



Northern Uganda

Human Security Update

November 2004 – February 2005

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Introduction

This human security update outlines major issues and events from the conflict in Northern Uganda over November 2004 to mid February 2005. The update focuses on the humanitarian and security situation, the peace process, and international, regional, and national political and judicial developments.

It was written on the basis of data and information compiled from United Nations Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reports, newspaper articles in Ugandan newspapers *The Monitor* and *New Vision*, BBC World News, Reuters UK, press releases from Amnesty International and NGOs working in the region, and through correspondence with human rights and conflict experts.

The Humanitarian Situation

Human Security Snapshot:

- 1.3 million people in Northern Uganda are currently internally displaced, a decrease from the peak of 1.6 million in March 2004.
- OCHA in Gulu district reports that the LRA is abducting children primarily to carry food and supplies and then is releasing them, rather than abducting children to increase the number of soldiers.¹
- The number of 'night commuters' has declined significantly since the ceasefire in November began. OCHA in Gulu district estimated 32,000 children walked each night to the security of large towns in December 2004.²
- Oxfam in Uganda continues to warn of the deteriorating conditions in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and the worsening humanitarian crisis. Overcrowded conditions have led to the spread of disease and exhausted medical services, humanitarian aid, and protection.³
- The severity of conditions in IDP camps have been linked with increases in suicides in IDP camps.
- Surveys conducted by Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in October 2004 revealed that 62% of women interviewed at a health clinic in Pader Town think about committing suicide.
- Due to the rapid construction and limited planning of IDP camps, close living quarters have contributed to the increase in and severity of accidental fires. A wave of fires broke out in IDP camps over the weekend of January 21-23, 2005. One fire was reported at Acet camp in Gulu, where 3 people died, 4050 huts were burnt, 20,000 people were left homeless, and food and supplies were destroyed. 278 huts were destroyed in Abok camp in Apac, 1548 in Agweng camp in Lira, 200 in Keyo camp in Gulu, and 50 in Cope camp in Gulu. The following

¹ Relief Web, *Uganda Complex Emergency Situation Report #1*, January 5, 2005

² The number of children commuting each night serves as an indicator of the severity of the conflict. For example, an increase in the number of children seeking refuge generally indicates an increase in the magnitude of violence in the region. Relief Web, *Uganda Complex Emergency Situation Report #1*, January 5, 2005

³ IRIN News, *Optimism that Sudanese peace deal could help pacify northern Uganda*, January 11, 2005

- weekend, on January 28, six people were killed, 2000 huts were destroyed, and approximately 10,000 people were left without shelter from a fire.
- On November 22, 2004, four opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) from northern districts were reportedly targeted and beaten by UPDF soldiers in Pader district as they held consultations on a White Paper released by Cabinet. Included in the White Paper was discussion on a proposed amendment to Uganda's constitution of striking the current limitation of two terms for the presidency and legislation to take control of land for environmental uses, investment purposes or as historical sites.

The Sudan Factor

The recent peace agreement between the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and the Sudanese Government has also brought renewed hope of peace in Northern Uganda. There is emphasis on the success of the Sudanese peace talks for stabilizing both the region of Southern Sudan and the relationship between Kampala and Khartoum. The Sudan Peace Accord, signed January 9, 2005, officially ended a civil war that has lasted for twenty-one years and has claimed more than two million lives.⁴ According to IRIN, Dr. John Garang, the SPLA leader, has stated that the LRA is unwelcome in Southern Sudan and will be "treated as enemies of the United Sudan. They have no business on our territory".⁵ On February 5, SPLA Deputy Governor in charge of Political Affairs in Equatorial Province, Mr. Juma Johnson Okot, announced that the SPLA and the UPDF will carry out joint military operations against the LRA.

