



REPORT

The Peace Process in Northern Uganda

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Overview

In May 2003, the Liu Institute for Global Issues sent associate Dr. Erin Baines to the Northern Dialogue for Peace to assess the current status of the peace process, identify critical actors involved in this process and provide a preliminary analysis of the role of donor agencies in this process. This report details a) a synopsis of the Dialogue b) the current human security crisis in Northern Uganda c) the role of different stakeholders in the peace process and d) potential research and policy actions required in the region

A. THE NORTHERN DIALOGUE FOR PEACE WORKSHOP, 9-10 MAY 2003

The most recent efforts at peace talks to end northern Uganda's 17-year civil war have all but collapsed in the last month. The Ugandan government formally ended a limited ceasefire agreement with the Lords Resistance Army (LRA), claiming the latter was not sincere in its intentions. The Ugandan People's Defence Force (UPDF) continues to pursue 'Operation Iron Fist' to eliminate the LRA, as well as a strategy of forced displacement of the population for their supposed 'protection'.

Despite repeated failures to initiate talks between the LRA and Government of Uganda and the increasing scale of human insecurities (see below), several peace initiatives are underway in the region, governmental and non-governmental, local, regional and international.

The two-day Northern Dialogue for Peace Workshop in Gulu was an attempt to bring together stakeholders in the peace process to stimulate coordination of efforts and reinstate peace talks.ⁱ

Peace stakeholders present at the Northern Dialogue included the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), the Presidential Peace Team (PPT) and the District Peace Teams (DPT), the Ugandan Human Rights Commission, Ugandan victims and survivors of the conflict and members of the international community.

Behind the scenes talks resulted in the inauguration of **Oduru Kuc** - which in the northern Acholi language translates as 'peace call' - a new body comprising religious leaders, international agencies, MPs, local councillors, elders, women representatives and influential Acholis from the Diaspora.ⁱⁱ

The committee was formed in response to the criticism that previous civil society efforts at peace talks failed because would-be mediators sent mixed messages to the rebels'

senior commanders. Its aim is to bring together all the various parties under a single committee so that they can talk with one voice.

Still, the difficulty of engaging the LRA in talks was cited as a major obstacle to the process. It is unclear what the organizational structure of the LRA is, and whether or not former talks with different LRA members is representative of the highest authorities.

The absence of either high level government officials or any representative of the LRA were sighted as major weaknesses of the Dialogue. Moreover, many participants were sceptical of the Government of Uganda's willingness to end the conflict through peaceful negotiation, and have been accused of undermining the capacity of civil society members to do so. The UPDF were also criticized for human rights abuses and for obstructing peace talks.

For instance, the army has repeatedly intervened in civil society efforts to meet with rebels to initiate talks. In August 2002, the UPDF shot and then arrested Father Carlos Rodriguez as he attempted to meet with the rebels. The national newspaper, the Monitor, was closed when it reported losses of the army in the North, including the downing of a military helicopter. In March 2003, the UPDF again intervened when the Presidential Peace Team attempted to meet rebels. These incidents only lead to even greater levels of mistrust, sending mixed messages regarding the government's sincerity in reaching a peaceful resolution. This also raises the question of a 'unified government voice', where hard-line elements of the military oppose a peaceful resolution.

The anti-terrorism law has also complicated the process of a negotiated peace. Approaching the LRA for talks risks being labelled a 'collaborator', an act of treason under this law, and has resulted in several arrests.

A report of the workshop is forthcoming by sponsors in the coming month.

B. HUMAN INSECURITY IN NORTHERN UGANDA

"Between June and September 2002, more lives and property were lost than in the whole of 2001. Close to 1000 people including civilians, UPDF soldiers and the rebels lost their lives".

The humanitarian emergency in Northern Uganda is reaching a critical level. The scale of child and adult abduction by the LRA has increased exponentially to the start of Operation Iron First in 2002, resulting in an estimated 5,000 'stolen children' or more in the past year (HRW 2003). As this report is written, daily abductions occur only

kilometres away from where the Northern Uganda Dialogue for Peace was held in Gulu. On May 12, LRA rebels raided Lacor Junior Seminary in northern Uganda, killed a child and abducted 41 boy students and local villagers who had sought refuge in the compound, thinking it safer to sleep there than at home (IRIN 8 May 2003 2003).

Impact of rebel activities on the population in 2001 and 2002

	UPDF Dead	Rebels dead	Civilians Killed	Civilians rescued/rel eased	Civilians injured	Civilians abducte d
2001	40	60	98	264	125	52
2002	171	436	670	737	172	1775

Source: UHRC 2001-2002 Annual Report

The reality of the abduction threat has led to an eerie ritual each night in Gulu town. As dusk enters the town each night so too do thousands of village children seeking refuge from the LRA. 'It's a reality', said Mads Oyen, a UNICEF protection officer who visited the children sleeping in fields, bus stops and stadiums.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps have swollen in number over the past year and inhabitants now number up to 840,000 (out of a total population of 1.1 million). In some camps, up to 82 percent of people live below the poverty line. Malnutrition and disease have risen where shortages in medical, food and health services have fallen off due to lack of humanitarian access. Most camps are only accessible with military convoys, and in past few months humanitarian aid workers have been targeted and killed by the rebels. Camps are unprotected from LRA attacks, as promised by the UPDF.

