

LRA Conflict in Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan, 2002

Summary

In recent months, the conflict between the northern Ugandan rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and the Ugandan government has significantly escalated, with resulting serious human rights abuses against civilians not only in northern Uganda but also in southern Sudan. Displaced persons and refugees and the agencies assisting them are not simply caught in the crossfire of this war, but have become primary focuses of LRA attacks in both Sudan and Uganda. By September 2002, it was estimated that 552,000 Ugandans were displaced or at risk of having no harvest, at least 24,000 Sudanese refugees in Uganda had been forcibly displaced, unknown thousands of southern Sudanese were displaced inside Sudan, and refugee and displaced persons camps and supplies have been looted or burned. Tens of civilians have been killed in this conflict since March 2002 in both northern Uganda and southern Sudan.

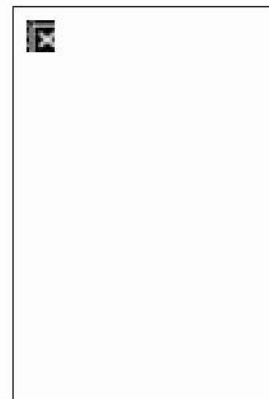
The LRA has waged a brutal civil war against the Ugandan government since the mid-1980s. The war has had a devastating impact on the Acholi people of northern Uganda, and its human rights abuses have included summary executions, torture and mutilation, recruitment of child soldiers, child sexual abuse, forcible displacement, and looting and destruction of civilian property. The Ugandan government has sought a military solution, deepening the destruction of Acholi society by forcing tens of thousands into displaced persons camps, where they have nevertheless not been safe from LRA attacks and have been subjected to arbitrary arrests, torture including rape, and other abuses by Ugandan army soldiers. In early October 2002, with the renewed LRA offensive, the Ugandan army ordered civilians in the Acholi districts to leave their homes and move closer to these camps.

From late 2000, the LRA had largely retreated to southern Sudan, where it maintained its headquarters and training bases and enjoyed the support of the Sudan government. Around the same time, however, the Sudanese government began to end its assistance to this rebel movement, under an agreement with the Ugandan government, which reciprocally agreed to end its support for the Sudanese rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Seeking food, and moving from its bases near Juba to the more remote Imatong Mountains in Sudan, the LRA looted food from and displaced hundreds of Sudanese families in attacks in southern Sudan in late 2001 and early 2002, causing casualties and destroying villages.

In March 2002, the Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) started a military offensive against the LRA in southern Sudan, "Operation Iron Fist," with the permission of the Sudanese government. Since then, human rights abuses connected to the war in northern Uganda and southern Sudan have escalated with resulting massive displacement and severe access problems for relief agencies. Escaping from the UPDF in southern Sudan in June 2002, the LRA resumed attacks inside Uganda on camps for internally displaced Ugandans and for Sudanese refugees. In one raid in early August, the LRA attacked a Sudanese refugee camp in Achol-pii, northern Uganda, killing more than fifty refugees. The Ugandan army, lagging behind in Sudan, failed to protect civilians from these attacks in northern Uganda, and resumed previous patterns of arbitrary arrests of civilians suspected of collaborating with the rebels, and of forcible displacement.

Some LRA soldiers have remained in southern Sudan, where they have attacked the Sudanese army and a Sudanese government-backed militia, former LRA sponsors. More LRA troops crossed back into southern Sudan in August 2002, in what seemed to be an endless cross-border cycle of violence. The renewed military activity started by Operation Iron Fist has stymied efforts to start peace talks with the LRA undertaken by the local administration in northern Uganda and by a forum of religious leaders.

Human Rights Watch calls on the LRA to cease attacks on civilians and civilian objects and release all underage soldiers and those forcibly conscripted while underage; and on the Ugandan government to relocate refugee and displaced persons camps a safe distance from the theater of war, take effective measures to protect civilians, and respect the human rights of Acholi civilians in northern Uganda.. The



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Sudan government and SPLA should also protect Sudanese civilians from attack by the LRA. The international community must insist that all parties cease targeting civilians and provide immediate and unimpeded access for humanitarian activities both in southern Sudan and northern Uganda.

