

**THE ANGUISH OF NORTHERN UGANDA**

**RESULTS OF A FIELD-BASED ASSESSMENT OF THE  
CIVIL CONFLICTS IN NORTHERN UGANDA**

**Kampala**

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## **NORTHERN UGANDA HUMANITARIAN ASSESSMENT**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In February 1997, the United States Embassy and its U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Kampala, Uganda, engaged the author to conduct a three-month, independent field-based assessment of the civil conflicts which since 1986 have affected northern Uganda. The assessment focused on the predominantly ethnic Acholi districts of Gulu and Kitgum in north-central Uganda and on the West Nile districts of Arua, Moyo and Nebbi. Its mandate was to address:

- the causes, progress and prognosis of the conflicts;
- their economic impact;
- their population displacement dimensions;
- human rights conduct of the opposing parties;
- the attitudes of the affected civilian population to the conflictive forces;
- the prospect for the expansion of the conflict to other areas, and
- measures which the United States Government and others could take to mitigate or resolve the conflict, minimize human suffering and stimulate economic reactivation and reconstruction of the affected areas.

The assessment was to include current emergency relief matters mainly to the degree that critical humanitarian needs were being overlooked. [In May 1997, USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) assigned an emergency relief expert to the north.] The assessment's mandate also excluded long-term economic development.

The purpose of this Kampala-based initiative was to contribute to the deliberations of a collaborative U.S. Embassy "inter-agency" committee established in November 1996 by Ambassador Michael Southwick to heighten U.S. Government attention to the decade-long war in the north.

The author conducted the assessment during March/May 1997, provided briefings on its findings and conclusions during June/July in Kampala and Washington, and completed this final report in August 1997.

## **Assessment procedures**

Research for this assignment began with consultations with officials of USAID and the Department of State in Washington, D.C., including USAID Administrator Brian Atwood and Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State William Twadell; and with concerned officials of the United States Embassy and USAID Missions in Nairobi. It was conducted principally in Uganda. Further consultations with distinguished northerners were conducted in Boston and New York.

During a five-week period in March/April 1997, the author traveled to and through northern Uganda by vehicle, covering about 5,000 kilometers. Travel was conducted in an independent manner and without accompaniment except at times by translators of the author's choice. Research was conducted in the following twenty-four towns and villages in five northern districts:

### Gulu District

Gulu town  
Koc-Goma  
Anaka  
Opit  
Atiak  
Pabo

### Kitgum District

Kitgum town  
Lokung  
Namu-okora  
Palabek  
Acholpi

### Arua District

Arua town  
Koboko  
Gbengi  
Yumbe  
Ladonga  
Midigo

### Moyo District Nebbi District

Moyo town  
Adjumani  
Pakelle

Nebbi Town  
Agermach  
War  
Zeu

In addition, the author visited St. Mary's College in Aboke, Apac District, the site of a large-scale abduction of female secondary students in October 1996.

The author consulted with about 300 individuals, including:

-- members of about fifty displaced families, locally affected persons and refugees outside district capitals in the north. These discussions, usually of at least one hour's duration, were most often held with one or two individuals at a time, in the presence of only a translator selected by the author, and usually outside the sight and hearing of others, at displaced and refugee centers; and with

-- about 250 other individuals, mainly in northern Uganda but also in Kampala and elsewhere. Such meetings were usually conducted individually, in English, and with a duration of one to two hours. Two or more meetings were held with twenty-two of these individuals.

Of the 300 persons consulted, 70% were Ugandans, of which the overwhelming majority were themselves northerners. These included:

- national and local elected and appointed public officials and civil servants, both current and former;
- members of the political opposition to the current Government;
- chiefs and elders;
- respected and prominent northern Ugandan citizens;
- non-governmental organization staff;
- Catholic, Anglican and Muslim religious leaders;
- Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) (national army) officers; and
- agronomists, veterinarians, road and water engineers, educators, medical doctors, bank managers, businessmen, social counselors, humanitarian relief specialists, women's representatives, journalists and editors.

The remaining 30% of those consulted were non-Ugandans and included officials of the United States Government, current and former diplomats of six other countries, representatives of four United Nations and other multilateral organizations, and members of religious missions. Experienced field staff of twenty national and international non-governmental organizations active in the north were consulted.