Reports of UPDF human rights violations and recruitment of child soldiers have been made by human rights bodies (HRW 2003). The UPDF are accused of forcibly recruiting child soldiers, and the detention and torture of 'rescued' children.

The situation in Northern Uganda is complex. Victims are also perpetrators, where child soldiers are sometimes forced to murder, loot or rape their neighbours, families and friends. A culture of fear permeates the camps and towns, where community members are vulnerable to attack from the LRA should they collaborate with the UPDF, and vice versa. The challenge of rehabilitation in this insecure and complex environment is formidable.

C. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE PEACE PROCESS

Stakeholders in the peace process cross a wide range of actors from international donors, regional and national governments, the population and children, to the LRA. This section details some of those actors and their roles, recognizing that the voices of the LRA and children are under-represented here.

International Donors

Advocacy

Participants cautioned that the International Community must exercise great care in their advocacy of the GoU. No participant disabused the idea that the situation in Northern Uganda has gotten worse since President Yoweri Museveni has pursued a military solution to the conflict, resulting in the current military campaign. Operation Iron First has cut off the LRA from Sudanese resources and a territorial base in that country, but in turn has resulted in increased LRA activities, including abductions, mutilations, rape, looting and murder.

Dialogue participants stressed the locality of the conflict, and need for a locally owned peace process, following similar models in Uganda's history of ending violent rebellions (eg. Teso rebellion and West Nile).

On the question of a Special Envoy and international advocacy around the security of children to the UN and donor governments, the Dialogue background paper stated, "it is highly unlikely that such high level interventions will engender trust in the LRA, or contribute to a de-escalation of conflict". A number of LRA statements indicate a high level of distrust of the international community, particularly humanitarian actors perceived to be complicit with the government's military strategy.

The background paper reiterated a concern for local solutions voiced by participants "An appropriate stock of credibility with elements within the LRA has been built up by individuals and community leaders in the north who have had contact with the rebels. Their role will continue to be crucial in facilitating contacts with the government. A time might come when both sides would specifically and genuinely invite mediate. That is likely to be quite a while off" (p.13).

Humanitarian Access

Given the rise in rebel attacks, humanitarian access has grown increasingly more difficult to obtain. Aid workers have been taken hostage, murdered and ambushed in the past year. In the panel on 'return and reintegration', a USAID representative proposed that negotiating access in specified 'safe zones', where the LRA and UPDF would agree to a ceasefire, could be a means of building confidence. This idea was not discussed further

during the Dialogue, but should be investigated to see if there is indeed follow-up among donor groups. In the meantime, the UPDF is not providing the protection it promised to IDP camps. Armed convoys are necessary to reach camps, and are frequently disrupted by ambushes. The level of insecurity raises critical dilemmas for the donor community on how to respond.

Development

While development agencies are active in the South, the North of Uganda has enjoyed limited success in development initiatives due to the ongoing conflict.ⁱⁱⁱ Waiting for peace might only further contribute to the cycle of violence. As the head of the government's peace team, Salim Saleh, said the peace talks had 'achieved nothing', but in the meantime 'we can do other things to help the population. Production is central in this. Once Acholiland develops, freeing up some cash, then Kony will be brought to the table' (IRIN 9 May 2003).

Mr. Saleh may be referring to the link between cycles of poverty and conflict. While the South has experienced a 38 percent drop in poverty headcount between 1992-2000 from 56 percent to 35 percent, the North has seen poverty levels from 60 percent rise to 66 percent (2/3 people).

Due to the extreme poverty in camps, some children and young men prefer to stay in the 'bush' or join the army to at least secure some kind of income. In turn, young women are often forced to 'marry' – a euphemism for prostitute or seeking 'sugar daddies' – to secure some kind of economic support, or to join armed forces themselves. The lack of economic alternatives feeds the next cycle of soldiers, alienation and poverty.

Historically, development agencies did not intervene in conflict zones because of high levels of insecurity. Donors need to continue to challenge this lack of engagement, and think more creatively to respond beyond humanitarian needs of a populace caught in conflict, and toward confidence building measures that improve human security situation and possibilities for peace including: income generation alternatives to war economies, security sector reform, support of human rights and other civil organizations within conflict zones, support of free media, countering hate propaganda, and support to civil society and nascent peace coalitions. Some of this is done in Northern Uganda, but the absence of international donor presence is notable, particularly beyond relief measures.

