



# Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative

*"Kacel ki Puc"*

*"Together for Peace"*

Autumn, 2011 Newsletter



## ARLPI Launches New Luo Language Land Act

In September, regional religious and political leaders as well as representatives of local NGO's and a variety of community stakeholders gathered to celebrate the launch of new Luo language Land Act manuals. Arising from the ARLPI's ongoing Land Conflict Mitigation Project, the idea to produce the Ugandan Land Act in local Luo emerged as facilitators began to realize the high proportion of Acholi region residents unable to read English.

Beginning in 2009 and in partnership with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), ARLPI's Land Conflict Mitigation Project (LCMP) aims to strengthen local governance through supporting and cultivating both formal and informal land dispute mechanisms as well as educating and empowering local citizens on land matters. The

educational component of this mission relies heavily on face-to-face instruction and community sensitization on land issues.

In order to educate local communities, ARLPI facilitators have distributed numerous manuals to regional stakeholders. These manuals outline existing land laws and regulations as well as the structures in place to arbitrate land disputes. Until last week, however, these manuals were only available in English—despite the claim by one ARLPI LCMP officer, Lokwiya Francis', that only 10% of rural community leaders are able to read English. To address this dilemma ARLPI, along with the help and support of numerous community members and interested parties, has spent the past six

months translating the Land Act of Uganda into the more accessible Luo.

Speaking about the new manuals, Francis remarked, *“These will be a valuable tool to carry out proper community sensitization and should go a long way towards bridging the linguistic gap that has hampered past sensitizations.”*

In celebration of the new manual’s launch, over sixty regional stakeholders gathered in downtown Gulu at the Sunset Hotel. Organized by ARLPI and lasting the better part of the day, the festivities included speeches by project partners and organizers as well as a response period allowing attendees a chance to voice their appreciation, concerns, and recommendations for future LCMP activities. Capped with a speech by ARLPI’s Chairman, Bishop Johnson Gakumba, the day’s festivities left stakeholders smiling and apparently hopeful about the progress being made

to address the devastation being wrought by local land conflict.



## **ARLPI’s Interfaith Centre for Peace**

Five kilometers south of Gulu, on the road to Kampala, stands the shell of a building that the Acholi Religious Leaders’ Peace Initiative has high hopes for. Approximately three quarters complete, ARLPI’s Interfaith Centre for Peace is envisioned as a beacon of peace and reconciliation for greater northern Uganda and the world.

Ground was broken for the Centre’s construction in late 2009 and was initially funded by the monetary awards ARLPI received as part of several international peace prizes. The religious leaders saw reinvesting these winnings back into the community as an

imperative. Unfortunately, largely due to uncontrollable inflation, the Centre’s construction has lately stalled for insufficient funding.

The longer this project remains incomplete, the longer our community must wait for the Centre’s unique peacebuilding offerings. Aside from serving as the offices of ARLPI’s secretariat, the Interfaith Centre for Peace will also provide many resources to assist northern Ugandan’s explore and practice nonviolent conflict resolution. These include: community halls, in which community leaders can be trained and mediations conducted; a

counseling unit, to provide psychosocial support to victims of war, HIV/AIDS, and gender based violence; a well-stocked library, complete with an extensive collection of peacebuilding literature as well as internet accessible computer stations; and a Peace Museum, to house war artifacts as a tangible history of the region's tumultuous past.

We at ARLPI are quite excited for the launch of this unique facility! In order to hasten its arrival, we invite any and all individuals or organizations interested in assisting us complete construction of the project to please contact ARLPI Program Coordinator, Patrick Loum at [arlpinterfaith@gmail.com](mailto:arlpinterfaith@gmail.com).



## **New Members Welcomed into the ARLPI Family**

On August 9<sup>th</sup> two new communities joined the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI). During a meeting at ARLPI's headquarters, religious leaders and elders of the Seventh Day Adventist and Born Again faiths were officially welcomed into the ARLPI fold.

ARLPI's original, 1998 configuration consisted of representatives from the Catholic, Anglican, and Muslim communities of northern Uganda with the Orthodox community being invited

into ARLPI shortly after its formation. With this most recent addition of the Born Again Faith Federation of the Acholi-sub region and the Seventh Day Adventist Church of Gulu, Amuru, and Nwoya districts, the total number of ARLPI constituencies is now seven. The already affiliated five constituencies consist of the Gulu Archdiocese of the Catholic Church, the Anglican Diocese of Northern Uganda, the Anglican Diocese of Kitgum, the Acholi Muslim district, and the Acholi Deanery of the Orthodox Church.