The author had worked in Uganda once before. During 1984, he had been engaged by the Department of State's Bureau for Refugee Programs and seconded to the United States Embassy in Kampala to serve as a refugee affairs officer.



## **Limitations**

Given the breadth of its scope, this assessment was carried out in a relatively brief period. It was conducted principally in the field and it is based to a significant extent on the information and views provided by those consulted. The security situation in the Ugandan north in March/April 1997 permitted road travel, albeit at some risk, to most areas. Travel to certain areas would have required military escort; although offered by the Government in most cases, the author did not deem escorted travel appropriate for this type of inquiry. As a result, he was unable to visit parts of Kilak County in western Gulu, a number of locations in Aswa County in eastern Gulu, Atanga trading center in western Kitgum, and Obongi County in western Moyo.

This report focuses on issues related directly to the conflict in the north. It is not intended to address broader national political and judicial issues.

Despite efforts to do so, the author was unable to meet with one of a small number of individuals who have identified themselves as official external spokesmen for the principal insurgency, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Persons who had until recently served in this capacity were no longer available and a current spokesman was not present in Nairobi during the author's visit. In persistent efforts, their offices could not be contacted by phone. The author was able to consult extensively in Uganda and outside the country with individuals who, while not associated with the insurgency, hold pronounced anti-Government outlooks.

## **Appreciation**

Three hundreds individuals devoted considerable time to consultations with the author. They patiently answered countless questions, explained their perception of the conflicts' histories, generously shared data, opinions and suggestions, narrated their personal experiences as conflict victims, or assisted in other crucial ways. A few had painstakingly collected or written yet-unpublished manuscripts, chronologies and other documents which they shared but which they preferred not be acknowledged. Colleagues in the sponsoring institutions – the U.S. Embassy and USAID, and in USAID/Washington, assisted with obtaining documents, logistical support and sustained encouragement, while refraining from attempting to influence the results. The author gratefully acknowledges their assistance. The interpretation of the information and views offered by these sources are the author's.

## **Organization of report**

This report is organized as follows:

**Section I** addresses the north-central predominantly ethnic Acholi districts of Gulu and Kitgum, located east of the Albert Nile River (hereinafter “the Nile”). On occasion, the conflict has intruded in the part of neighboring Moyo District located east of the Nile. In Gulu and Kitgum, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), led by Joseph Kony, is continuing an anti-Government insurgency begun by others in 1986 and which has evolved through several iterations. This conflict has been the most enduring and destructive of the northern wars.

**Section II** addresses the conflict in the West Nile region, in northwest Uganda. Here, the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF), led by Juma Oris, is conducting an insurgency whose main impact has been felt during the past two years. It has disrupted mainly Arua District as well as parts of neighboring Moyo District west of the Nile. The suffering and destruction the WNBF conflict has caused is significantly less than that borne by the Acholi people in Gulu and Kitgum.

**Section III** describes the impact of the conflicts on Nebbi District, just south of Arua, which has not experienced the intensity of violence and destruction which its northern neighbors have suffered. But its economy has been seriously affected by both WNBF and LRA activities.

**Section IV** analyzes the prospects for the expansion of the LRA and WNBF insurgencies beyond their current geographic areas of activity or ethnic base.

**Section V** sets forth the report’s final observations and recommendations.

Almost all of the locations described in the report appear on Maps A and B. The country’s major ethnic and linguistic groups are described in Map C.

## **SECTION I                    THE CONFLICT IN GULU AND KITGUM**

### **Background**

The districts of Gulu and Kitgum together comprise an area of 28,000 square kilometers – about the size of New Jersey, Belgium or Rwanda. But in comparison with Rwanda's population of seven million, the population of Gulu and Kitgum is 700,000 – of which some 90% normally reside in rural areas. Gulu and Kitgum, both located east of the Nile at the Sudan border, comprise 14% of Uganda's land mass and 4% of the national population. Roughly 70% of its people identify themselves as Catholics, 25% as Anglicans and 5% with other faiths, including 0.5% who are Muslims. The people of Gulu and Kitgum are almost entirely ethnic Acholis, and the two districts are often referred to as "Acholi" or "Acholiland." Ethnic Acholis are also found in southern Sudan near the Uganda border.