“Operation Iron Fist”

The Sudan government had supported the LRA in retaliation for the Ugandan government's support of the SPLM/A, which has been fighting the Sudanese government since 1983. The presidents of the two countries agreed in 1999 to end support of these two groups and to restore normal diplomatic relations. The Sudan government was also motivated, after September 11, 2001, to disassociate itself from the LRA, deemed a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department. By then, Khartoum had already started to cut off food, medicine, and other support for the LRA inside Sudan, even though the Ugandan government had not taken any visible steps to cut off aid to the SPLA. The LRA had largely retreated into Sudan after an outbreak of Ebola hemorrhagic fever in Gulu, northern Uganda, in late 2000, and northern Uganda became relatively quiet.

The Sudan government's cutback of aid to the LRA weakened the rebel group but did not lead to its disintegration. To survive, the LRA attacked and looted southern Sudanese villages for food. Wary of the Sudan government's intentions, the LRA began moving from its bases south of Juba to Upper Talanga, a remote area of the Imatong Mountains on the Sudan/Uganda border, sometime in 2001.

In March 2002, the Sudan government gave the UPDF permission to enter Sudanese territory in order to capture and destroy the LRA. The UPDF, which had been saying in 2000 that it was “ready” to chase the LRA out of southern Sudan, called this “Operation Iron Fist.” This brought the Ugandan civil war inside Sudan, with several thousand troops from the LRA and more than ten thousand UPDF soldiers conducting operations to the detriment of tens of thousands of southern Sudanese civilians, who already had the Sudanese civil war to cope with.

The LRA rebels managed to avoid the more slowly moving UPDF in the rough terrain of southern Sudan—with which the LRA was familiar and the UPDF not. The Ugandan government's minister for the north conceded to Human Rights Watch in July 2002 that Operation Iron Fist was a failure: the UPDF did not militarily defeat the LRA in Sudan. Indeed, the campaign had the effect of driving the LRA back into Uganda: in June 2002 the LRA left a small number of forces in the Imatong Mountains and returned to northern Uganda.

In late June 2002, the LRA attacked several small camps of Sudan government soldiers in El Jebelien, Sudan, about forty-five kilometers southeast of Juba, and along the road between Juba and Torit, Sudan. Shortly after, on July 1, President Bashir of Sudan announced for the first time that the Sudan army had joined the UPDF in the anti-LRA offensive inside Sudan.

In early August, after the LRA attacked a Sudanese refugee camp in northern Uganda, killing at least fifty people, the UPDF launched a large-scale military operation against the LRA on the Sudan/Uganda border. Joseph Kony, the LRA leader, was alleged to have fled to the Imatong Mountains in southern Sudan at that time, with other LRA remaining in the border area.

On August 31, 2002, the SPLA, which was not a party to the UPDF-LRA fighting in its territory, captured the Sudanese government garrison town of Torit in Eastern Equatoria, southern Sudan, just north of the area of LRA and UPDF fighting. In late September, the Sudan government bombed the UPDF in Palotaka, southern Sudan, to the south of Torit. The Sudanese government later said the bombing of the UPDF was an “accident” and that the Sudanese pilots had been aiming at the SPLA. It questioned what UPDF troops were doing in such close contact with the SPLA. One Sudanese government spokesman said that “an unidentified neighboring country” helped the SPLA capture Torit. Despite this incident, another Sudan government spokesman maintained that Sudan-Uganda relations were in “good shape.”

In late September, the LRA attacked Liria, a Ugandan town well south of the Acholi area. This was its first attack so far south. By October 2, 2002, the Ugandan government announced that some 100,000 civilians had to move away from their homes, closer to camps controlled by the government. It gave them forty-eight hours to move. The government denied that it was having trouble “flushing out” the LRA rebels.

LRA Abuses in Sudan

In 2001 and 2002, hundreds of Sudanese Acholi and other families were displaced as the LRA attacked their villages in southern Sudan, and looted and burned their property. They fled, destitute, to Labone and Nimule, larger villages in SPLA-held southern Sudan, according to relief workers. Southerners had not been safe from the LRA, even in previous years: in January 2000 the LRA killed two relief workers for Norwegian Church Aid inside Sudan.

