and rebuild infrastructure such as roads, schools, health centres and markets. Leaders in South Sudan and CAR recommended a community-based approach to solve their problems since it is usually the community that feels the full brunt of the war.

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Bringing laughter in the face of tragedy

Editorial by Father Ernest Sugule, Editor-in-Chief



Father Ernest Sugule,
VoP Editor-in-Chief,
SAIPED Director

The LRA threat and local and international responses remain the main focus of the latest VoP edition, while other aspects of the security and political situations in LRA-affected countries, especially those in CAR, are examined as exacerbating factors. Kony is using the current period of instability there to move into new territories, making military pursuit nearly impossible.

Dispersing into vast areas is one of the LRA's survival tactics. Others include growing crops and not attacking civilians - almost going underground. Fighters mainly carry out attacks to resupply while waiting for their crops to grow. They usually abduct villagers to carry looted goods and young boys and girls are occasionally abducted to increase their numbers. The LRA employed this tactic in 2005 when they first entered DRC. They are currently resuming the same tactics in Bas Uélé district, DRC where they have reportedly set up two camps and are cultivating crops.

With this in mind, regional religious and political leaders in the affected areas call for greater efforts on the part of their respective governments to counter the LRA and rebuild the areas affected by Kony and his rebels. This includes reintegrating returnees by providing good psycho-social support; improving the livelihood of returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); and rebuilding infrastructure such as roads, schools and health centres.

Finally the VoP highlights the work of an incredible woman, Sister Angélique Namaika.. With few resources but with laughter and great joy, Sister Angélique has been able to save the lives of 33 orphaned children. Most of these children lost their mothers to the LRA insurgency or other related issues such as the lack of necessary facilities. Sister Angélique, we salute you.

Father Ernest Sugule, OSA, is VoP Editor-in-Chief and Director of the NGO, SAIPED, based in DRC.



Hon. Charles Kisanga,
Minister of Information,
Western Equatoria State,
South Sudan

LRA preys on civilians in CAR and DRC

Regional Situation Report, January-March 2014

Democratic Republic of Congo

While most LRA fighters are still believed to be in CAR, those in DRC continue to attack civilians frequently and violently. Groups of LRA fighters reportedly carried out 32 and 21 attacks in February and March 2014 respectively. Five people have been killed and others seriously wounded. LRA groups continue to abduct civilians. They release most abductees soon after using them to transport stolen goods but they have recently restarted keeping hold of some

young men and women to build up their forces. Twenty-one people were abducted and kept captive during the first three months of 2014. LRA fighters loot mainly food, clothes and useful items such as batteries. Many fear the rise in attacks in DRC indicate the LRA is trying to regroup and rebuild its strength. If so, the LRA will likely look to forcefully recruit more young people and use violence to push civilians away from its area of operations as they have done in the past.



Hon. Ojara Martin
Mapenduzi, Chairman LC
V Gulu District, Northern
Uganda

	DRC			CAR			S Sudan			Uganda			Total
	J	F	M	J	F	M	J	F	M	J	F	M	
2014													
Attacks	5	32	21	7	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	68
Abducted	12	7	2	7	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	32
Killed	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5
Newly displaced	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Escaped	0	1	0	2	9	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	15

Sources: OCHA, NGOs, Local Protection Committees, civil society and customary leaders.

Central African Republic

Taking advantage of the current disorder in CAR, the LRA has exercised greater freedom of movement, carried out 14 attacks and abducted 11 people during the first quarter of 2014. On one hand, the LRA has moved to new areas including around Sam Ouandja, an area rich with diamonds in the northeast. On the other hand, CAR remains the only country where LRA fighters are defecting at a high rate - 13 in the first quarter of 2014.

The new transitional authorities are struggling to stop widespread violence perpetrated by armed militias. Despite the presence of 2,000 French forces (Operation Sangaris) and 6,000 African Union troops (Mission internationale de soutien à la Centrafrique sous conduite africaine, MISCA), the situation is getting worse day by day. Terrible acts of violence are a daily occurrence. Violence started between Muslim and Christian militias and the deteriorating situation has taken on its own momentum to horrendous levels of human suffering.