According to several Acholi elders, the pre-Colonial history of the Acholi people includes a warrior tradition which included combat with their eastern (Karamojong), southern (Langi) and western (Madi) neighbors, as well as frequent conflict among the Acholi clans themselves. During the Colonial period, the British Government recruited heavily among the Acholi for the uniformed services (army, police and prison guards). Acholi soldiers participated with the British in World War II in combat theaters throughout the world. Acholi people generally hold the view that the colonizers exploited them for the uniformed services and for unskilled labor, leaving them at the margins of Uganda's development, while central Ugandans, such as the Baganda, were the beneficiaries of more durable commercial and educational activities.

In his 1987 publication, Politics and the Military in Uganda 1890 - 1985, Amii Omara Otunnu notes that:

“...the African sector of the Army was not very representative of the ethnic composition of the country as a whole. The largest contingent was recruited from the north, especially from the people of Acholi...By 1914, Acholi had become the main recruiting ground for the KAR [King's Africa Rifles], a pattern which was continued in the post-colonial period.”

During the first post-Independence government of President Milton Obote (referred to as “Obote I”), the Ugandan army was still derived primarily from the

north. The Acholi, while not the majority, comprised its predominant ethnic group. Soldiers from the West Nile region were prominent as well.

### **Amin's persecution of Acholis**

Army Commander Col. Idi Amin – an ethnic Kakwa and a Muslim who claimed to be from Koboko County in the West Nile's Arua District – overthrew Obote in January 1971. Fearing the army's Acholi and Langi elements, he ordered them to the barracks, and early in his regime had many hundreds of their officers and enlisted men killed. The Amin regime was characterized by the elimination of many prominent, educated or prosperous Acholi in Kampala as well as in the north, including in 1977 the Anglican Archbishop of Uganda. Some Acholi assert that an entire generation of Acholi leaders was eliminated or forced into exile during these years.

Amin replaced the Acholi in the army with West Nilers, especially Kakwa and Aringa people from northern Arua and with a group many Ugandans refer to as "Sudanese." The term "Sudanese" apparently refers to Sudanese migrant laborers long settled in Uganda and their descendants, who resided around the Jinja area near Kampala; or their relatives from southern Sudan (and some from northeastern Zaire) who were invited to join the Amin forces.

As national and international disaffection with Amin increased, anti-Government elements (including the current president, Yoweri Museveni) coalesced in Tanzania during the late 1970s, and organized to overthrow him. According to some northerners, Ugandan Acholis residing as refugees in Sudan as well as Acholi in Gulu and Kitgum living in their home areas were recruited for this purpose. In Tanzania, they organized and trained to participate in the Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLA). The Tanzanian Army and the UNLA invaded Uganda and in April 1979 overthrew the Amin forces, many of whom retreated to Sudan.

Following three brief interim presidencies (Lule, Binaisa and Muwanga), and an election whose integrity was widely questioned, President Obote was returned to power in 1980. The "Obote II" Ugandan army, now the UNLA, again included a predominant Acholi element. Its proportion was estimated by some Acholi sources as about 30% to 40% of the approximately 35,000-person force. A larger proportion of officers than enlisted men may have been Acholis. The army, often perceived by the public as largely of Acholi origin,

was used by the government for the unenviable job of settling power disputes and carrying out unpopular government orders, gaining for it the enmity of many Ugandans.

During 1981, Yoweri Museveni established the National Resistance Army (NRA), and began an armed anti-government insurgency. Its formation had been prompted by the electoral fraud which returned Obote to the Presidency. NRA forces included Banyankole combatants from Museveni's home area, as well as Baganda, Banyarwanda and other groups from the Luwero area. Most of this conflict was waged not in Museveni's home district of Mbarara in southwestern Uganda, but instead in the Luwero District (1980 population: 412,000), home principally of the Baganda people, who were believed to be generally sympathetic to the anti-Obote struggle and upon whom the struggle visited profound suffering. The conflict also spilled over into parts of Kiboga, Mpigi, Mubende and other districts.