The affected areas—south of Juba, east of the Nile, and south of Torit in Eastern Equatoria, all in southern Sudan—are a patchwork of territories variously controlled by the Sudan government army, the government militia Equatorian Defense Force (EDF) and other government militia, and the SPLA. This area has been subjected to a Sudanese government flight ban imposed on the humanitarian community for about three years, and the creation of new internally displaced persons there added to the misery that was largely out of international reach and sight.

LRA abuses against southern Sudanese escalated after Operation Iron Fist started. In early April 2002, the LRA attacked Sudan government-controlled villages, and military posts, near Juba, the largest Sudan government garrison town in the south, causing thousands to flee to displaced persons camps nearer Juba. The villagers reported to relief officials that their homes had been looted and burned by the LRA, they believed in retaliation for Sudan's support for the UPDF. At the same time, some 2,000 people fled from Juba to the south for safety, according to the World Food Program (WFP).

Many LRA fled from the UPDF and possibly from the Sudan army to the safety of the Imatong Mountains, east of their Juba-area bases, looting along the way. As the UPDF was moving troops, heavy artillery, tanks, and armored personnel carriers into Sudan, the LRA was looting and razing to the ground at least six villages, according to the Catholic church in the area just across from the Uganda border. The church estimated that the LRA had killed more than 470 southern Sudanese civilians in these and other Imatong villages, and displaced more than 500 others from a displaced persons camp in Imatong Center in one week in late April-early May 2002. Included in the dead were 350 Sudanese civilians living in Katire, mostly elderly, women, and children, killed with LRA machetes starting from April 26. The LRA robbed, looted, and ransacked the village and surrounding hamlets of all food and valuables.

According to the Catholic Diocese of Torit, fifty of the dead were allegedly members of the EDF led by Cmdr. Martin Kenjii. The EDF has in the past participated in LRA training and assistance on behalf of the Sudan government. Many in the EDF were Sudanese Acholis. However, the relationship between the EDF and LRA was strained by LRA attacks on southern villages inhabited by Acholi and other civilians who "belonged" to the EDF.

In a separate attack, also denounced by the Catholic church in the area, the LRA raided at least three villages around Lokodi, which they burned to the ground, killing men and boys and raping young girls; some families were stripped of their clothing and locked in their homes for four days, during which time they were forced to drink their own urine to survive.

On May 9, 2002, the Sudanese government, through its governor in Juba, ordered civilians to vacate areas currently occupied by the LRA, calling on them to run for safety to several named towns, according to a Sudanese government press report. The Sudanese government, however, made no attempt to offer protection to civilians outside its garrison towns, even though the LRA was based in its army and militia-controlled territory.

A few NGOs tried with minimal resources to provide for thousands of newly displaced civilians inside southern Sudan, both in the garrison towns and in SPLA areas. By June 2002, there were approximately 4,500 internally displaced Sudanese in Ikotos, an SPLA-controlled area of Eastern Equatoria, in poor conditions, having just fled the LRA-UPDF fighting in the Imatong Mountains, according to a United Nations (U.N.) official.

On August 15, 2002, the LRA attacked Gumbo and Rejaf, located also in Sudanese government-controlled territory just southeast of Juba. In Gumbo displaced persons camp, the Sudanese government patrol engaged the LRA. According to U.N. sources, the LRA abducted two internally displaced persons and killed two Sudan government soldiers. One LRA soldier was killed. In Rejaf village the LRA killed one woman and looted cattle. After one of the displaced abductees reportedly returned with a threatening note from the LRA, the displaced persons in Gumbo camp began to spend the night in Gumbo village. On August 24, the LRA attacked Gumbo village, killing one policeman. An LRA soldier was killed and five LRA injured as the Sudan government responded to the attack, and the internally displaced fled to Juba. On September 9, a delegation of chiefs and elders from Rejaf called on Sudanese authorities in Juba, complaining of LRA harassment and theft from their farms in daylight. The villagers slept in the bush at night for fear of more LRA attacks.