Beginning in 1994, the LRA's assets came almost entirely from looted civilian goods and from supplies given by the Sudanese government. The Government of Uganda financially supported the SPLA so, in retaliation and in an effort to subdue the SPLA, the Sudanese government began supporting the LRA. The Sudanese government supplied weapons and other combat-related necessities to the LRA to fight the SPLA, which was waging war to establish Sudan as a secular and democratic state. The Sudanese government also permitted the LRA to enter and establish camps in its southern territory.

⁴ The Sudanese Government and the leader of the SPLA signed the treaty in Nairobi, Kenya. The treaty promises equal sharing of power and wealth and implementing measures for democratic elections.

⁵ IRIN News, *Optimism that Sudanese peace deal could help pacify northern Uganda*, January 11, 2005

United Nations Briefing

In January, in his briefing to the Security Council, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief, Jan Egeland made the following statement:

“Since I last briefed you about Northern Uganda in October, the security environment has improved thanks largely to the start of a dialogue between the government and the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). The level of violence is substantially lower than in the past two years, and the number of IDPs has fallen from 1.6 to 1.3 million people.

The ongoing efforts provide the best opportunity in more than a decade to bring the conflict to an end. President Museveni has shown his willingness to find a peaceful resolution, and the LRA has repeatedly indicated its interest to do so as well. The government declared a limited ceasefire on 14 November 2004, and senior government officials met face-to-face with the LRA on 29 December 2004. Although the government’s ceasefire expired on 31 December 2004, the mediator, Ms. Betty Bigombe has continued to meet face-to-face with LRA representatives in an effort to finalize a cessation of hostilities agreement. She also maintains her contacts with the government. Ms. Bigombe, assisted by some member states and UN staff, is doing an excellent job under difficult and dangerous conditions, and I urge the Council to demonstrate its support for her efforts. The parties should be strongly encouraged to fully pursue the path of peace, and should be assured of international support in their efforts to reconcile, recover and rebuild from almost two decades of war.

The United Nations stands ready to do its part. When I met with President Museveni in Kampala in early December, we agreed on an overall framework of assistance, to be led by the UN, if and when an agreement is reached with the LRA. The UN will continue to play the lead role in providing humanitarian assistance to the affected population in the north and planning for the possible return of IDPs, as well as organize and support reintegration efforts for child combatants and provide support for a reconciliation process among sectors of society in Northern Uganda.”

In February, Oxfam in Uganda accused the United Nations Security Council of being “appallingly negligent of the conflict in Uganda, failing to pass a single resolution”.⁶ They emphasize that the conflict has gone largely unnoticed over the past two decades and that other international crises are overshadowing the severity of the conflict in Northern Uganda. Oxfam states that despite the recent peace talks, “Northern Uganda teeters on the brink of a full return to war” and urges the Security Council to initiate an international push for peace.

⁶ Reuters UK, *UN “appallingly negligent of Uganda war”*, January 27, 2005

Peace Negotiations

The Ugandan government announced a month-long ceasefire beginning on November 14, 2004 to enable LRA rebels to safely meet mediators and each other to discuss the potential of holding peace talks. Both the traditional leadership in Acholiland (the districts of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader), and the Government of Uganda have engaged in peace talks with LRA commanders. Acholi elders and cultural leaders, led by Acholi Paramount Chief Rwot David Onen Acana II, met with LRA rebels on December 7. LRA commanders stated that they want reassurance that the government will not seek retribution during or after demobilization, that their communities will welcome them back, and that the ICC will not indict the commanders. The Acholi leaders reportedly assured the LRA commanders that they would not be punished for their crimes if they cooperated with government peace negotiations. However, the LRA announced that they would not meet with the government without also meeting with Acholi leaders to ensure their safety. This meeting also resulted in the release of LRA spokesman, Brigadier Sam Otto Kolo's wife and child.



Betty Bigombe, former Ugandan Cabinet Minister for the Pacification of the North (1986 – 1996) remains the chief negotiator in the current peace talks. On December 28, Bigombe led a delegation of Acholi district and religious leaders to meet the LRA delegation led by Kolo. This meeting resulted in the announcement that a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was to be signed on December 31, between the government and the LRA. Government officials met with the LRA for the first time in the conflict's history on December 29 though the December 31 meeting was cancelled hours before it was to take place, signalling the end of the ceasefire. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni ordered the army to resume military operations against the rebels and stated that further talks would only take place outside Uganda.