### **Luwero: the ghost that haunts Acholi**

By 1984, the UNLA had made little headway in the "Luwero Triangle" (see Map A) against the NRA insurgency, which had strong support among local civilians. Frustrated by its inability to defeat the NRA forces, it exacted reprisals against the area's unarmed Baganda (and Banyarwanda) civilian population through large-scale murder and purposeful mass starvation, and through the looting and destruction of undefended farming communities. One army massacre in which scores of civilians were killed took place just outside the Triangle in mid-1984 near the Namugongo Christian shrine, east of Kampala. At times, victims were reportedly brought into Luwero from other areas to be killed. Acholi soldiers returned home from Luwero with stolen property and in some cases with young girls as abductees.

An August 1984 Washington Post article<sup>4</sup> exposed the situation in Luwero, which was described by then-U.S. Assistant Secretary for Human Rights, Elliott Abrams, as "horrendous." By August 1984, some 100,000 or more persons were estimated to have been murdered. The State Department's assertive public denunciation and the human rights advocacy of then-U.S. Ambassador Alan Davis are still recalled by many Ugandans.

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<sup>4</sup> New Ugandan Crackdown Said to Kill Thousands, Caryle Murphy, Washington Post, 5 August 1984.

A recent overview<sup>1</sup> of Uganda by author Thomas Ofcansky asserts that

“...the UNLA conducted its operations with little regard for the rules of warfare. As a result, terrible human rights abuses occurred against pro-NRA communities in the Luwero Triangle. In January 1983, Obote launched “Operation Bonanza” in this area, during which UNLA troops destroyed small towns, villages, and farms and killed or displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians...After the war ended in 1986, the International Committee of the Red Cross claimed that at least 300,000 people had died in the Luwero Triangle and that officials had failed to account for half to a third of the region’s population.”

UNLA forces in Luwero were sometimes referred to as “the Acholis,” because of the large number of Acholis who comprised its officer and enlisted corps.

NRA conduct, by comparison, was observed by international witnesses to be generally disciplined and correct. Summary execution of prisoners and suspected UNLA collaborators and other abuses almost certainly occurred. But the NRA appeared to rely more on a program of political outreach to civilians, upon whose support it depended.

After the Luwero conflict ended, the ghosts of Luwero continued to haunt Acholi. By 1987, Acholiland itself was consumed by war. The Catholic Bishop of Gulu and Kitgum, the late Msgr. Cipriano Kihangire, in his April 1987 Easter homily, addressed the question, “What has caused this difficult situation?” Speaking to his Acholi parishioners about Luwero, he observed:

“Many joined the army with the hope of getting rich overnight, and were used by unscrupulous political leaders who sent them to carry out ‘operations’ in areas of political unrest. These operations involved atrocious acts of violence against innocent civilians, including children and women, who were subjected to unspeakable mistreatment. A lot of looting was done...When the loot was brought home, parents and relatives welcomed it in their homes, knowing that it was looted. Instead of correcting their children and condemning their actions, many parents had only praise for them...We can now see that these present sufferings are the result of our own sin.”

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<sup>1</sup> Ofcansky, Thomas P., Uganda - Tarnished Pearl of Africa, Boulder, 1996. His analysis of Luwero relies in part on U.S. Committee for Refugees and Amnesty International reports.

At the time these atrocities were being committed, beginning in about 1983 and in the years which followed, some Obote II spokesmen denied they were taking place at all. Those who acknowledged them alleged that the massacres were conducted by NRA forces disguised in UNLA uniforms. Still today, when the subject is raised, some Acholi offer the same explanations. Moreover, those Acholi who acknowledge that many atrocities took place dispute the estimate of 100,000 dead.

Is the attribution of events in Luwero exclusively to the UNLA's Acholi elements justified? The Acholi were only one of several ethnic groups prominently represented in the armed forces. Acholi forces in the army appear to have been generally subordinated to senior officers of President Obote's Lango tribe, a source of continual friction within the military. During some of this period, the UNLA was rudderless, operating without a permanent Chief of Staff. Powerful figures in the security apparatus who influenced military policy, such as National Security Agency Director Chris Rwakasisi, were of non-Acholi backgrounds. The army relied upon North Korean technical advisors in its Luwero operations. All of these factors had a bearing on the UNLA's conduct in Luwero.

Moreover, before and since Independence, abuses and indiscipline in the armed forces had been ignored or tolerated, contributing to an increase in such lawlessness. Amnesty International recounts one illustrative example of the origins of what some refer to as the military's "cultural of impunity:"

"In 1962, shortly before Uganda's independence, Lieutenant Idi Amin of the King's African Rifles commanded a platoon which killed a number of Turkana prisoners in northwest Kenya. Sir Walter Coutts, the British Governor of Uganda, vetoed any criminal proceedings against him on the grounds that he was one of only two black officers in the Ugandan army and a prosecution would be politically undesirable just before independence."