Despite the displacement caused by this military activity, the government of Sudan has kept in place the three-year flight ban it has imposed on the affected area, preventing access to the U.N. and NGOs working through the U.N.-coordinated relief effort Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS)-Southern Sector, based in Lokichokio and Nairobi, Kenya. The land route to northern Uganda, through which OLS could access some Sudanese border towns, such as Nimule and Labone, also became unsafe as the LRA moved back

into Uganda. In addition, on September 27, the Sudan government imposed a ban on all flights going into Western and Eastern Equatoria in southern Sudan from neighboring Kenya or Uganda, putting extra pressure on the southern Sudanese displaced inside Sudan by LRA attacks. The ban was to be lifted on October 7.

LRA Abuses in Uganda

After leaving southern Sudan and re-establishing itself in northern Uganda in mid-2002, the LRA resumed large-scale attacks on the UPDF and the northern Ugandan population. The LRA's small contingent inside Uganda, left when it departed in late 2000, had sporadically attacked Ugandan Acholi displaced persons and Sudanese refugee camps, and ambushed vehicles on northern Ugandan roads, but had engaged in no major campaigns inside Uganda for a period of about eighteen months.

The Ugandan area traditionally subject to attack by the LRA comprises the three Acholi districts of northern Uganda—Kitgum, Gulu, and Pader. The LRA has also attacked Sudanese refugee camps in the Adjumani district to the west of the Acholi. From June 2002, the LRA started again, in many small and large units, to loot and burn Ugandan villages in these districts, camps for internally displaced persons established by the government, and Sudanese refugee camps, and to kill Ugandan Acholi civilians while abducting others for short-term portering and recruitment. It operated in units with effective communications and evident central command and control, suggesting good equipment and training. Its targets also included UPDF personnel, installations, and equipment.

In July 2002, the U.N. resident coordinator in Kampala (the Ugandan capital) reported that LRA soldiers had recently attacked sixteen camps for internally displaced persons in northern Uganda (Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader districts), further displacing an estimated 50,000 people. On July 24 and 25, LRA soldiers killed an estimated fifty-seven people with machetes twenty-two kilometers from Kitgum town, in four villages of Mucwini sub-county. The survivors fled into Kitgum trading center and town for safety. In some of the attacks, such as in Bungatira on July 22, the LRA used landmines (a newly-introduced weapon) to threaten civilians to leave their homes; in Bungatira the rebels then burned sixty huts.

The LRA, in its attacks on Ugandan Acholi internally displaced persons camps, sometimes first warned the residents to evacuate the camps or else face the LRA. It did this in Palabek, Kitgum district, on July 20. On July 25, it attacked the Palabek Gem camp, looted some shops and the food supplies distributed by the WFP the day before, and abducted the headmaster of the school with all his family. In mid-August 2002, the LRA announced that all humanitarian agencies working in northern Uganda—most assigned to internally displaced persons camps—had to withdraw, or risk becoming targets of new attacks. Despite this warning, relief agencies continued operations, although with scaled back staff and assets and few trips to the camps.

The LRA also targeted Sudanese refugees in Uganda. There are some 180,000 refugees in Uganda, according to the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), of whom 87 percent or 156,500 are Sudanese, almost all in refugee camps in northern Uganda not far from the Sudan border. In Pader district, LRA forces raided the Achol-pii camp for Sudanese refugees on August 5, killing approximately fifty people in a confrontation with the Ugandan army, including four UPDF soldiers and two Ugandan policemen. Eleven LRA rebels were killed in the clash. The LRA also abducted five aid workers from the International Rescue Committee (IRC), releasing them after five nights of captivity; on the second day demands were made in exchange for their lives. The LRA looted all the relief food recently delivered to Achol-pii camp, and burned what it could not carry; it also burned dwellings, vehicles, and administration buildings, forcing the camp's 24,000 Sudanese refugees and relief staff to flee the site. Some refugees fled back to Sudan, but the majority fled to non-Acholi areas of Uganda. The UNHCR began to settle these displaced refugees into alternative sites in other parts of the country.

Most Sudanese refugees in Uganda live in Adjumani district, which is west of the three Acholi districts in northern Uganda. On July 8, 2002, in an LRA attack on the Maaji camp (housing 11,000 refugees) in Adjumani district, LRA soldiers killed five Sudanese refugees, abducted five, and burned a grinding mill, five classrooms, and 127 houses. On September 9, more than eighty LRA forces attacked seven refugee sites in Maaji camp again. According to U.N. sources, the LRA injured one woman, abducted nineteen others (of whom eight returned), and 6,000 refugees fled; the UNHCR moved them temporarily to a transit center. The day before this second attack on the refugee camp, 200 LRA troops attacked the town of Adjumani in its biggest raid since Achol-pii, looting shops, burning dozens of houses, and abducting more than fifty people.