Thus, the UN Security Council decided on 9 April 2014 to send 12,000 peacekeepers to CAR to hasten the return of security. But other aspects that can help bring peace to this nation must be adopted in tandem to putting boots on the ground. Other essential activities include:

- Recruit, train and equip a modern national army for CAR that can defend and protect its national sovereignty.
- Disarm all those in the country who hold weapons illegally.
- Promote peaceful coexistence among all Central Africans irrespective of their religious and political affiliations by organising interfaith dialogue.
- Set up a truth commission.
- Strengthen the justice sector so it can prosecute alleged perpetrators of serious crimes.
- Restore the authority of the state and uphold respect for state institutions.
- Create a compensation fund for victims.

South Sudan

The general security situation in South Sudan is fragile. While the war between forces loyal to former Vice-President Riek Machar and government forces rages on, Western Equatoria State enjoys relative peace. However, some hunters and poachers claim to have seen LRA footmarks and to have met

some LRA fighters in the bush close to the border with DRC. This is causing great anxiety and instilling fear among the people living along the border.

Some farmers are too frightened to work their fields close to the border, which in turn reduces food production in the counties of Ezo, Tambura, Nzara and Yambio. All of these places have experienced massive displacement of civilians due to LRA attacks. In addition, former LRA abductees have not returned to their villages of origin due to fear of re-abduction and attacks. They have settled instead in towns where there is limited land for agriculture and as a result have no source of livelihood.

Uganda

The LRA has not been present in Uganda for many years. However, since violence erupted in South Sudan in December 2013, Uganda has opened new refugee camps at Elegu and Dzaipi reception centres in Adjumani District in the north. Locals fear refugees may be in possession of small arms and light weapons.

There were unconfirmed reports that gun wielding South Sudanese refugees were forcefully setting up homes in Lading in Atiak Sub County, Amuru District and harassing local residents. The latter reportedly appealed to their Resident District Commissioner (RDC) Mr. James Navinson Kidega to come to their aid.

The residents claim the refugees are mainly Dinkas who number about 300-500 and set up camp on their land three months ago, after fleeing their homes in South Sudan.

In a related development, Acholi leaders have called for reconciliation between Uganda and other countries affected by the LRA. The Acholi Paramount Chief, Rwot David Onen Acana II and the female member of Parliament for Amuru, Hon. Betty Bigombe Atuku Oyella, last week apologised to victims in CAR for the atrocities committed by the LRA rebels.

"We regret Kony's action in the neighbouring countries and we call for cooperation in ending these atrocities," Rwot Achana II said. "There is no difference between what he was doing in northern Uganda and what he is doing to you here; we are hoping that he comes to his senses and he stops it with immediate effect."



Chaos in CAR



Armed youth in Bangui, CAR

Sister Angélique Namaika - A pearl in the community

“Beautiful as the pearl” as she is commonly known, Sister Angélique Namaika has been for many years an inspiration for many children and women in DRC. Born into a humble background with six siblings, Sr. Angélique was inspired at the age of nine by one of the secular sisters in Bas Uélé District who was offering her services to sick and weak people.

who had lost their parents either to sickness or the LRA. Sr. Angélique welcomed them with open arms. Even with her limited resources, she made sure that each woman and the 33 children under her care had food to eat and a safe place to sleep.

This selfless service to the under-privileged won her the 2013 Nansen Refugee Award, an annual prize given by the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) to someone who goes beyond the call of duty to help displaced people and demonstrates great courage. With the prize money, she has managed to build a small bakery and train women in a number of income generating activities. She has also set up 20 hectares of farm for over 60 formerly displaced women in LRA-affected areas.

She started her vocational training and studied the ways of the nuns for several years with the Augustinian sisters of Dungu-Doruma diocese. In 1991 Sr. Angélique became a nun and made her final vows in 2000. She has never forgotten her inspiration and still desires to have an impact in the lives of the weak and vulnerable.

Sr. Angélique still faces great challenges. Due to the remoteness of Orientale Province, DRC where she is based, she lacks the basic supplies she needs to do her work. She admits that she often lacks medication and food for the children. Also Dungu has no paediatric hospital. She is looking for support in order to set one up. As her name states, Sr. Angélique is a true pearl in the Dungu community.