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<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, *Uganda: The Human Rights Record 1986 - 1989*, published in March 1989. The report attributes a part of this information to David Martin, *General Amin*, London, 1974. It also cites Sir Walter Coutts' assertion that "he [Coutts] did favour disciplinary action against Idi Amin. This was blocked by the then-Prime Minister, Milton Obote."

The vast majority of Acholi civilians in Gulu and Kitgum participated in no way, were remote from events in Luwero, and had no immediate reason to be concerned about them at the time.

Despite all of these mitigating factors, many Ugandans hold mainly the Acholi responsible for the Luwero atrocities because of the high proportion of Acholis in the armed forces at that time. While almost all Acholis deny such responsibility, a few Acholi elders nonetheless assert that the time has come for a dialogue with Baganda leaders, with the aim of reconciling what had occurred there. In a way which was difficult to pinpoint, they believe such a dialogue might help create conditions to end the current war in Acholi, even though the present conflict does not appear to directly involve the Baganda people. A few Acholi were said to believe that the spirits of some Luwero victims – for example, of a pregnant Baganda woman who was killed and mutilated in a particularly unspeakable way – are exacting revenge by causing or prolonging the current Acholi war.

#### **General Tito Okello Lutwa's Government - July 1985/January 1986**

During 1985, the Obote II regime appeared to be disintegrating under the pressure of the NRA insurgency, national discontent and international condemnation. In July 1985, Acholi elements in the UNLA, led by Lieutenant General Basilio Olara-Okello, himself an Acholi, overthrew the Obote government. General Tito Okello Lutwa (not related to Basilio), himself an Acholi from Namukora (Kitgum District), became President. President Obote and most of the Langi in the military were expelled and a predominantly Acholi government took power. Ambassador Olara Otunnu, also from Acholi (previously Obote's representative to the United Nations in New York), was appointed Foreign Minister. According to several observers, including authoritative U.S. Government sources, both Kampala and districts like Apac and Lira, home of the Lango people, were the scene of widespread looting – in many cases by Acholi soldiers – in an environment characterized by a general absence of law and order.

General Okello invited several anti-Obote forces to join his government:

-- Two organizations comprised mainly of ex-Amin soldiers in exile in Sudan – the Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) and the Former Uganda National Army (FUNA) – were given arms and joined the Okello Government.



-- Another small anti-Obote insurgency, the Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMU), also joined. FEDEMU consisted mainly of combatants drawn from the Baganda group, including from the Luwero area. [FEDEMU forces were to play a prominent role at the outset of the subsequent conflict in Acholi.]

Shortly after the Okello Government took power, President Moi of Kenya initiated peace negotiations between the Okello forces and the NRA, which remained in the Luwero Triangle in opposition to the government. Four months of negotiations for power-sharing were conducted in Nairobi, culminating in the execution of a December 1985 agreement signed by General Okello, NRA leader Museveni and President Moi.

Under the Nairobi agreement, a 17-member military council would govern the country. It would be comprised of seven members of the UNLA, seven members of the NRA, and representatives of the other smaller factions which had joined Okello. Museveni would have served as Vice Chairman under General Okello. A reconstituted national army was to comprise:

from UNLA	3,700 soldiers	(44%)
from NRA	3,600 soldiers	(42%)
from other factions	<u>1,200 soldiers</u>	<u>(14%)</u>
TOTAL	8,500 soldiers	(100%)

### **Advent of the NRA - January 1986**

Six months after General Okello's coup, and just one month after the execution of the Nairobi power-sharing agreement, the NRA unilaterally abrogated the treaty and proceeded with the military capture of Kampala. Government forces were overrun and expelled from the capital. According to a variety of sources, the Acholi contingent of the UNLA continued to engage the NRA forces as it was forced toward the north, with some UNLA soldiers looting what they could along the way.

As the Acholi UNLA forces crossed Acholiland, they warned Acholi civilians that the NRA would exact revenge – and in fact kill many of them – when it arrived in Gulu and Kitgum. They urged civilians to follow them across the border to Sudan, and many did. The rest remained at home and held their breath, awaiting developments.