The LRA's behavior has changed since it left Uganda in 2000: in previous years, the LRA carried out mutilations of those it believed to be government informers and others, and in 2002 this no longer seemed to be the case. In addition, relief workers in northern Uganda observed in 2002 that the LRA conscripted

fewer people, adults and children—perhaps because it had lost its safe rear bases in Sudan where it trained them. In 2002, the LRA continued, however, to abduct some people apparently on account of their suspected government connections. And Acholi Ugandan children were still abducted, despite the fact that overall abductions were down. One boy of seventeen told an organization working with children in northern Uganda of being abducted by the LRA on the night of August 13, 2002. He was marched around for nine days, during which time it rained and he and the other women and children abductees were barefoot and slept in the cold bush without a blanket. He was taught how to dismantle, clean, and assemble a gun, and witnessed the summary execution of two government local defense men, wounded, who were killed with an axe and panga (long knife). An abducted boy caught escaping was executed in front of all the abductees with a knife on the barrel of a gun. The LRA has not stopped brutalizing its captives.

LRA Interference with Relief Activities

With the increasing displacement of Acholi Ugandans from rural areas into towns, the need for food assistance in the three districts in northern Uganda escalated. The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) projected in September 2002 that 522,000 displaced people would lose their current harvest and the smaller second harvest as they did not have access to their fields. They would be in need of food aid for another year.

Prior to the return of the LRA in June 2002, the WFP was providing 30 percent of the nutritional needs of 520,000 persons in the Acholi region. The WFP was forced to suspend food deliveries there for one month in June 2002, however, due to the return of the LRA to northern Uganda and the resultant insecurity. This resulted in a dramatic increase in levels of malnutrition among displaced children. WFP deliveries resumed on July 15 with increased UPDF protection, but still subject to frequent LRA attacks on relief vehicles. After the return of the LRA, the WFP assessed that it needed to deliver 100 percent of the food needs of the huge population in its care.

In August, despite some deliveries of food aid to outlying areas and resumption of some non-food item deliveries in the Acholi region, the situation remained tense and many displaced remained beyond reach because of insecurity. The congestion in the hospitals and towns of overnight refuge seekers diminished. But the displaced were still crowded into inadequate conditions of health and safety and shelter at a time when relief agencies had to scale down their activities because of insecurity.

On September 6, the LRA ambushed a truck belonging to British NGO ACORD, loaded with non-food items for the displaced going from Gulu to Kitgum. It killed the driver and burned the entire contents of the truck, worth U.S.\$6,000.

On September 14, 2002, a WFP convoy of eight commercial trucks carrying 300 tons of food aid and clearly marked with WFP flags was ambushed by the LRA en route to Kitgum. One driver was killed and the UPDF escorting the convoy and the LRA exchanged fire, causing the LRA to flee. The food was not stolen. The trucks proceeded to Kitgum but the food was not distributed to locations outside Kitgum for fear of further attack, and the WFP suspended its activities in two of the three districts until further notice.

LRA Child Soldiers

The LRA has a long history of abduction of children from northern Uganda who were brutalized and marched to LRA bases in southern Sudan where they were trained and inducted into the LRA. Girls were sexually abused, and many kept as soldiers' and officers' "wives" or concubines. The LRA has abducted an estimated ten to twelve thousand children under age eighteen, one third of the total abductions, since it began its mobilization. Of these, one third were under age twelve when abducted. Recruitment of children is prohibited under international law and can constitute a war crime.

In mid-2002, when the LRA returned to Uganda, a rumor circulated that the LRA was seeking to abduct children under twelve years of age. Fearing a repetition of the abductions, northern Ugandans living in smaller villages and displaced camps sent their children to spend the nights in nearby towns. Churches, hospitals, and schools filled to overflowing with children as young as four years. At Gulu's main hospital alone, some forty thousand villagers were sheltering nightly during the month of July. The sleeping, sanitary, and social conditions for them were appalling and disease spread. These children vanished back to their homes at dawn.