In the meantime, the Government of Uganda has recently released a Discussion Paper (April 2003) to think forwardly about the possibilities of post-conflict reconstruction, outlining areas of needed intervention in social and economic welfare. The conflict-development-relief 'gap' becomes relevant here: it is, as noted in the Dialogue background paper, it is unlikely that LRA soldiers will engage in dialogue with the

government unless there are viable economic alternatives for them in a post-conflict period. This also raises governance issues, where a stake in the national political agenda fosters confidence in securing economic resources. Currently, initiatives such as the Amnesty Act might 'guarantee' safety post-return, but do not extend to meet the however oblique demands of the LRA. Hence the importance of a locally negotiated peace process, or efforts to building peace processes, referred to below.

Civil society, Government and Military Actors

Despite the lack of a ceasefire or peace agreement, return and reintegration of x-rebels (largely child soldiers) is on going. There are several actors involved in facilitating the return process, including the Amnesty Commission, UPDF, ARLPI, NGOs such as World Vision and the Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), and more recently, the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Strategies include the Amnesty Law overseen by the Amnesty Commission, the 'rescue' of child soldiers by UPDF and demobilization through 'Child Protection Units' and rehabilitation centers, traditional cleansing ceremonies and rehabilitation centers.

Government Actors and Military Responses

Formal efforts to bring peace to the region were renewed with the convening of the **Presidential Peace Team** in August 2002. Since its inauguration however, progress in defining a strategy has been slow. In August 2002 the President went to Gulu to assess the situation personally. Nevertheless, alternatives have not been forthcoming and Operation Iron Fist continues. The PPT will also have to overcome accusations of self-interest and politicization, where some have charged they exist solely to attract international funding and act as intelligence gathering officers for the army. To realize their mandate of engaging the LRA in talks, they will also have to address elements within the military that take a more hard-line approach to resolving the conflict.

Efforts at Peace making and reconciliation

- Peace pact with UPDA in June 1988
- July 1990 Addis Ababa peace accord with UPDM
- Peace negotiations with LRA
- Establishment of County Security Committees in 1989
- The Acholi Pacification Committee (APC) in 1994
- Establishment of protected villages
- Blanket Amnesty
- Facilitation the return of political exiles
- Repatriation of refugees and abducted children

- Reintegration of former combatants into the UPDF
- Disarmament
- Improving diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries
- Civil society involvement

The **District Peace Teams** in Kitgum, Pader and Gulu, sensitize and mobilize the population around the Amnesty Act (2000) and facilitate dialogue at a regional level.^{iv} The Amnesty Act (2000) and **Amnesty Commission** includes the **Demobilization and Resettlement Team** (DRT) officers operating at regional level and work with the UPDF, Police, Director of Public Prosecution, NGOs and donor agencies. Commendable progress has been made in realizing benefits from the Amnesty Act but many challenges remain, including building confidence regarding the ability to provide security to former combatants and a backlog of Amnesty reporters.

Important regional initiatives include the normalization of **Sudan-Uganda relations**. The Nairobi Accord and other regional peace efforts seek to address the difficulties of each state support to rebel groups. While implementation has been slow, the thawing of relations is an important process itself. This may have been given impetus by the events of September 11th 2001, where terrorist groups have become a primary pre-occupation of foreign policies across the globe. Seeking to reclaim some amount of international legitimacy and distance itself from the label of harbouring terrorists, the Sudanese government has cooperated in Operation Iron Fist.

Civil Society

The strength and wealth of civil society leaders in Northern Uganda was demonstrated by their participation and presence at the Northern Dialogue for Peace. These actors have engaged in a variety of efforts to bring peace to the region, including national and international advocacy (for example, lobbying the GoU and realizing the 2000 Amnesty Act), attempted talks with the LRA and rehabilitation and reconciliation efforts, such as traditional healing ceremonies.

Civil Society Actors for Peace in Northern Uganda

- Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI)
- Gulu Support the Children organization (GUSCO)
- 'Ka In Kono' Women's Association (KIKWA) in Acholi
- UWESO, Gulu Branch
- Gulu District Reconciliation Peace Team
- Church of Uganda
- World Vision International
- Centre for Conflict resolution
- People's Voice for Peace
- Human Rights Focus (HRF), Gulu

• Justice and Peace Commission Joint Forum for Peace (JFP) in Pader and Kitgum
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The formation of the peace coalition - **Oduru Kuc** - among civil society members was a response to the perceived weakness of these efforts: that is, lack of coordination. No doubt that funding will be sought for support of this coalition. Generally, the ARLPI and local traditional chiefs are given high regard and respect. However, raised expectations also engender the danger of over-estimating capacity and pressing an unrealistic time-frame. There is also some rumour of self-interest in 'profiting from the peace process', suggesting that the actions of civil society members, like that of the government and military, need transparency and some mechanism of accountability.