By March 1986, the NRA had achieved complete military control of Gulu and Kitgum. According to eyewitness interviewees, including a number of strident opponents of President Museveni, the NRA conducted itself in an exemplary and restrained manner in the first few months. The revenge and plundering of which the Acholi civilians had been warned did not materialize.

Instead, the NRA forces were characterized by most interviewees to be disciplined, restrained, respectful of civilians, and engaged in a program of affirmative political outreach, at least in the first few months. Eyewitness accounts of NRA conduct suggest that the new Government's policy of "reconciliation with no revenge" appeared to be guiding NRA conduct. Hearing of these developments, some civilians who had preemptively fled to southern Sudan returned to their homes. During these months, there was some recovery for personal gain by NRA soldiers of property which they alleged had been looted by UNLA soldiers. But most Acholi people with whom the author spoke asserted that the public was surprised by the peaceful nature of the NRA administration.

During this same period, beginning in March 1986, ex-UNLA Acholi forces in Sudan organized themselves into an armed insurgency and, at an early stage, formulated specific plans of attack against the NRA which were to be carried out later that year.

## **Acholi attitudes/Contributing causes of the war**

Nonetheless, during this same period, perceptions and attitudes among the Acholi people combined to forge a durable resolve to initiate a prolonged, armed insurgency against the Museveni Government. A number of these attitudes persist today, though they are much diminished. In the author's view, these can be summarized in five categories:

### **1. Military humiliation**

Many Acholi shared a collective identity as proud and able professional soldiers in the Colonial and post-Independence uniformed services. This included the long-held view that Acholis do not surrender, especially in their home areas, and to some degree that "only Acholis should rule in Acholi."

Yet the NRA – which they perceived as an unprofessional, inexperienced alien military force – had defeated them and occupied their own home area. Some professional soldiers felt that the UNLA had withdrawn from Kampala prematurely, believing that if it had persisted it would have overcome the NRA forces. A profound sense of military humiliation pervaded among the Acholi, especially among the professional soldiers.

The means to resist were also at hand: according to several sources, caches of arms and ammunition had been pre-positioned in Acholi for this contingency.

### **2. Loss of government power**

After decades of subordination to Lango elements in the armed forces, the Acholi had achieved government power just six months earlier and had finally begun to enjoy some of the power and privileges of more senior rank, political and civil service appointments – and the homes and vehicles which attain to them. They were deprived of all this by the NRA military victory. Although they themselves had come to power through a military coup, they felt cheated by Museveni when he betrayed the Nairobi agreement. "We paved the way for the NRA by overthrowing Obote," several Acholi explained, "and Museveni paid us back by betraying us."

### 3. Economic consequences

The economic implications of the military defeat were immediately apparent: a great number of Acholi families depended on their jobs in the uniformed services (army, police, prisons) for a livelihood. It was the largest single source of cash employment, the equivalent of a major industry. Some Acholi sources estimated that 20% to 30% of Acholi families had at least one male member in the uniformed services. [A May 1994 Community Action Program profile of neighboring Moyo District suggests that 60% of families there had a member in these services.] Whatever the actual proportion, it seems likely that Acholis lost well over 10,000 jobs as a result of the UNLA defeat, and the alternative of on-farm employment was perceived as an unattractive one.

The presence in a family of an armed services member offered other benefits as well, such as the fostering or protection of extended family businesses and property. Most of the population's wealth and savings were invested in livestock, which were susceptible to rustling by neighboring Karamojong tribesmen. The police Tracking Force, which patrolled the eastern border of Kitgum, and the presence in Acholi of active UNLA personnel, had kept the Karamojong largely in check.

Until 1979, most Karamojong cattle rustlers depended on bows and arrows and other manual weapons. When the Amin forces were expelled from Uganda by the UNLA in 1979, they abandoned their armory at Moroto in eastern Karamoja. A stock of modern weapons and ammunition was thus acquired by the Karamojong, who became adept in their use.

Shortly after the NRA took power, the Karamojong reportedly received further arms from the government to defend themselves against cattle raiding by Turkana tribesmen from Kenya. To protect their wealth from Karamojong rustling, the Acholi were convinced they needed to retain their arms, an assertion which was amply vindicated a year later.