Sr. Angélique became the head of Dynamic Women for Peace (the women’s branch of the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission). She empowered women by training them in income generating activities like baking and improved their level of literacy. Her work attracted the attention of the community who started bringing orphan children to her - those



Sister Angélique
with orphaned children

UN to send peacekeepers to CAR

The United Nations has promised a peacekeeping mission for the CAR in response to a precarious and highly dangerous situation characterised by inter-communal violence.

security apparatus to restore order and protect citizens. In addition, endemic poverty feeds inter-communal violence.

On 10 April 2014 the UN Security Council authorised the deployment of 10,000 soldiers and 2,000 policemen to constitute the mission, which will be known as MINUSCA. The mission is supposed to be fully operational by mid-September 2014 and will be tasked with protecting civilians under imminent threat of violence as well as assisting the transitional government.

MINUSCA will have an extremely difficult task. Even if the mission manages to deploy by September, there are question marks over its ability to have a genuine impact on peace and stability. 10,000 soldiers are not enough to secure the whole country. Rebels will likely continue to control fiefdoms and civilians will remain vulnerable to attack.

CAR is already host to several international missions. The AU peacekeeping mission, MISCA, has been present since December 2013 and numbers around 6,000 soldiers from Gabon, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Rwanda and DRC. These forces will likely be re-hatted as MINUSCA. The Chadian contribution was recently withdrawn due to its impartiality. The European Union has 1,000 troops in Bangui while France has also deployed its own force.

UN peacekeepers have tended to find protection of civilian mandates extremely difficult to fulfil. However, the success of the current Force Intervention Brigade, part of the UN mission in DRC, may have emboldened the department of peacekeeping operations (DPKO). If MINUSCA is to achieve any of its aims it must be proactive in protecting civilians from day one. This will send a strong message to rebels on all sides that human rights abuses will not be tolerated and will be stopped, by force if necessary.

The situation is showing little sign of improvement. Christian and Muslim militias have been battling for over a year. Reprisal attacks and massacres are a daily reality. Most of the country is ungoverned and local grievances exacerbate the situation.

It is essential that MINUSCA has the necessary resources and support offices to effectively carry out its duties. Military and police contributions are desperately needed. Equally crucial is civilian capacity: political officers who understand the situation on the ground and human rights and rule of law teams that are appropriately staffed to advise on reported abuses. Only a combination of strong military and civilian interventions can bring back peace and help the transitional government rebuild state institutions.

Part of the problem is that there is no national



President Hollande
of France greets
French forces in Bangui



French forces
patrolling in Bangui

LRA groups occupy new territories in CAR and rebuild their forces in DRC

The LRA has a remarkable ability to adapt very quickly to changing situations. They have operated successfully like this for the past 28 years; firstly against Museveni's government in Uganda and now across three countries.

Key to the LRA's strategy is operating in peripheral, rural areas where state authority is weak. The absence of a professional national army or police force creates a security vacuum and state administration is unable to provide basic services. The LRA know exactly how to exploit these weaknesses, porous borders and poor infrastructure to their advantage.

CAR and DRC are clear examples of environments where the LRA has been able to enjoy relative freedom of movement, attack civilians and rebuild its forces. This began in 2005 when LRA fighters first entered DRC, rearmed themselves and started training their troops in Garamba National Park.

Currently in CAR, the LRA has been active near Sam Ouandja, an area known for its diamonds. This area has been occupied by a local rebel group called the Union of Democratic Forces for Unity (Union des forces démocratiques pour le rassemblement, UFDR) of Michel Djotodia, the former CAR president and Seleka leader. Before leaving office, Djotodia claimed to have direct contact with the LRA leadership. But there is no proof of this. It is more likely Kony moved towards the border with Chad in search of a better area for him and his top leaders to take refuge and reorganise.

In DRC, there are reports of the LRA changing their tactics. LRA groups continue to kidnap. Previously fighters tended to

release most abductees soon after using them to transport stolen goods. Recently the LRA have started to keep young men and women captive. They loot mainly food, clothes and useful items including batteries and other goods.

