



ACHOLI RELIGIOUS LEADERS PEACE INITIATIVE

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AN OPEN LETTER TO INVISIBLE CHILDREN

RE: #KONY2012 CAMPAIGN

On Monday 5th March 2012, the California-based organization Invisible Children released an online 30-minute documentary about Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord Resistance Army (LRA). In summary the Video states "We want to make him famous, not to glorify him, but so that his crimes would not go unnoticed." The video, part of a campaign called Kony2012, became a viral sensation with more than 35 million views. #Kony2012 was a number one topic of conversation on Twitter, and was shared multiple times on Face book by concerned citizens and celebrities alike.

We have watched the Video with a hope of finding peaceful solution to the conflict but only to find sensational messages. A lot of the information in it is of the 2003 documentary by Invisible children of the life of the night commuters in the streets of Gulu Town. It lacks current facts of the LRA activities. It misrepresents the current situation on the ground and is full of over simplified justifications.

The campaign has met a lot of genuine criticisms; from within Uganda and outside. We too believe that;

1. The Juba Peace Talks which started in September 2006 and collapsed in December 2008 led to the signing of Cessation of Hostility Agreement (CHA) between the LRA and GoU and relative peace has since returned to the region¹. Everyone had hopes in the talks that it will lead to signing of the comprehensive agreement for war to come to an end. To the surprise of many Government of Uganda lost patience and with the support of the United States launched the operation lightening thunder meant to end the conflict within two weeks. Had the US not intervened the final peace agreement could have been signed. In fact past military campaigns such the operation north of 1994 and Operation Iron Fist of 2002 both supported by the US failed at a time when the Hon Minister of Northern Uganda Betty Bigombe was making efforts to broker peace. Again Invisible Children has launched a campaign that will make the LRA to intensify its atrocities on innocent children instead of a campaign intended to revive the peace talks.
2. The video brings back bad memories of night commuters some of whom have now graduated from the universities and other tertiary institutions. One of such is Jacob who featured in both videos of 2003 and #Kony2012 was reported in local news last week that he is now a big man. Instead the documentary should follow some of these people to find out how they are living today.
3. Community believes that Invisible Children is being used to promote US interests. In the video Russell-the author of the video clearly stated that everyone in Washington they talked to said there is no way the United States will get involved in a conflict where our national security or financial interest is aren't stake. Community feels the video is a gate way for selfish interest but not to stop the war.

¹ The signing of Cessation of Hostility Agreement ended fighting inside Uganda but the LRA is still at large in Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic where fighting is still continuing

We recommend that;

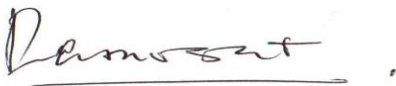
- i. IC should push for revival of the peace talks that stalled in Juba. Even the US strategy to support the Disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army released on 24th November 2010 noted, 'There is no purely military solution to the LRA threat and Impact' (page 9). IC should learn more about the conflict and to talk to people affected - including those who might not share their confidence in a military "solution".
- ii. Such campaigns should be launched in the affected region with full information of current trends of the conflicts. IC should help to get their voice and those of their brothers and sisters in S.Sudan, DRC and CAR heard – by way of newsletters and statements to the attention of the international community.
- iii. Invisible Children is more pronounced in the region for its programme of renovating depilated schools and giving scholarships for war affected children. As an NGO Invisible Children should play a neutral role in a military conflict. Like Resolve (Resolve Uganda), IC were instrument for recent US deployment by agitating the LRA disarmament bill of 2010.
- iv. Since IC has been so successful in raising funds in the name of the victims of the LRA violence, it would be good share such resources with partner organizations struggling to respond to the insecurity and the consequences for their communities.

About us:

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) is an interfaith peace building and conflict transformation organization formed in 1997 as a proactive response to the conflict in northern Uganda. Our mission is sustainable peace through dialogue and non-violent approaches to transform conflict. ARLPI brings together the religious leaders from the four different religious denominations and their respective constituencies (Muslim, Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Born Again Faith Federation and Seventh Day Adventist) to participate effectively in transforming the conflict. ARLPI primarily operates in the Acholi region of Uganda (Amuru, Nwoya Gulu, Kitgum, Lamwo, Agago & Pader), but has been working throughout the region and abroad on various conflict issues. For more information visit www.arlpi.org

May God bless you all

Thank you



+Rt. Rev. Johnson Gakumba
(Chairman-ARLPI, Bishop Diocese of Northern Uganda)

On behalf of:

+Sheik Altai Musa Khalil (the Kadi Acholi Muslim District) - Vice Chairman ARLPI

+Archbishop John Baptist Odama (Chairman of the Uganda Episcopal Conference, Archbishop of Gulu) – Member ARLPI

+Fr. Julius Orach (the Dean of Orthodox)-Member ARLPI

+Rt. Rev. Benjamin Ojwang (Bishop of Kitgum Diocese)- Member ARLPI

+Rt. Rev. Nelson Onono Onweng (The retired Bishop diocese of Northern Uganda)-Member ARLPI

+Rt. Macleod Baker Ochola II (The retired Bishop of Kitgum diocese)-Member ARLPI

+Pr. Lisa David (SDA Resident pastor Gulu)

+Pr. Patrick Okecha (Overseer Born Faith Federation)