Aid agencies had expected an influx of escaping child soldiers once the LRA returned to Uganda: in early 2002, it was estimated that about five to six thousand child soldiers remained with the LRA (of the original ten to twelve thousand abducted). Extensive preparations to receive them (tents, food, etc.) were launched. However, very few child soldiers materialized/escaped during Operation Iron Fist, to date.

Some observers concluded that most of the captive children who had not escaped by 2002 (thousands had escaped and passed through rehabilitation centers maintained in northern Uganda) were long dead of disease, LRA punishment, or war. It was roughly estimated that the LRA's total forces, including underage soldiers and other children, numbered only in the one to three thousand range in 2002.

In addition, the LRA appeared to have been stung by broad international condemnation of its abuses. On June 12, 2002, it released about one hundred sick, elderly, and women with young children as it crossed into Uganda from Sudan.

UPDF Abuses in Uganda

Since 1996, the UPDF has forced thousands of Ugandan civilians in the Acholi north of the country to move into camps, in addition to those who went willingly for protection from the LRA. In early October 2002 it ordered some 100,000 northern Ugandans to move next to displaced persons camps or towns for protection. Some of these Ugandans had already been displaced.

While Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions, the international law governing internal armed conflict, allows for civilians to be moved if "the security of the civilians so involved or imperative military reasons so demand" (article 17), this forcible displacement has not in practice improved the security of those moved, and rather, seems designed to control the population. There are some 584,000 internally displaced persons in Uganda, of whom more than half (356,000) are in the northern Gulu district. The camps have provided little or no protection from the LRA and were also vulnerable to abuse by the UPDF and individual soldiers.

Human Rights Focus (HURIFO), a Gulu-based human rights organization, published a report on the plight of internally displaced persons in northern Uganda in February 2002, documenting forcible recruitment by the UPDF of child soldiers and underage "Home Guard" self-defense militia from the displaced persons' camps. Arbitrary arrests, killings, torture, rape, and other abuses by the Ugandan forces were documented in this report, as well as abuses by the LRA. In April 2001, one man in the Opit camp was arrested for suspected links to the LRA, hung upside down from a tree, and beaten by UPDF soldiers. Other displaced persons reported similar mistreatment at the hands of the UPDF. At the army barracks in Gulu, an estimated thirty civilians were arbitrarily detained by the Ugandan government.

In response to the LRA's new campaign in northern Uganda, the UPDF stepped up the existing pattern of arbitrary long-term detentions of civilians suspected of collaborating with the LRA. Since humanitarian agencies had limited access and resources and the displaced had few farming opportunities, living conditions in the camps were very poor.

The UPDF, overstretched by Operation Iron Fist inside Sudan, offered minimal protection from the renewed LRA attacks in 2002 to people in Ugandan displaced persons camps, villages, and Sudanese refugee camps. Often, UPDF soldiers told the civilians to fend for themselves as the UPDF numbers were too low to provide any protection; in other cases, UPDF soldiers ran when the LRA approached, according to civilians interviewed by members of parliament from northern Uganda and journalists in July 2002.

The LRA had often attacked Sudanese refugee camps, and relief and human rights organizations had sought the relocation of the camps elsewhere inside Uganda, without success. The Ugandan government, as of January 2001, required all newly arriving Sudanese refugees to register in the Sudanese refugee camps in northern Uganda. Since the return of the LRA to northern Uganda, and its resumption of targeted attacks on Sudanese refugee camps, those camps are no longer safe for refugees.

Prospects for the Future

In northern Uganda, both the LRA and the UPDF continue to commit abuses. The LRA attacks internally displaced camps and villages and Sudanese refugee camps, burning and looting property, and killing civilians. The UPDF and the Ugandan government seem intent on further displacing civilians into larger and larger camps—by, for instance, requiring food deliveries for two camps to be made at a single camp, thus encouraging displaced to move to the one camp—while protection remains poor. The Ugandan government's maintenance of Sudanese refugee camps in an unsafe area near the border, and its requirement that all Sudanese refugees (but not other nationalities of refugees in Uganda) register in such camps, puts refugees at risk. Continuing LRA activities in Sudan threaten Sudanese civilians with death, displacement, and destruction.

