

NORTHERN UGANDA: THE FORGOTTEN WAR

“The war in Northern Uganda...has posed a serious challenge to all of us, the people of Uganda. The loss of so many human lives, the maiming and disfiguring of so many people, the disappearance of so many young and innocent children, the destruction of property and the resultant poverty are all a cause of great shame to our country and to our conscience. We can never, never keep silent on this great evil in our country...We can never give up the search for peaceful means to end this long and bitter war.”

- A Concern for Peace, Unity and Harmony in Uganda, Easter Message of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda, April 14, 2004

RECENT UGANDAN HISTORY

Uganda, the "Pearl of Africa," has been plagued by decades of dictatorship, military coup d'états and civil conflict. One of the most notable dictatorial regimes was that of Idi Amin (1971-79), responsible for 300,000 deaths in Uganda. Another brutal regime was that of Milton Obote (1980-85), which claimed another 100,000 lives. Current Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni is generally cited as responsible for the rebirth of the country. The Ugandan government has been praised especially for its efforts to stabilize and grow its economy and steadfast fight against HIV/AIDS. However, issues of government corruption, the slow pace of further reforms and the continued fighting in the North continue to be a major concern.

THE WAR IN NORTHERN UGANDA

The United Nations Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, recently noted that northern Uganda may be the biggest forgotten and neglected humanitarian crisis in the world.

The roots of the northern Ugandan conflict can be traced to unequal social and economic development between different regions in the country, violent regional conflict and marginalized minority groups. After the current Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni took power during a coup in

1986, there was a widespread fear in the North, especially among the dominant ethnic group there, the Acholis that reprisal killings would ensue for atrocities committed when Northerners dominated the army.

As a result, many Northerners joined existing rebel movements, including the Holy Spirit Movement led by Alice Lakwena who claimed to be possessed by a spirit that was guiding her for the good of the Acholi people. When Museveni's government forces defeated the Holy Spirit Movement in 1987, Joseph Kony emerged as a new leader gathering its remnants and forming the Uganda People's Democratic Christian Army, which became the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) around 1994.

GENERAL STATISTICS ON UGANDA	
Source: U.S. Department of State	
Size:	91135 square miles (slightly smaller than Oregon)
Population:	24,699,073 (July 2002 est.)
Religions:	Roman Catholic 33%, Protestant 33%, Muslim 16%, indigenous beliefs 18%
Ethnic Groups:	Baganda 17%, Karamojong 12%, Basogo 8%, Iteso 8%, Langi 6%, Rwanda 6%, Bagisu 5%, Acholi 4%, Lugbara 4%, Bunyoro 3%, Batoro 3%, non-African (European, Asian, Arab) 1%, other 23%
Languages:	English (official national language), Ganda or Luganda, other Niger-Congo languages, Nilo-Saharan languages, Swahili, Arabic
Infant Mortality Rate:	89.35 deaths/1,000 live births (2002 est.)
HIV/AIDS - adult prevalence rate	5% (2001 est.)
People living with HIV/AIDS	600,000 (2001 est.)
GDP - real growth rate:	4.4% (2003 est.)
Population below poverty line:	35% (2001 est.)
Literacy	Definition: age 15 and over can read and write Total population: 69.9% Male: 79.5%; Female: 60.4% (2003 est.)
Exports:	Coffee, cotton, tea, tobacco. Coffee chief export crop and foreign exchange earner.

THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

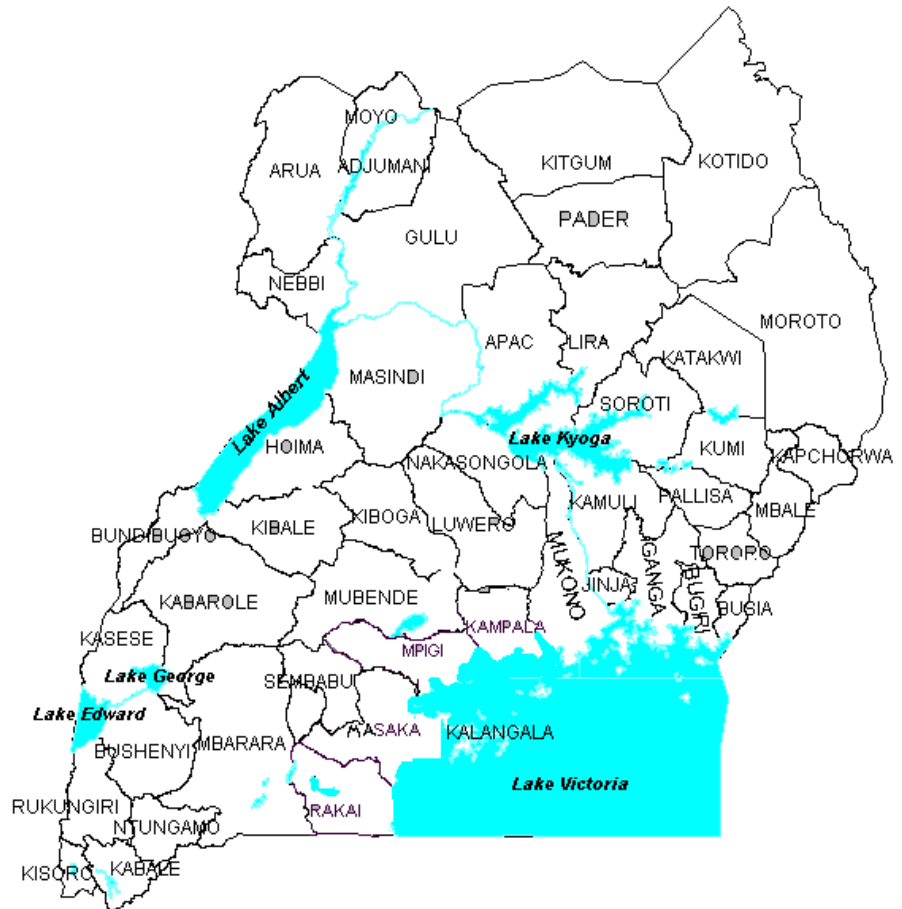
Since 1986, one of the most brutal rebel groups in the world, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony, has waged war against the Ugandan government and President Yoweri Museveni's Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) mainly in the three northernmost districts of Uganda of Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader. This region is referred to as "Acholiland" because the dominant population is part of the Acholi ethnic group. In the nearly 20 years of fighting between the two parties, over 1.5 million people have been displaced. In Pader district alone, it is estimated that 82 percent of the population is now displaced as a result of the conflict.

DETAILED MAP OF UGANDA

Little is known about the reclusive LRA leader, Joseph Kony. He uses spiritualism and biblical revelations to maintain support from his forces. While it is clear the LRA is anti-government, the group has yet to articulate a coherent political program or a set of political demands.

THE IMPACT ON CIVILIANS AND CHILDREN

Throughout the 1980s, the conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan government remained largely military in nature. However, in the early 1990s, the LRA began to focus on civilian targets, instilling terror among villages. The ferocity of the LRA's attacks has helped ensure a fear-stricken population that disperses quickly when attacks are mounted, leaving behind food, clothing, livestock and other resources for the LRA. It is believed that one reason the LRA has attacked so many of its own people – the Acholi – is because they are perceived as supporters of the government, especially those living in camps for the internally displaced.



Originally made up of 200-300 fighters, the LRA's central strategy has been the abduction of children for forced servitude and combat. They are tortured or killed if they attempt to escape. The Refugee Law Project recently estimated that the LRA now includes approximately 3,000 child combatants, and 150-200 commanders. The LRA reportedly forces children to kill family members or friends in front of other children to instill fear and loyalty causing a devastating psychological impact on children who are less likely to return to a community where they participated in murdering and torturing their own neighbors and family members. The use of abducted children as combatants also has a devastating impact on community members, who are less likely to take up arms against the LRA if it means fighting against their own children.

Ugandan government policies have also contributed to the humanitarian crisis in the North. In 1996, the government began a policy of moving civilians from their homes to "protected villages." These "protected villages" are, in essence, camps for the internally displaced population. The government argued this relocation was necessary to better protect villagers from LRA attacks. However, the camps have increased internal displacement of the population and have not provided real protection for camp residents, who continue to be attacked by the LRA while also being exposed to high prevalence of disease, malnutrition, and poverty.

NIGHT COMMUTERS

Fighting, child abductions, and internal displacement have resulted in approximately 25,000 mostly children leaving their villages every night and walking to large town centers to spend the night. Gulu town receives an influx of an estimated 14,000 children every night. These so-called “night commuters” are usually sent by parents who fear their children will be attacked or abducted by the LRA if they stay in their villages overnight.

SUDAN AND THE LRA

During the 1980s and 1990s, the LRA operated out of southern Sudan. During this time, the Ugandan government provided military and financial support to the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army in southern Sudan, a movement in direct opposition to the Sudanese government. The Sudanese government, in turn, allowed the LRA to operate out of the South and began to heavily supply the LRA with weapons, fuel, ammunition, and communications equipment in 1994. This supply was critical in allowing the LRA to continue fighting.

As a result of negotiations between the Sudan and Uganda in 1999, and the resulting Nairobi Peace Accord, Ugandan government forces (also known as the UPDF) were allowed to conduct cross-border operations against LRA strongholds in Sudan. This became known as “Operation Iron Fist.” While this succeeded in flushing the LRA out of Sudan, it also worsened the already grave humanitarian situation in the northern provinces of Uganda. With the LRA returning to the North to fight the Ugandan government, greater numbers of Acholi have been displaced, and incidents of child abductions increased dramatically. Despite the resumption of diplomatic relations between the Sudan and Uganda, the LRA continues to operate from Sudanese territory, and there are concerns that the Sudanese government is continuing to financially support the LRA.