D. Research and Policy Interventions

Despite a wealth of information on key actors, processes and events in Northern Uganda, more research and policy interventions may be required to enhance the peace process. An encouraging step in this direction is the commission of two studies on the source and dynamics of the conflict by USAID and EC. Preliminary findings based on participation in the Dialogue suggest the need to focus on specific dimensions, such as:

1. **Geographical dimensions of the conflict.** In the first instance, a sharp divide in resources, political representation and perception of the root causes of the conflict exists between **Northern and Southern Uganda**. Several interveners in the Dialogue emphasized the need to understand and address the conflict in terms of this dimension, not solely as a problem rooted in 'Acholland'. Particular attention was given to the role of the media in reproducing the idea that the conflict was contained within the North, drawing on racial stereotypes that the Acholi are 'warlike' people. Such stereotypes also fuel the fear of Southerners that a move towards democratic openings in the country would lead to multi-partyism and the spread of the conflict. Some argued this perception has helped the President justify his one movement approach and military response to the situation. In the second instance, the **regional spill over** of conflicts and refugee movements from Sudan and the DRC, as well as movement of rebels and arms across borders indicates this conflict has a regional dimension, not fully explored by researchers or policy makers. To what extent are actors in the peace process taking a regional approach? Finally, international developments in response to terrorism post-September 11th suggests an **international dimension** to the conflict may need analysis and address.
2. **Restorative Justice.** The lack of communication and coordination between different stakeholders in the peace process suggests that a mapping exercise of current efforts to promote restorative justice amidst conflict and towards the process of peace is essential. Such a mapping exercise would assist in policy development towards support of this process as well as civil organizations currently involved.

3. **The political economy of the conflict.** Few reliable, empirical analysis exist of the political-economic factors fueling the conflict, yet the seeming elusiveness of the peace process to reach its goals suggests that involved actors have some stake in the continuation of the conflict. What these factors are – be it some kind of regional resource dimension, manipulation of aid, development of a war economy, corruption or means of military control – need further consideration.
4. **Child recruitment, abduction and rehabilitation.** The conflict has torn the social fabric of Acholi communities, targeting future generations and installing fear as a way of life amongst its youngest members. A variety of initiatives to stop the forced recruitment of child soldiers by the LRA and UPDF, and to facilitate the rehabilitation of ex-child soldiers exist, some outlined in this document. A diagnostic of these over-lapping, sometimes contradictory efforts would facilitate a coordinated approach among donors, the government, the LRA and civil organizations. Presently, the security situation is such that follow-up to demobilized soldiers is extremely difficult. Good practices of what works, and does not work, may be necessary. A gender analysis is critical to this analysis.
5. **The internally displaced and humanitarian access.** The high levels of insecurity raise the question of humanitarian access. What strategies have worked in the past and why? What dynamics fuel the current status of inaccessibility and how might they be addressed? How might donors begin to look at rehabilitative development as a means of preparing for peace, such as access to land and employment?
6. **Donor relations to the GoU:** The current level of donor investment in development in the South, and the tensions between the South and North are important considerations for future donor-government relations. The LRA exhibits a high level of skepticism towards the international community, citing political bias. On the other hand, more information on what types of conflict analysis are applied by donors operating in the South is needed. For example, how does such assistance impact North-South relations, and what political conditionalities placed on the GoU have resulted in positive versus negative changes? What fills the relief-development-security gap?

The Liu Institute for Global Issues pursues interdisciplinary and policy-related research and advocacy on global public policy issues related to human security. Its research agenda embraces international relations, human security, peace and

disarmament, global public opinion and democratization, the environment, conflict and development, and global health and international justice issues.

The Liu Institute for Global Issues, together with Makerere University Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC) and Human Rights Watch (HRW), are working to coordinate and consolidate an immediate civil society response to northern Uganda.

NOTES

ⁱ The workshop was organized by the Gulu District Reconciliation and Peace Team, a group working for dialogue between the government and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and supported by the Canadian Physicians' for Aid and Relief, Britain's Department for International Development (DFID), Save the Children-Denmark, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision and the Uganda Human Rights Commission.

ⁱⁱ The Gulu Catholic Archbishop, Jean Baptist Odama, will chair the Committee.

ⁱⁱⁱ According to one source, the World Bank funded reconstruction programmes in the 1990s, and has more recently committed funds to a Northern Uganda Social Action Fund; the European Commission has an Acholi Development Programme for three Acholi districts, and USAID has supported some economic development programmes to stimulate income generation. However, the challenges remain formidable in the face of the conflict.

^{iv} The Gulu Reconciliation and Peace Team and Kitgum Joint Forum for Peace were actually established in 1999, before the Amnesty Act was approved. More recently, the Pader District Peace Forum has been created.