Failure to have both parties sign the MOU has been attributed to various factors. First, some argue that the government is working against the peace talks and have their own interests in prolonging the conflict. Sudan's peace agreement denies the LRA a base in Southern Sudan and the Ugandan government is arguably less willing to compromise because the LRA is at a disadvantage. Another factor is that Kolo was reportedly given twenty-four hours to confer with Kony and other top commanders. He requested but was denied more time to review the MOU with top commanders who were spread throughout Northern Uganda. A third identified factor is the absence of top LRA commanders and leading government officials at the meetings. Those representatives present at the meetings have little authority themselves to make decisions, instead reporting discussions back to their superiors. A fourth identified factor is that the LRA have reportedly claimed that they fear UPDF ambushes and saboteurs, and cancel meetings when they hear the UPDF are in the area. Although the breakdown of previous peace negotiations, including the negotiations in 1994, have been the calm before the storm of increased LRA attacks, many locals are optimistic about the most recent developments. NGOs in Northern Uganda share this optimism and state that this most recent setback is just that, and that the negotiations must be given time in order to be successful.

Bigombe kept an active dialogue with the LRA commanders throughout the ceasefire and met with them on January 4, where she presented an eleven-point MOU. At a second meeting on January 10, she met with top LRA commander, Onen Kamdulu who is said to be a confidante of Kony. Kamdulu released three of his wives, which Bigombe considered a "good gesture for peace". At a third meeting on January 17, Bigombe discussed the details of the draft MOU in an effort to arrive at a signed MOU for negotiation. The government decided at the conclusion of these talks to give the rebels more time to discuss the MOU though stipulated the ceasefire was not to be extended.

The success of the MOU rests not only on the ability of the government and the LRA to support the efforts, but also on the international community to put pressure on both sides to respect the proposed negotiations and ceasefires. In mid January, Bigombe made a request for international NGOs to meet with members of the Security Council and advocate for a statement on the peace process. She made this request in order to ensure that the talks did not completely breakdown. Also, civil society organizations in Gulu district have suggested the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force in Southern Sudan and Northern Uganda, with ceasefires monitors stationed in Northern Uganda.

LRA Attacks and Battles

LRA attacks on civilians continued during the November-December ceasefire and once it expired. On December 12, seven people were hacked to death in Southern Sudan, and on December 25, twenty-two were killed in Pader district. On January 5, rebels amputated fingers of civilians they had abducted in Pader district and the UPDF stated that the rebels had resumed amputating and mutilating their victims to show that they intend to continue fighting. On January

7, three civilians were killed and several others suffered bullet injuries in Gulu district.

The UPDF and the LRA clashed on January 6, leaving three rebels and one UPDF soldier dead. These attacks led to military refortification of IDP camps and major roads in Northern Uganda to protect against further ambushes. Other LRA civilian attacks and clashes with the UPDF took place in January and the beginning of February, resulting in the capture and death of several rebels and the seizure of some weaponry. During one clash on January 16, one of Kony's wives surrendered with her child.

Traditional Leadership

On January 17, the coronation of His Highness Rwot Acana, the twenty-fourth hereditary leader of the Acholi, took place in Gulu. The Acholi people's history and tradition of hereditary leadership that began in the fifteenth century, had been disrupted over the past two decades due to the ongoing war with the LRA rebels. Museveni, Bigombe, and Ministers Betty Akech, Henry Oryem, Grace Akello, members of the Acholi community, diplomatic members of the international community, as well as over 40,000 spectators attended the ceremony. Museveni stated that the government "backed the institution of traditional leadership well knowing that they were good in unification of our people". At the coronation, Museveni spoke of the importance of the event in uniting the people of Uganda, and His Highness made appeals to the LRA to end the conflict and respond to the peace talks initiated by the government.

