



## **ACHOLI RELIGIOUS LEADERS PEACE INITIATIVE**

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### **ARLPI Response to:**

#### ***From Promise to Peace: A Blueprint for President Obama's LRA Strategy by Resolve***

*In May 2010 Obama signed into law the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009 (S.1067/HR 2478) "I signed this bill today recognizing that we must all renew our commitments and strengthen our capabilities to protect and assist civilians caught in the LRA's wake, to receive those who surrender, and to support efforts to bring the LRA leadership to justice."<sup>1</sup> The Obama administration has until November 2010 to develop an implementation strategy. Since May ARLPI has continuously been lobbying the Obama administration for peaceful mechanisms bearing in mind that justice can never be attained by a military offensive. Resolve, an American organization also lobbying on LRA issues, recently released a new report including recommendations for the implementation plan: "From Promise to Peace: A Blueprint for President Obama's LRA Strategy." ARLPI was specifically requested for their response to the report, which is outlined below.*

We, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, would like to thank Resolve for their continued commitment to the enduring conflict in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and the Central African Republic (CAR), particularly for their persevering work to bring attention to the region and promoting lasting peace for those affected by the LRA conflict. Regarding the recently released report, *From Promise to Peace*, we would particularly like to thank Resolve for their support of the *LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act*. We appreciate the emphasis within the report on humanitarian aid, reintegration and civilian protection.

As an organization which has longstanding direct experience with the LRA and who continues to work for peace on the ground in the region, ARLPI finds that certain considerations and important alternatives to military action are absent from the report. Therefore we would like to respond by highlighting the following issues, followed by a brief position statement. We offer these alternatives in the spirit of peace and cooperation. It is our hope that all actors interested in pursuing peace in the LRA affected region can work together on a comprehensive strategy characterized by peaceful means.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. President Barack Obama, May 24, 2010, upon signing the *LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act*.

As peace promoters we strongly believe that the following areas should be closely considered and incorporated when outlining an implementation strategy: First, civil society in the LRA affected regions should be brought into the center of the implementation discussions and outcomes; Second, a negotiated solution should be seriously considered and a strategy outlined to achieve such; Third, a larger focus should be placed on investigating the supply lines to the LRA; Fourth, a civilian protection strategy should be implemented by each affected country, rather than solely by Ugandan forces.

**1. Involve civil society in both the development of the implementation plan and in the implementation itself.**

The strategy laid out in *From Promise to Peace* fails to involve the civil society and the grassroots community. The history of northern Uganda demonstrates that civil society can and has been a powerful force for peace. When civil society has been excluded from or overlooked in peace efforts the result has usually been a failure to address root causes, which has exacerbated frustration and uncooperative behavior at the community level, and opened the door to the potential rise of more violent factions. In other words, excluding civil society from planning and implementing a civilian protection strategy results in the perpetuation of conflict in other forms. Civil society is a powerful body and should not be ignored.

It is our experience in northern Uganda that civil society is indispensable in maintaining contact with the LRA and acting as bridge builders. Community based non-violent mechanisms had a large impact in promoting peace. One example was their promotion of the Amnesty Act, which resulted in the voluntary return of many LRA members. We strongly recommend that the US government carefully consider methods that will engage civil society groups in the implementation of the LRA bill. *From Promise to Peace* recommends increasing civilian capacity for self-protection (pg.31). Local capacity should extend beyond self-protection. In other words, the civilian population should be involved in the peaceful settlement of the conflict. The three governments should be responsible for civilian protection.

Particularly with reference (pg.30,31) to the development of road systems and telecommunication systems in the LRA affected areas that currently lack such road and communication systems, committed cooperation with both the local grassroots population and with the local governance structures will be necessary.

**2. Civilian protection should be implemented by country.**

We agree with Resolve that civilian protection should be one of the primary goals of the LRA Bill. We, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative believe, however, that in order to increase the capacity of the surrounding countries and ease the pressure on Uganda, the responsibility to protect civilians should be mandated of each respective country and the United Nations

missions (UNMIS and MONUSCO).<sup>2</sup> We also firmly agree with Resolve that the UN missions should be expanded with a direct mandate to LRA affected areas (pg.29), as they have so far failed to reach their protection potential (pg.23). We also recommend that France be diplomatically contacted and persuaded to assist with civilian protection in the DRC and CAR.