#### **4. Genuine and induced panic**

As they withdrew in the wake of their defeat by the NRA to Sudan, Acholi soldiers warned the civilian population that “the NRA killers [were] coming.” To the degree that its military leaders were already contemplating further armed resistance to the Museveni forces, it may have served their interests to panic the public into joining them in exile. However, they may also have had in their minds three other factors:

- a fear that the massacre of Acholi soldiers and leaders, such as that conducted by Amin forces beginning in 1971, would recur;
- a concern that the NRA would take revenge on the Acholi soldiers and civilians for Luwero atrocities in which the NRA believed Acholi soldiers participated; and/or
- an expectation that the NRA would simply conduct itself as the UNLA itself had in its Luwero massacres and, during the early 1980s, in the West Nile.

#### **5. Unexpected consequences**

Having witnessed the razing of Luwero and the West Nile, the Acholi soldiers would have understood the potential impact of an insurgency waged in Acholi itself. But most of the Acholi public had not witnessed these events and may not have anticipated the magnitude of consequences which such a struggle could entail. Many believed that an organized assault by the Acholi professional military would have forced an NRA retreat across the Nile River in thirty days. In hindsight, it appears that the Acholi may also have over-estimated their own military capabilities and underestimated those of the NRA.

Many of the attitudes and motivations described above remained strong among the Acholi people during succeeding phases of the war in Acholi, particularly from 1986 until 1991. But, observing its lack of success over its ten-year course and its consequences, empirical evidence caused the views of many to evolve.

### **Was poverty a cause of the war?**

The economic implications of the UNLA's defeat in 1986 were an integral part of the dynamics which led to the current conflict. It might be useful, however, to distinguish these factors from a related assertion:

A number of expatriate observers assert that poverty in Gulu and Kitgum was a principal cause of the current conflict. In several sectors, Acholi has had a disadvantaged development in comparison with other areas of Uganda.

On the other hand, in 1986 Gulu and Kitgum comprised a vast sparsely-populated area with considerable potential for agriculture and livestock development, as it does today. Rainfall in Gulu is reasonable, and the people of Kitgum had constructed river dams and valley tanks to cope, in part, with dry spells. Employment in the agricultural and livestock sectors may not have been perceived as attractive alternatives for former combatants, but it was an option for many. The area possessed large herds of cattle, goats, sheep and other livestock and the potential for almost 100% on-farm employment. While not as prosperous or developed as other parts of the country, neither does the area appear to have been acutely impoverished.

Most Acholi interviewees blame their area's lack of development in great part on Colonial policies. However, from 1962 until 1986, through the almost 25 years since Independence, Uganda's presidents – except during the 1979/1980 interregnum between Amin and Obote II, had been northerners. The Acholis had been prominent participants in the Obote I and II administrations. The fruits of development during those administrations had not reached Acholi to the degree that they had reached other areas. Nonetheless, it is not clear how poverty or lack of development could be legitimately attributed to a government which had been in power for only a few months, as was the case of the National Resistance Movement (NRM) administration in 1986.

### **War in Acholi as an extension of the Luwero conflict**

In a sense, the struggle initiated by the NRA in Luwero in the early 1980s has never been concluded. It continued in Luwero through 1985. In early 1986 it was fought in Kampala and has continued in Gulu and Kitgum since that time. In essence, the opposing parties remain the same, as do some of the tactics. In its current stage, it has passed through five phases, which are outlined in Charts A and B on the following pages and whose outset and evolution will now be described.

**FIVE PHASES OF INSURGENCY**

**GULU/KITGUM - 1986/1997**

**PHASE I                      UPDA                                      March 1986/July 1988**

**PHASE II                      ALICE LAKWENA                                      Late 1986/End 1987**

**PHASE III                      SEVERINO LIKOYA                                      Jan 1988 - Aug 1989**

**The Joseph Kony Period**

**Phase IV                      Early Kony                                      late-1987 - Feb  
1994**

**Phase V                      Current Kony/LRA                                      March 1994 - present**





## **FIVE PHASES OF INSURGENCY IN ACHOLI**

**Phase I      UPDA      March 1986 to June 1988**  
**Uganda People's Democratic Army**

Most of the former Acholi UNLA soldiers who retreated from Kampala (fighting the NRA as they withdrew) continued north during March 1986 and finally crossed the international border into Sudan. Sudan provided refuge and a base from which to re-organize but, according to most reports, did not provide military assistance. Several Acholi asserted that, in fact, Sudanese authorities confiscated their weapons when they entered Sudan and returned them when they crossed back into Uganda.