Many fear the rise in attacks in February and March indicates the LRA is trying to regroup and rebuild its strength in DRC. For instance in Bas Uélé, local people have reported the existence of two new LRA camps. According to some escapees, LRA combatants are poaching, farming and exploiting mineral resources such as gold and diamonds.

They are also trying to recruit young boys and girls. The food and non-food items looted include tools, machetes, axes, paddy, cassava flour and palm oil. This indicates that the LRA is currently trying to rebuild its forces in DRC through hit-and-run tactics.

Current political turmoil in South Sudan and CAR will give the LRA ample opportunity to rebuild their forces. Without sufficient protection from state forces, local people will rearm themselves to fill the security void creating local defence groups that could themselves become negative forces. This has almost happened in Nambia, Haut Uele District, DRC.

The LRA continues to pose a serious threat to lives and livelihoods in the CAR and DRC. The group's brutality, combined with other destabilising factors, will have a lasting impact on the region. To minimise the current threat and ensure the long-term security of civilians, the government, civil society and international partners should look beyond military solutions and strengthen local protection mechanisms and governance systems capable of resolving conflict peacefully.

Religious and political leaders in LRA-affected areas speak out

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Leaders from the LRA-affected areas also emphasised the need to protect civilians and reintegrate survivors of LRA captivity into their communities. Leaders were asked to identify what had been done in their areas in this respect and what still needs to be done.

In Uganda, Retired Bishop Ochola said little had been done to foster long-term reintegration. He added that children who came from captivity, especially the young and child mothers, were left to fend for themselves without help from anybody. Some of the male captives who had come back home were absorbed into the Ugandan army if they were over 18.

Hon. Ojara Martin Mpenduzi, Chairman LC V Gulu District, has a different view. He says a lot has been done including the setting up of vocational training schools for the abducted and other initiatives with support from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). In DRC, according to Bishop Richard Domba, the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission of Dungu (DJPC) had played a major role in healing the post-war traumatic stress of former abductees and reintegrating them back into their communities.

In South Sudan, Rt. Rev. Bishop Samuel Peni echoed his Ugandan counterpart when he said, "So far we have spoken about the reintegration of escapees and returnees but nothing has been done at all. There are many people who have come. They have lost their property, their land which they were using for digging and their livelihood. Even in trauma-healing not much has been done to help these escapees to reduce their level of trauma."

In CAR, it was noted that civilians took up arms to defend themselves in the face of escalating violence and lack of state security.

The regional political and religious leaders had the following recommendations to their governments,

the international community, donors and international non-governmental organisations concerning the reintegration of LRA escapees and civilian protection.

Governments should prioritise the participation and involvement of communities in the reintegration process. Lessons from the Ugandan experience show that the community can be a great help in identifying, receiving and counselling returnees.

The Ugandan government should pull out its troops from South Sudan so that it should not be seen as biased in the affairs of its neighbour. Uganda should only play the role of arbitrator rather than supporting one side of the conflict, leaders said.

Museveni's government needs to come out with a very clear policy on victims and survivors, on reparations and compensations for those who have really been affected by these wars and a clear policy on national reconciliation among the communities that have been affected.

The international community should not mix issues. The LRA's insurgency against the government of Uganda has left many people dead, many people who have lost their limbs, lives, property and dear ones. The international community should come forward to support the government of Uganda in bringing a comprehensive plan for the recovery and reconstruction of Northern Uganda in a very holistic manner.

The international community should also support the Congolese government in providing opportunities for sustainable socio-economic development in the area affected by the LRA.

It is clear that local leaders and regional government representatives must work together and in tandem to successfully implement community level projects. This is especially true of socially sensitive initiatives such as the reintegration of former combatants into society, but applies more broadly to all community-based programmes.

An interview with Bishop Richard Domba of Dungu-Doruma Diocese, DRC



Bishop Richard Domba of
Dungu-Doruma Diocese,
DRC

The Voice of Peace: Hello Excellence.
Bishop Richard Domba: Hello.

VoP: How would you describe the current situation in your country?