*As From Promise to Peace* recognizes (pg. 19), the UPDF has a poor human rights record in the region. Within northern Uganda the UPDF forces committed many offenses against the population. Only recently, on September 24, 2010, the Ugandan High Court convicted two UPDF soldiers of brutally murdering an innocent elderly nurse at the height of the LRA conflict in northern Uganda.<sup>3</sup> The recent UN *DRC Mapping Report* highlights the poor history of human rights abuses by implying that Uganda may have committed crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps the UPDF currently enjoys a better reputation than other regional militaries, yet as regional religious leaders closely connected with the grassroots communities throughout the region we know that there is already growing suspicion of UPDF forces on foreign soil, which will further complicate civilian cooperation, information sharing, and thus their ability to protect.

*From Promise to Peace* requests that measures are set in place to ensure that the UPDF, “do not revert to previous practices of widespread human rights abuses and illegal exploitation of natural resources.” The UN report also demonstrates that often offenses do not become public until many years after the atrocities are committed. It is a dangerous assumption to assume that human rights abuses and resources exploitation are not currently part of UPDF practices. Furthermore, it is our understanding that the UPDF is currently operating in Sudan and CAR without an official mandate; In the DRC they continue to function beyond their mandate of intelligence sharing. The Charter of the United Nations dictates that no country can interfere with another country’s internal affairs without official consent.<sup>5</sup> Currently the Ugandan government has failed to make such agreements, leaving local population throughout the region with serious concerns about the purpose of the UPDF presence. Neither has the United Nations made any official request for support from regional forces or AU forces.

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<sup>2</sup> UN Resolution 1925 specifically stresses the responsibility of the DRC government for “ensuring security in its territory and protecting its civilians with respect for the rule of law, human rights and international humanitarian law, stressing the urgency of implementing comprehensive security sector reform and of achieving as appropriate the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR) of Congolese armed groups, and the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation, resettlement and reintegration (DDRRR) of foreign armed groups for the long-term stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

<sup>3</sup> The Monitor, 30 September 2010, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201009300152.html>.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, “Democracy Republic of the Congo, 1993-2002,” August 2010, released October 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Charter of the United Nations, Chapter 1, Article 2.

Though the DRC has outlawed them, South Sudan has recently announced its intention to support local self-defense units. As *From Promise to Peace* states, “the presence of armed civilian self-defense forces should not be considered a sustainable option for protecting civilians from LRA violence” (pg. 27). The experience of Uganda, who also armed the civilian population in certain areas, shows that long-term destabilizing complications result from arming the civilian population. However, in order for this to not be a tempting alternative for communities, the protection capacity of the respective countries and the UN missions needs to be augmented.

By solely supporting the Ugandan army on foreign soil, the United States risks antagonizing other regional armies and Uganda faces the risk that its neighbors’ armies will become uncooperative or even turn against them, creating a new layer of conflict. Tension between armed forces is already evident in South Sudan, where the UPDF and the SPLA are failing to work together for civilian protection. The Ugandan army is already overstretched with their mission in Somalia and presence in the DRC, Sudan, and CAR. They are also currently active at home in the Karamoja district and will be used extensively to prevent electoral violence during the upcoming months.

**3. A negotiated solution should be seriously considered and a detailed strategy should be outlined to reach such negotiations.**

*From Promise to Peace* notes several times that apprehension of the LRA commanders should happen “unless they agree and commit to a negotiated settlement” (pg. 5, 15, 33). The Obama administration should be made aware that the regional conflict has roots and dynamics that go beyond the LRA issue, to deeper historical grievances. By moving negotiations with the LRA forward, the Obama administration would be shifting the world into a new era of peace building.

Furthermore, the LRA is not the only actor destabilizing the region and committing atrocities. Peaceful means will allow the region to begin to address all aspects of the very complex conflict, rather than focusing efforts on cleaning up after yet another failed military attempt. By engaging with local communities peaceful solutions will rise to the surface which both grassroots communities and regional governments can own and implement. Yet another military operation, even if it does successfully apprehend or kill top LRA leaders, will fail to bring a lasting peace to the region. Instead it will only create further grievances between nations and communities, leading to further destabilization and the rise of more rebel groups, evidenced by the history of Uganda and the region.

