

## [Lord's Resistance Army] Ugandan troops 'free' abductees

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<http://news.bbc.co.uk>

The Ugandan army says at least 400 people, most of them children, have escaped from the rebel Lords Resistance Army, (LRA).

An army spokesman says the abductees fled to safety following military pressure on the rebels after an attack on the remote village of Pajule, 380 kilometres north of Kampala.

Eight civilians and 19 rebels were killed in fighting during and after the raid, the spokesman said.

But a local official said 500 people had been abducted by the rebels and dozens were still missing on Sunday.

The BBC's Will Ross in Kampala says the LRA uses children but often abandons them if pursued by the army.

Some 20,000 children are believed to have been abducted by the LRA since it declared war from its northern power base on the government of President Yoweri Museveni.

### 'Success'

Troops chased the rebels through the bush for nearly 24 hours before they deserted the captives, said army spokesman Lieutenant Paddy Ankunda.

Many of the children among the 404 people recovered were exhausted and appeared malnourished, he said. Some recounted how they had been abducted up to three years earlier.

They will all be handed over to organisations which rehabilitate abducted children and will be reunited with their families, said Lieutenant Ankunda.

Describing the rescue as one of the army's greatest successes in the war against the LRA, the spokesman added that many of those freed were "trained fighters".

However, an official in the region told the BBC that the rebels had abducted 500 civilians in the raid on Pajule and dozens were still in rebel hands.

This, our correspondent notes, would throw into doubt the army's claim that many of those who escaped were trained fighters.

Our correspondent says it is currently impossible to verify the army's claim as this part of northern Uganda is remote and cannot be contacted by telephone or VHF radio.

However, if a high number of children have indeed escaped, he adds, this would represent a significant success in a military campaign which has been criticised for causing increased insecurity.

### **Missing children**

Led by Joseph Kony, who claims to have special spiritual powers, the group has wreaked chaos in the north.

In recent months, it has launched attacks thought to have forced some 300,000 people to leave their homes.

Children abducted by the group have been forced to work as porters or pressed into military service, whilst abducted girls have been made sex slaves.

The group professes to wanting Uganda to be ruled according to the Biblical 10 Commandments.

However, Mr Kony was this year reported to have ordered Roman Catholic missions in the region to be destroyed, priests and missionaries killed and nuns beaten up.

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