

## The Emergency in Northern Uganda

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*From the Northern Uganda Advocacy Partnership for Peace (NUAPP)*



### Key Facts

- The conflict in northern Uganda between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda (GoU) has lasted since 1986
- While the LRA's political agenda is unclear, it abducts children and young people from the northern region and forces them to fight and kill fellow civilians. These abductees now make up the majority of the rebel army
- At least 1.4 million people (mostly in the Acholi region) are living in displaced people's camps, where access to food, safe water, sanitation, medical services and education is extremely limited
- Regular brutal raids are a feature of the conflict, despite the efforts of the GoU to crush the rebellion militarily and to protect the displaced people's camps
- Over 40,000 children are currently "night commuters" – leaving their homes every night to walk up to 10 miles to temporary shelters in town centres, which give them better protection from LRA raids and abductions

### NUAPP urges the British Government:

- **to play a more active role in supporting the current peace efforts in northern Uganda, whilst continuing to back long-term peace efforts by civil society;**
- **to recognise the risks and complexities of the International Criminal Court investigation in Uganda, especially the implications of ICC indictments before a peace agreement is signed; and**
- **to place a greater priority on seeking a peaceful, just and lasting solution to the conflict in its dealings with the Government of Uganda**

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Contact: Tim Raby, [tim.raby@tearfund.org](mailto:tim.raby@tearfund.org), 0208 943 7710

## **Peace Efforts**

It is widely recognised that military intervention alone cannot bring an end to this conflict. Since the mid-1990s civil society has been working to build peace in northern Uganda, creating a foundation for recent developments. Attempts to reach a peaceful settlement between December 2004 and February 2005 led to a series of ceasefires and the first face-to-face meeting between senior LRA commanders and GoU officials for 10 years. While an agreement was not reached during this period, peace efforts remain underway, though fragile and partial. **There remains a crucial window of opportunity for peace:**

- Regular contact is taking place between the chief mediator, Betty Bigombe, and the LRA commander, Joseph Kony.
- Kony has shown a willingness to offer terms of negotiation, although these have not been accepted by the GoU. The failure of the LRA to articulate its political agenda has proved a stumbling block to previous peace efforts.
- President Museveni has demonstrated a greater willingness to seek the help of the international community. The Governments of Norway, the Netherlands and Great Britain are currently providing support to the Bigombe initiative. International support is considered vital to overcome the mistrust between the LRA and the GoU.
- The LRA has traditionally been based in S Sudan and received support from elements within the Sudanese Government. The conflict in Uganda could threaten the completion of the South Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement.
- Greater international scrutiny of Museveni's record has brought some attention to the conflict, although the pace of transition to a multiparty system and the extension of the presidential term limit seem to be the issues most greatly exercising the British Govt.

## **The International Criminal Court**

The ICC's investigation into Uganda began in 2004. It is believed that indictments are now imminent. Whilst supportive of the ICC's mandate, civil society in Uganda and the chief mediator, Betty Bigombe, have raised real concerns that the indictment of LRA commanders could jeopardise hopes for a negotiated end to the conflict.

## **The Political Atmosphere in Uganda**

On March 17<sup>th</sup> 2005, Hilary Benn, whilst recognising the impact of the LRA on Northern Uganda stated that "LRA activity has had minimal effect on the stability of Uganda's central government". It is generally recognised that one of the major factors in keeping this emergency largely forgotten by the international community is that it is not perceived to be a threat to the effective functioning of the Ugandan state.

In March 2006, presidential elections will be held, in which President Museveni will be entitled to stand again as a result of the Ugandan Parliament's decision to remove presidential term limits from the constitution. International NGOs are concerned that in a context of ongoing insecurity, people in northern Uganda will remain disenfranchised from the political process.

In certain areas, the British Government has shown itself to be willing to use its influence over the Government of Uganda. Recently, £5million of British aid was withheld from the Government of Uganda due to the slow transition to multiparty politics, which will partly be addressed by a referendum on 28<sup>th</sup> July.

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