RD: On a macroeconomic level, the Congolese government has done well in stabilising the inflation rate and maintaining the annual internal domestic growth above 8 per cent. However, this has not yet improved the lives of Congolese people. For instance, salaries for civil servants such as teachers, local administration officers, nurses and doctors are still low. Infrastructure such as roads, hospitals and schools need to be reconstructed. Payment through the bank system is very good but the government needs to increase the number of bank branches across the country. The Congolese government should also increase security at the borders because they are currently porous and this situation causes a lot of insecurity.

VoP: What do you think the government should do to end the LRA?

RD: The government needs to know that the LRA phenomenon is not completely eradicated and that the group still operates on Congolese soil. However, there is a reduction in LRA atrocities. Their forces are diminished but they still loot on roads, raid villages, abduct civilians and sometimes kill.

Mbororo herders also pose a threat to the population. These nomadic pastoralists have destroyed fields and some of the environment of the rural population. The international community has put pressure on the government to accept them on Congolese soil because they are climate refugees as they call them. However, how do you expect them to coexist peacefully with the local people while they are armed? National authorities should count and settle all Mbororo in uninhabited places on Congolese territory since they constitute a security threat for some local communities.

VoP: It seems many international NGOs have left the areas affected by the LRA. According to you, what are the urgent problems that need to be addressed?

RD: The needs are enormous. The LRA is active, but they are not as violent as before. The Mbororo can exacerbate the suffering of

the population since the area is not completely secure. There is also an urgent need to reintegrate Congolese refugees who are currently in South Sudan. There are also issues of internally displaced people. They need to be supported in their respective villages and they must not be abandoned in an abrupt manner. We must transition from an emergency response to sustainable development.

VoP: In terms of reintegration of LRA survivors and civilian protection, according to you what has been done and what should be done?

RD: Each organisation has its own philosophy and way of doing things. Some agencies accompany survivors and their families while the Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission of Dungu (DJPC) has another philosophy which is that of Centre Elikya, a transit and counselling centre. The goal is to de-traumatise LRA survivors and socio-economically reintegrate them into their families and society. There are other groups who need this assistance, but currently there is no funding for Centre Elikya and its LRA survivors.

VoP: What are your recommendations to the DRC government and the international community regarding the reintegration of survivors and the protection of civilians?

RD: The Congolese government must recognise the presence of the LRA in the region despite the reduction atrocities and join the international forces in protecting civilians. The international community should mobilise its forces to capture and prosecute the LRA leaders. The governments of affected countries (DRC, CAR, South Sudan and Uganda) should join forces to eradicate the LRA phenomenon definitively. The national and international community should help displaced people resettle in their homes and villages.

VoP: Excellency, do you have something else you would like to add?

RD: The LRA phenomenon disturbs the peace as I pointed out above and Mbororo should be identified and settled in uninhabited places.

VoP: Excellence, thank you for answering our questions.

RD: My pleasure.

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Next edition:
unreported
human rights
violations in
South Sudan

Kinshasa calling! 6th Regional Civil Society Task Force meeting

From 26 to 30 May 2014 the Regional Civil Society Task Force will hold its sixth annual meeting at Hotel Invest de Press, Kinshasa, DRC. The Task Force is a network of religious and cultural leaders and NGO representatives from the four LRA-affected countries (DRC,

CAR, South Sudan and Uganda) who meet to discuss the conflict, identify common challenges and work towards common approaches that will bring lasting peace to the cross-border region.

About The Voice of Peace

The Voice of Peace is a quarterly newsletter that aims to increase understanding among local communities and national and international policymakers of the severe challenges faced by people living in areas of DRC, CAR, South Sudan and Uganda affected by the Lord's Resistance Army.

It is written and produced by local civil society groups with support from Conciliation Resources, a UK-based peacebuilding organisation. It gives local actors a voice on problems that have a profound impact on their lives and the opportunity to inform the solutions.

This and past editions are available at
www.c-r.org/resources/voice-peace

Contributing civil society organisations:

- Solidarité et Assistance Intégrale aux Personnes Démunies (SAIPED), DRC.
- Commission Diocésaine de Justice, Paix et Réconciliation, Aru Diocese (CDJPR-ARU), DRC.
- Femme Action Plus (FAP), CAR.
- Inter Church Committee (ICC), South Sudan.
- Diocesan Commission of Justice and Peace (CDJP), Gulu, Uganda.
- Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), Uganda.