The International Criminal Court (ICC)⁷ and Traditional Justice

The traditional justice alternative does not deal in innocence or guilt, but rather emphasizes reintegration and reconciliation. Rebels, and child soldiers who have been abducted by the LRA, are encouraged to come out of the bush to reintegrate into their communities. Various traditional justice and reintegration initiatives practiced throughout Northern Uganda are deemed more likely to bring about a peaceful end to the war. The Amnesty Act pardons all those who surrender and Northern Uganda's traditional leaders, working through the umbrella organization Ker Kwaro Acholi, initiate cleansing ceremonies for returning abductees and former LRA rebels, and organize peacebuilding visits and a cultural ritual, known as Mato Oput. Mato Oput involves allows victims and perpetrators to discuss their grievances, and involves the community in deciding appropriate restitution.

Museveni's government recognizes that the ICC is impeding the peace process and is therefore considering withdrawing the ICC referral. This is despite Museveni's referral of the LRA to the ICC in December 2003. The government recognizes that the ICC is considered to be discouraging top rebel commanders from surrendering due to their fear of prosecution. Several groups and individuals

⁷ For more background on the ICC in Uganda, see the Northern Uganda Human Security Update Report, August – April 2004 available online at www.human-security-africa.ca.

have also begun supporting the idea of withdrawal. Though the ICC has assumed jurisdiction over this case and is not compelled to agree to such a request, the ICC Prosecutor can decide whether it is an inappropriate time to proceed with the ICC case. The decision should however be based on sources and information within Uganda.

Ugandans generally approve of the ICC's purpose, yet many feel that in this particular situation traditional justice methods are better suited. Those in favour of seeing the conflict pass through international criminal law are concerned that the traditional justice system offered as an alternative does not have the capability to deliver justice. The international community wants this case to be pursued to show that genocide and indifference are no longer tolerated. Chief ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo announced that he hopes to start the LRA's war crimes trial within six months and warrants are expected to be issued this year. It is important to note that the ICC overrules the Amnesty Act, which means that the ICC could prosecute former LRA commanders who have since been given amnesty.

Concluding Remarks

The last two decades have seen a rise in the number and complexity of internal conflicts and wars, and have also witnessed the increase in UN peacekeeping missions. Yet the devastating conflict and ongoing humanitarian crisis in Northern Uganda is not on the Security Council's agenda and the issue has received little international attention. Although the Ugandan government has been successful in reducing the rate of HIV/AIDS and in stimulating national economic growth, the conflict in Northern Uganda persists and is in need of immediate international assistance. It is only recently that the UN has identified this crisis as one of the "10 most under-reported news stories in the world". With such limited international attention being paid to the conflict, and inadequate resources available to those most affected, it is difficult to determine the depth and severity of this war. The exact number of children abducted and people killed may never be known, highlighting even further the complications of a forgotten war fought by children.

Chronology November 2004 – February 2005

- November 2 - LRA spokesman states LRA wants the Ugandan government to say it is looking for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.
- November 14 - The Ugandan government announces a month-long ceasefire in Northern Uganda.
- November 26 - LRA spokesman states LRA wants to end conflict peacefully.
- December 7 - Paramount Chief Rwot David Onen Acana II leads a group of nineteen chiefs to meet with seven LRA commanders in Palabek, Kitgum. LRA commanders express their fears and promise that 2005 will be a 'year of peace'.
- December 12 - Three women and four children are hacked to death in Rejaf, South Sudan by about thirty LRA fighters.
- December 14 - UPDF soldiers kill sixteen rebels but states that this occurred outside a ceasefire zone, set up for rebel fighters. Three children are reported abducted in Pader. His Highness Rwot Acana requests Museveni extend the ceasefire by two weeks, which is granted.
- December 17 - Museveni extends a ceasefire in parts of Northern Uganda to December 31.
- December 25 - LRA soldiers kill 22 civilians in Pader district.
- December 28 - Bigombe leads government officials, MPs and religious leaders to meet LRA commanders for talks in Kitgum. Participants announce that they expect an MOU will be signed on December 31.
- December 29 - Minister of Internal Affairs meets with the LRA in Kitgum in the attempt of assuring the LRA commanders that in the case of a peace agreement, the government will withdraw the ICC case against them.
- December 31 - Bigombe attempts to meet with LRA rebels but the meeting is cancelled. The ceasefire expires without a signing of the MOU. Museveni orders the army to resume military operations against the rebels and states that further talks would only take place outside Uganda. SPLA leader John Garang and Sudanese Vice President Ali Osman Taha end Southern Sudan's twenty-one year war.