For years, civil society leaders in northern Uganda, most prominently the "Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative," have called for a peaceful solution to the conflict through negotiations. In July 2002, highly-placed Acholi civil society leaders, with the permission of Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, were engaged in "talks about talks" with the highest-ranking LRA officers immediately under Kony. The rebels wanted a ceasefire prior to peace talks.

In a letter of July 20, 2002 conveyed by the civil society leaders to the LRA, President Museveni offered a ceasefire on condition the LRA stop kidnappings, attacks on civilians, soldiers, and transport, and canton its troops in specified areas in southern Sudan (the Owiny Kibul, Panyikwara and Aswa valley areas) for a few weeks, while negotiations were carried out.

Ugandan government officials sometimes referred to the northern Uganda conflict as "Acholi killing themselves." Some officials noted that no rebel force could exist in that area if the civilians did not want them there. However, the UPDF has prosecuted its war with the LRA in a manner that disregarded the rights of civilians in northern Uganda, and even targeted some for ill-treatment in violation of human rights. On August 23, President Museveni "pitched camp" in Gulu to oversee the crisis. He designated a government team for negotiations with the rebels, and in discussions both parties agreed to a ceasefire, but as of this writing nothing has been agreed upon.

Recommendations

The government of Uganda should take all practical steps to stop its abuses and actions that endanger civilians:

- The government should not order displacement for reasons related to the conflict unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand.
- Should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures should be taken in order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition. When considering the safety of displaced persons camps, the government should weigh the security risks inherent in creating a potential target for LRA attack against the potential security benefits.
- Since the only stated governmental purpose for displacement and creation of the displaced persons camps in northern Uganda has been to provide protection for the civilians, if the Ugandan government is unable to do so, the camps should be moved to a safe location outside northern Uganda, the theatre of the LRA war. A recommendation that the camps be provided with enough security is not useful at this time as the government has been asked to do this for years and either has not done it or has not been able to do it to the extent required.
- Sudanese refugee camps should be moved to a safer place farther from the Sudan border, and Sudanese refugees should be permitted to seek asylum in Uganda's towns and cities, rather than being forced to apply solely in refugee camps in strife-torn northern Uganda.
- The Ugandan government must stop recruiting children as soldiers, home guards or other auxiliary forces.
- Wherever possible the Ugandan government should spare LRA child soldiers and apply international standards for escaped, captured, or demobilized children.
- The Ugandan government should provide for an arrest process that guarantees fair trial rights and puts the judiciary in charge of the extension of detention periods longer than forty-eight hours. Those not tried within a reasonable period should be released without charges.
- The Ugandan government should vigorously investigate and punish all acts of torture and ill-treatment of detainees.

The LRA should cease its abuses of the civilian population in Uganda and Sudan, including:

- Stop attacks on civilians and civilian objects, and refrain from attacking military objectives if excessive civilian losses would result; cease indiscriminate attacks on civilians and civilian objects including killing, looting, and destruction of civilian property.
- Stop forced portering and conscription. Release all persons younger than eighteen years of age and permit all persons forcibly recruited into the LRA (when they were less than eighteen years of age) to choose whether to return to their homes, and allow monitoring of this process by national and international nongovernmental organizations or by the U.N.
- Stop attacks on relief vehicles and personnel.

The Sudan government should:

- Immediately lift its ban on relief agency flights (by the U.N. and others) into southern Sudan, particularly the area east of the Nile and south of the Juba-Torit line, and permit free movement for humanitarian operations.

The Sudan government and allied militias and the SPLA should:

- Take all necessary steps to protect Sudanese civilians from the effects of the LRA war inside Sudan.

The international community should:

- Press the Ugandan and Sudanese governments to fulfill these conditions, and maintain pressure for the LRA and the UPDF to respect human rights and humanitarian law and in particular demobilize all child soldiers (including those adults abducted or recruited as children) in their ranks.
- Take steps to ensure that any peace agreement proposed for the solution of the conflict in northern Uganda must include enforceable measures to protect and respect human rights, including provisions against impunity for past crimes.
- Insist that all parties provide immediate and unimpeded access for humanitarian activities both in southern Sudan and northern Uganda, where the needs have skyrocketed.