We would like to clarify a misconception about the failure of the Juba Peace Process to secure a lasting peace. Joseph Kony refused to sign the final agreement until he received clarification about components of '*Agenda Item #3: Accountability and Reconciliation*,' not because of any lack of genuine engagement with the process. Neither Kony, nor Museveni were ever physically present at the negotiation table; both worked through delegations which used shuttle diplomacy tactics. The launch of Operation Lightning Thunder opened wide the flood gate of

conflict, which the Juba Peace talks had nearly shut, and the result has been the expansion of devastating conflict to the whole region, a much larger area than previously affected. The Juba peace talks brought the possibility of a lasting solution between the conflicting parties closer than ever before, so the failure of the Ugandan government to exhibit patience was a devastating blow to all who had been laboring to ensure the successful completion of the talks. The failure to fully exhaust all avenues to achieve a peaceful solution to the conflict and the faith many are putting in military action despite the deadly consequences on civilians, troubles us deeply.

The current strategy outlined in *From Promise to Peace* would be very expensive in terms of financial cost and in the cost of human lives. Most likely, the US would bear the main financial cost and Uganda would bear the loss of soldiers, while the nations of DRC, CAR and South Sudan would likely see a much larger loss of civilian life than they now see. *From Promise to Peace*, notes that there is a high likelihood of reprisal attacks against civilians following attempts to apprehend the LRA leadership (pg.36). This is consistent with the experience of Uganda and surrounding areas. In making the decision on whether to use military force or pursue negotiations this threat to civilian lives should be seriously considered. Civilian protection is not easy in the LRA affected region due to geographical, political and logistical reasons. As the regional forces and the UN have proven unable to protect civilians thus far, we think it is unlikely that the likelihood of such heavy civilian loss would change in the short period of time before a military offensive would begin.

While the LRA has not been active in Uganda over the last few years, military spending remains a burden to Uganda and her supporters, as the UPDF continues to be involved in regional military activities against the LRA in neighboring countries. In July of 2009, the Ugandan army was allocated 433 billion UGX (approximately 191.8 million USD), however in February of 2010 a request was made for an additional 71.9 billion UGX (approximately 31.8 million USD) "for continuing Operation Lightning Thunder and clearing unspecified domestic arrears."<sup>6</sup> It cannot be ignored that peace talks also require a significant amount of resources which requires assistance from the international community. In 2007, the projected cost of the Juba Peace talks was estimated to be 15.1 billion UGX (approximately 6.7 million USD) with the Government of Uganda (GoU) contributing 1.7 billion UGX (approximately 0.7 million USD) of the budget.<sup>7</sup> However, comparing the costs for these two approaches to bringing peace clearly indicates the huge disparity in the financial burden of employing military offenses against the LRA as opposed to using peaceful means such as dialogue.

Attempts to apprehend the LRA leadership, as outlined in *From Promise to Peace* would be both a costly effort and unlikely to succeed. Do not underestimate Joseph Kony. He will not be easily

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<sup>6</sup> Daily Monitor, February 15, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Govt-Kony Peace Talks Cost Shs5b, Pachodo.org: April 19, 2007 <http://www.pachodo.org/General-News/South-Sudan-News/govt-kony-juba-talks-cost-shs5b.html> accessed, March 5, 2010.

captured or killed. The tactics outlined are not unlike ones tried multiple times in the past, none of which came even close to success. Additionally every attempt to capture Kony is bound to result in the killing of abducted children, which needs to be carefully considered. Because the majority of those within the LRA ranks were involuntarily recruited, we must not devalue their lives. The complex nature of LRA members' identities should not be de-complexified. The fact that we are dealing with abducted children when engaging the LRA in any way should always be emphasized.