WHAT CRS IS DOING TO PROMOTE PEACE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

CRS is part of the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Community Resilience and Dialogue Consortium (CRD), a \$5 million project implemented by several international non-government organizations that provide psychosocial rehabilitation, conflict resolution, and HIV/AIDS services to victims of conflict-affected regions of Uganda. Key CRS activities supported by CRD include:

1. **Gulu Archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission.** CRS trains Church catechists to be local resources on human rights and legal issues in communities where there is little access to government resources. CRS, through our partners also promotes school-based peace clubs to help students support peace and discuss the effect of the conflict on their lives.
2. **Gulu Archdiocesan Caritas.** CRS works with the Gulu Caritas to facilitate a reception center for ex-combatants, helping communities focus on reconciliation and forgiveness as they receive formerly abducted children and former rebels who have surrendered under the government’s amnesty program.
3. **Ker Kwaro Acholi (the traditional leaders association).** CRS and its partners assist traditional leaders, elders and youth to practice traditional and modern reconciliation techniques, as well as foster dialogue between the warring parties. This includes direct dialogue with the LRA.

In addition to these activities, CRS supports inter-religious dialogue and the use of Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Christian and traditional reconciliation practices that help communities reconcile and also work across communities to overcome the misunderstandings that led to rebellions in the first place.

CRS’ ADVOCACY IN SUPPORT OF PEACE IN NORTHERN UGANDA

Given the extent of the violence in northern Uganda, CRS is considering ways to continue supporting peacebuilding programs in Uganda, as well as advocate for continued United States government engagement and commitment to a lasting peace in Uganda.

Based on these priorities, CRS is supporting the bipartisan *Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act*, S. 2264, sponsored by Senators Russ Feingold (D-WI) and Lamar Alexander (R-TN) that recently passed the Senate. The bill calls on the United States among other things to:

- Support efforts for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in northern Uganda;
- Work with the Ugandan government and the international community to make available sufficient resources to meet the relief and development needs of northern Uganda and to assume greater responsibility for the protection of civilians and economic development in regions in Uganda affected by the conflict;
- Make clear that the relationship between Sudan and the U.S. cannot improve unless no credible evidence indicates that authorities of the Sudanese government are providing support to the Lord's Resistance Army.
- Directs the Secretary of State to submit a report on the conflict in Uganda, including information on LRA supporters, activities of the LRA and Ugandan People's Defense Forces practices particularly toward civilians; and actions carried out by the United States, Uganda, or the international community to protect displaced civilians, especially women and children.

CRS is also advocating for funding to be made available to provide critical personnel, additional shelters, and resources for "night commuters" in affected areas of the North.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. **Support CRS' advocacy efforts.** Contact your elected officials and urge them to support S. 2264, the *Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act* and for additional funding to support the night commuters programs. Visit our website at www.catholicrelief.org/actioncenter.cfm to take action today.
2. **Pray for peace in Uganda.** The Catholic Bishops of Uganda have asked their parishioners to pray one Our Father until peace is achieved in Northern Uganda. In solidarity with our Ugandan brothers and sisters, we ask that you join them in this one intention for peace.
3. **Get involved in CRS' Africa Campaign, Africa Rising! Hope and Healing.** Visit www.catholicrelief.org/africacampaign.cfm for more information.

HOPE AND HEALING: THE MESSAGE FROM THE GULU PEACE CLUB

In late May 2004, CRS/Baltimore led a delegation of U.S. diocesan partners, congressional staffers and a representative from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to Uganda and southern Sudan. The delegation traveled to Gulu, northern Uganda to meet with CRS partners and visit peacebuilding, agriculture and HIV/AIDS projects. One of the most powerful moments came when the **Sacred Heart Girls Peace Club**, (shown in the photo below), which is supported by CRS through our partner Gulu Caritas, performed several songs for us. Here is an excerpt of their songs:



We are the children of Northern Uganda

*We are the children of Northern Uganda
We are crying for freedom and peace
Join us fighting for freedom
Our hope is the peaceful Uganda*

*Comrade Joseph Kony and all the rebels,
Africa calls you pare way to freedom
President Museveni, Commanding Uganda,
the masses are dying, please come and help.
Comrade Joseph Kony commanding all the
rebels the masses are dying,
please stop the war.*

*Mr. Kofi Annan of the United Nations the
masses are dying, please come and help.*

*In Gulu there is war. In Kitgum there is war. In
Lira there is war. In Pader there is war
We are all crying for peace. We are all crying for peace.*

