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ACHOLI RELIGIOUS LEADERS PEACE INITIATIVE OPEN LETTER TO QUEEN ELIZABETH II

November 21, 2007

Your Majesty,

Peace and God's choicest blessings to you.

We, the members of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative in Acholi sub- region, with great joy, salute and welcome Your Majesty to Uganda on your second visit (1954 and 2007). On the same note, we wish to extend our cordial greetings and warm welcome to all Heads of States and delegates from across the globe to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kampala, Uganda.

We salute His Excellency President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni and the government of the Republic of Uganda for hosting the CHOGM which brings together several Heads of States and delegates to discuss and deliberate on important issues related to fundamental rights and dignity of the human person, freedom of the children of God to live in harmony and share God's given resources of this earth, economic development, poverty eradication, good governance, proliferation, conflict, dictatorship, oppression, HIV/AIDS, democracy, corruption and similar issues of concern especially those which dehumanize the dignity of the children of God created in His image and likeness. It is of great honor to have you in our country. Be assured of our prayers for the success of your historic visit and guidance at the CHOGM's deliberations for the good of humanity.

OUR MISSION.

We, the members of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) in Acholi Sub- region are an interfaith peace organization composed of the Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and Orthodox leadership. ARLPI came into existence in 1997 to be part of the solution to the Northern Uganda conflict between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). We wish to bring to the attention of Your Majesty that this conflict has displaced nearly 1.6 million people out of their homes, with thousands of young girls and boys abducted into captivity over the years, forced into sexual enslavement and child soldiers, loss of innocent lives and destruction of infrastructures with subsequent results of abject poverty in the greater North. Amidst this humanitarian crisis, ARLPI became a continues voice of the voiceless. Convinced that the military option is an enemy to human life, we strongly called upon the conflicting parties to embrace dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation as the best option in settling the 21 year old conflict. Hence, our mission in this conflicting situation has been that of advocacy and mediation with emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation.

RECAP ON HISTORY OF CONFLICT IN UGANDA

Generally, the history of conflict in Uganda is rooted in the struggle for power which dates back to the colonial and post colonial era. In the Uganda context, it exploded with the 1966 crisis, shortly after independence in 1962, when the people of Uganda witnessed the struggle for political power between the elected/legislative administration and the traditional monarchy.

Other struggles that followed included the 1971 military coup in which thousands of Ugandans were reported killed. From 1972 some concerned sections of Ugandans especially those in exile came together with the support of the government of the United Republic of Tanzania and resolved to overthrow the military government headed by Idi Amin which finally fell in 1979 to the Uganda National Liberation Forces (UNLF).

This was followed by several short lived junta administration (governments) till the 1980 general election that was generally disputed by the majority of Ugandan political parties that participated. They claimed that the election was “not free and fair”. This led to a re-organization once more into another liberation movement that struggled till 1986 when they finally succeeded in capturing political power by force of arms. In this struggle, some members of the then defeated army were either taken as prisoners of war or voluntarily joined liberation movement or settled back home while a section regrouped in the north in order to launch a counter offensive to gain political power. It is generally accepted that this was the starting point of the Northern Uganda conflict that has changed faces of struggle which adversely affected the people of the greater North.

JUBA PEACE DIALOGUE

Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative wishes to recognize and appreciate the good will demonstrated by the government of Uganda and the LRA in accepting round table dialogue which kicked off in July 14, 2006 in Juba. We equally recognize the instrumental role played by the government of Sudan in bringing together the two conflicting parties to the round table peace talk. Since then, some significant progress has been made in the peace process. On this note, we wish to acknowledge with gratitude and appreciation the intervention of the international community, African Union (AU), UN Peace Envoy in the person of President Joachim Chissano, European Union and all men and women of good will.

APPEAL TO CHOGM THROUGH YOUR MAJESTY

CONCERN about the cry of our people for lasting solutions to the Greater Northern Uganda conflict; **MINDFUL** of our mission and pastoral obligations to promote and defend the God's given rights and dignity of every human person created in His image and likeness; **AWARE** of the urgency to respond to the needs of the victims of conflict; **TRUSTING AND RELYING** on the key roles of Your Majesty as Head of Commonwealth Heads of governments; we hereby appeal to CHOGM through Your Majesty to:

1. Encourage the government of Uganda and the LRA to unconditionally resolve the ongoing conflict in the greater North of Uganda.
2. See to it that the ongoing Juba Peace talk is not derailed.
3. Put diplomatic pressure on the LRA to unconditionally release the children in captivity.
4. Sanction the proliferation and sale of small arms including child trafficking.
5. Collectively consider getting involved in the resettlement programs and economic empowerment to the war affected region of the greater North.

Thank Your Majesty for honoring our country in this historic occasion (CHOGM) with your presence and for sparing time within your busy schedule to preside over and guide the CHOGM on issues that affect humanity. Furthermore, allow us to register our gratitude through Your Majesty to the Commonwealth for the construction of “Labora” Youth Centre in Gulu.

Wishing you God's abundant blessings and happy time in Uganda.

We say all this "For God and our Country".

With highest esteem,

1. His Grace Archbishop John Baptist Odama (Chairman of ARLPI and Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese).
2. Al Hajji Sheik Musa Khalil (Vice Chairman and the Head of Muslim in Acholi sub-region).
3. Rt. Rev. Bishop Nelson Onono Onweng (Bishop of Northern Uganda Diocese).
4. Rev. Fr. Julius Orach (the Dean of Orthodox in Acholi sub-region)
5. Rt. Rev. Benjamin Ojwang (Bishop of the Diocese of Kitgum).
6. Rt. Rev. Sabino Ocan Odoki (Auxiliary Bishop of Gulu Archdiocese).
7. Rt. Rev. Macleod Baker Ochola II (Retired Bishop of Kitgum Diocese)