We firmly believe that a return to negotiations, including a new regional agenda item, is the best sustainable solution. We applaud Resolve for their recommendation to develop a multilateral strategy, particularly with regards to further engaging the UN (pg.18,28). We recommend that in the move towards negotiations the Obama administration push for the reinstatement of the UN Envoy to the LRA Affected Areas and for the UN to temporarily suspend the ICC warrants on the LRA leaders, as a confidence building measure, while negotiations proceed. We also agree that the governments of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, and Sudan need to be brought on board for any strategy to be successful (pg.18). A negotiated solution will have the fewest monetary and life consequences and has the most likely chance of addressing the complex nature of the regional conflict we are currently experiencing.

#### **4. A larger focus should be placed on determining the supply lines to the LRA:**

The LRA has always made strategic alliances, in order to open up and maintain supply lines for themselves. Currently however, the source(s) of these supply lines is unclear. Though there are allegations that the Khartoum government is again supporting the LRA, with the intention of destabilizing South Sudan prior to the upcoming referendum, strong evidence has not been found to support such claims. Careful consideration also needs to be given to the allegations that the Ugandan diaspora also supports the LRA. More resources should be put into firmly identifying the supply sources and routes. We recommend that the European Union be brought in to help achieve this goal. Once the supply routes are identified the American government should use high diplomacy to approach the people behind the supply lines. Removing the LRA's supply lines through diplomacy will give them further incentive to return to the Peace Talks table.

**As the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, we firmly believe that peace talks are the most likely solution leading to sustainable regional peace in the LRA affected regions of Eastern Africa.**

Northern Uganda continues to live with the challenges that remain as the result of military action failing to meet its objectives. The financial burden, failure to meet humanitarian needs, the spread of violence, failure to protect civilians, failure to address other negative forces which threaten regional security, the failure to cut off support and to name spoilers of the peace process, failure to consider the fate of the abducted, and the lack of patience in peaceful

processes have all contributed to the continued suffering of millions of people. In light of these challenges, ARLPI continues to advocate for the end of military action and for communication and dialogue to resume between the conflicting parties, more specifically between the LRA, the GoU and the other affected areas in South Sudan, DRC and CAR.

We firmly believe that it is possible to bring Joseph Kony and the LRA back to the peace talks table. As people who have personally spent significant time dealing with the complex LRA conflict and therefore have a greater understanding of the implications of the conflict situation between the LRA and the government of Uganda. We believe that given the right circumstances the LRA will willingly return to the peace table.

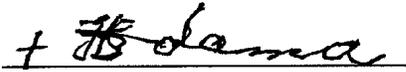
*From Promise to Peace* states, "...a negotiated end to the conflict that leads to the peaceful demobilization of all LRA combatants would be ideal and therefore should be pursued if there is a viable opportunity..." (pg.33). We, as religious leaders and peacebuilders, confirm that there is a viable opportunity and we offer ourselves as bridge builders to that opportunity. We request that as religious leaders and experienced peacebuilders we once again be given the opportunity, time, and resources to move the situation towards negotiations which now necessitate a regional approach. When granted the opportunity by President Museveni to approach the LRA, it took ARLPI only ten days to contact the LRA leadership. In both 2002 and 2008 preemptive military action disrupted peace negotiations resulting in an even wider conflict. Further military action, like that recommended in *From Promise to Peace*, will further destabilize an already volatile region. Our peace and reconciliation oriented strategy is carefully laid out in our 2010 report *Pursuing Peaceful Means to End the LRA Conflict: Recommendations by ARLPI* which is available on our website ([www.arlpi.org](http://www.arlpi.org)) or by request.

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) is a Ugandan interfaith peace building and conflict transformation organization formed in 1997 as a proactive response to the conflict in northern Uganda.

We once again thank Resolve for their commitment to peace in the region and for their helpful recommendations on the issues of humanitarian aid, reintegration and their focus on civilian protection. We request that our recommendations on the use of peaceful means and our voice of experience be taken carefully into consideration. Peace talks are not only the preferable solution, they are an attainable solution. We welcome further dialogue on the issue.

Kacel pi Kuc (Together for Peace).

Signed,



+ Most Rev. John Baptist Odama  
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+ Rt. Rev. Macleod Baker Ochola II (The  
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+ Rt. Rev. Johnson Gakumba (Diocese of Northern Uganda COU) - *Chairperson Acholi Religious  
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