- January 1 - Museveni vows to increase military action against the LRA.
- January 4 - Bigombe meets with LRA rebels to present a revised MOU.
- January 5 - Rebels amputate fingers of abducted civilians in Pader district.
- January 6 - Three LRA rebels and one UPDF soldier are killed and another injured during a battle in Gulu district. A coalition of civil society groups urge the Ugandan government and the LRA to resume talks.
- January 7 - Three civilians are killed and several others suffer bullet injuries in Gulu district.
- January 9 - Garang and Taha sign the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Garang announces he is giving Kony seventy-two hours to leave Sudan.
- January 10 - Betty Bigombe meets with senior rebel commanders in Palaro, Gulu.
- January 12 - The UPDF reports killing eight and capturing ten LRA rebels in Kitgum.
- January 15 - The coronation of His Highness Rwot David Onen Acana II takes place in Gulu.
- January 17 - Betty Bigombe meets with LRA rebels to discuss details of the draft MOU. UPDF soldiers kill twenty fighters and recover military equipment during aerial and ground raids.
- January 19 - The UPDF clashes with the LRA, leaving eight rebels dead in Palabek, Kitgum. Residents in Awach subcounty, Gulu flog the body of LRA rebel commander Lt. Nyeko Biswize who was killed by the UPDF in an ambush.
- January 22 - Senior LRA rebel commander, Brig. Michael Acellam-Odong, is captured by the UPDF along with two of Kony's wives and three of his children. Acellam says they were captured on their way to a high command meeting at Anaka to discuss the draft government ceasefire agreement.
- January 24 - Three people are killed and 30,000 are left homeless following accidental fires in IDP camps.

- January 25 - Bigombe announces that by the end of the week, both sides will have agreed on a date to sign a ceasefire agreement.
- January 26 - Museveni announces the UPDF has defeated the LRA and he advises them to surrender, saying they will not face retribution. Garang pledges to work towards peace in Northern Uganda.
- January 27 - Museveni holds rally with Garang. Garang encourages peace talks.
- January 28 - Ocampo announces he hopes to start the ICC's first war crimes tribunal within six months.
- February 3 - UPDF reports seven rebels are killed in Gulu, five rebels are killed in Awach sub-county, one rebel killed in Pararo sub-county and one rebel captured in Koki kweyo.
- February 4 - A new eighteen-day partial ceasefire takes effect at 7:00am local time. Military operations continue outside the ceasefire zone. LRA Director of Operations Colonel Onen Kamdulu surrenders in Kilak county, and hundreds of people flock to Gulu Town to welcome him.
- February 5 - SPLA Deputy Governor announces the SPLA will carry out joint military operations with the UPDF against the LRA.
- February 6 - Two civilians are shot dead during crossfire between the UPDF and the LRA. One UPDF soldiers is wounded in the clash and four LRA soldiers are captured.
- February 8 - ICC announces plans to issue arrest warrants for LRA leaders. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Gulu Archdiocese states that the ICC may jeopardize the current peace discussions.
- February 13 - His Highness Rwot Acana says it is unwise for the ICC to issue arrest warrants for LRA commanders during negotiations.
- February 14 - UPDF spokesman confirms the UPDF have killed five LRA rebels during a recent battle.
- February 16 - LRA spokesman Sam Kolo surrenders in Kilak county.