Representing the Born Again Faith Federation at the welcoming meeting were Pastors Patrick Okecha and Alex Atine. Both men noted the strong preexisting working relationship between their communities and ARLPI and expressed great excitement at the prospect of working together in an official capacity to address the needs and concerns of the greater Acholi community.

On hand as representatives of the Seventh Day Adventist Church were Pastor Liza David and Church Elder Okot Joseph who also both voiced excitement over the peacebuilding potential of this official partnership. Pastor Liza David noted how such a relationship appears inevitable, as

ARLPI and his congregation both work passionately for peace.

ARLPI's Vice Chairman, All Hajji Sheik Musa Khalil, acting on behalf of Chairman Bishop Johnson Gakumba, took the opportunity to welcome the new members to ARLPI, noting the years of informal cooperation and expressing gratitude over this new chapter in ARLPI history.

*"Today is reinforcement for our work. It will increase our strength to help us address the post conflict era for our people. We will work together to promote coexistence, bridge gaps, and transmit love and hope to Northern Uganda,"* Sheik Musa Khalil enthusiastically noted.



## Ongoing Land Dispute Activities

ARLPI has been involved in numerous peacebuilding initiatives since its inception in the late 1990's. In recent years, land disputes erupting from the influx of IDP returnees back into their native communities has become a central focus. The need for educating citizens on their rights and for teaching them alternative forms of dispute resolution has become imperative.

To address these urgent needs, ARLPI has implemented a number of activities as part of its Land Conflict Mitigation Project (LCMP). These include: stakeholder mapping, in which local community structures are examined in order to identify all formal and informal structures and mechanisms already working to resolve land conflicts; baseline surveys, conducted in order to ascertain what types of land disputes

are most prevalent as well as how these disputes are/are not being addressed; stakeholder consultation meetings, in which stakeholders collaborate, brainstorm, and review one another's past and current initiatives; and producing and disseminating land related literature.

One of our most recent initiatives has been the creation of Land Stakeholders Collaboration Manuals. Born out of a desire for a resource that could serve as a reference guide for individuals and communities embroiled in land disputes, these manuals explain various land related policies and laws as well as serve as training manuals to be used as disputes are worked through. Recently finished and reviewed by stakeholders in the local community, 1,750 of these manuals are currently in production and will soon be distributed.

It is ARLPI's hope that through initiatives such as these, ones that educate and promote dialogue, the pressing wave of land related conflicts in our region can be diminished and citizens can be provided with new tools to improve their lives and enhance their relationships.



## **International Peace Day Celebrations**

In late September, as people the world over gathered together, Gulu hosted Uganda's International Peace Day celebration. Started 30 years ago by the U.N., Peace Day has become a global event, a shared occasion in which individuals unite and perform practical acts of peace.

This year's Peace Day festivities were stretched over an entire week in northern Uganda. The events included: school sensitizations, in which children were taught about peace and nonviolence; tree plantings, during which hundreds of saplings were planted around Gulu; a candlelight procession, led by ARLPI leaders; and, on Peace Day itself, a 5km march

culminating in a day-long celebration at Kaunda fairgrounds.

Acholi religious leaders have historically been very active and visible participants of Peace Day celebrations in Gulu and this year's event was no exception. Carrying banners and accompanied by hundreds of others representing various NGO's and CSO's, ARLPI leaders and secretariat staff paraded through downtown Gulu and the surrounding countryside. At the fairgrounds, Sheik Musa Khalil led attendees in prayer while Archbishop Odama presented a speech to the gathered dignitaries and citizens calling for continued efforts to end regional turmoil.

Complete with speeches, dancers, and musicians, the day's events were a huge success and drew thousands of Ugandans to the festivities. With its message of empowerment and nonviolence, the festivities provided a venue for celebrating past accomplishments while simultaneously calling for rededication to the work that remains to be done.



For more information on these stories, contact Cooper Brown, ARLPI Interim Information, Documentation and Research Officer at: [cbrown32@nd.edu](mailto:cbrown32@nd.edu)

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