According to some reports, senior Acholi officers began actively planning their military campaign against the NRA almost immediately. A Makerere University study<sup>7</sup> asserts that the anti-government Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) was established in Juba in March 1986. One knowledgeable interviewee asserted that in May 1986 key Acholi military leaders, at a meeting in Sudan, identified locations throughout Gulu and Kitgum which the UPDA would attack in mid-August. If these reports are generally accurate, it appears that the UPDA was organized just as the NRA arrived in Gulu, and that its battle strategy was determined during a period in which almost all of the assessment's interviewees characterized the NRA's conduct as exemplary.

According to most reports, there were three categories of potential UPDA participants:

- (a) Former UNLA soldiers who had taken refuge in Sudan, and who were among the group determined from the outset to continue the armed struggle against the NRA forces;
- (b) Former UNLA soldiers who had returned to their villages, buried their weapons and ammunition, and awaited developments; and
- (c) young men who had never served in the UNLA but who were potential UPDA recruits in those villages.

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<sup>7</sup> Asowa Okwe, Charles and Amisi, Bertha, Analysis on the Human and Economic Cost of War in the North NGO Advocacy and Lobby for Peace in Northern Uganda; Makerere University in conjunction with ActionAid Emergencies Response Information Centre (ERIC); January 1997.

UPDA activists in Sudan who were organizing the insurgency sought ways to induce those in categories (b) and (c) who remained in Uganda to join them.

The Makerere University study mentioned above and numerous interviewees indicate that after the NRA consolidated its authority, it ordered former UNLA soldiers to surrender their weapons and that many did so. At some point before August 1986 it also ordered all former UNLA soldiers to report to the NRA. Many refused, in part because they may have feared a recurrence of the massacre of Acholi soldiers conducted with a similar prelude by Amin forces in 1971. To avoid arrest by NRA units, they joined the UPDA ranks in Sudan.

### **The FEDEMU factor**

The Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMU) was described earlier in this report as an anti-Obote insurgency which had joined General Tito Okello's government following his July 1985 coup against Obote. FEDEMU did not enjoy the reputation for discipline which had characterized the NRA. It was comprised mainly of Baganda combatants, among whose families were the victims of Luwero Triangle atrocities. When the NRA overthrew the Okello Government, FEDEMU joined the Museveni forces and was integrated as a unit into the NRA, which from that moment assumed responsibility for its conduct.

At some point – apparently after regular NRA forces consolidated their control in the north – the NRA/FEDEMU unit (known in the NRA as the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion) was dispatched to Acholi.<sup>6</sup> Among the areas to which it was assigned was Namu-okora, the home town in eastern Kitgum of General Tito Okello and, reportedly, the origin of many Acholi officers.

From the outset, NRA/FEDEMU's conduct was reported by civilians in the area as different from the regular NRA units which had previously occupied the area. Frequent looting, threats and beatings took place. According to Namu-okora interviewees, during the May/July 1986 period in Namu-okora:

-- one boy (aged 18) accused falsely of being ex-UNLA was shot while running from NRA/FEDEMU forces;

-- one former UNLA soldier (aged 30) was arrested by NRA/FEDEMU soldiers in Namu-okora and beaten to death; and

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<sup>6</sup> While all interviewees in Kitgum and several published sources identify the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion as the former FEDEMU forces, one source indicates that it may have been an amalgam of former FEDEMU and combatants of the former Uganda Freedom Army/Movement (UFA/M), another anti-Obote insurgency incorporated into the NRA.

-- one local teacher was shot to death by an NRA/FEDEMU soldier.

While mortality was limited, these incidents created fear and tension in the minds of Namu-okora residents. Most people understood that FEDEMU was at that point an integral part of the NRA, but also appeared to recognize that it had a previous separate identity.

In August 1986 the UPDA launched a series of well-planned, coordinated attacks on NRA positions throughout Gulu and Kitgum. Among the first was an attack on the village of Ukuti, northeast of Namu-okora, a few kilometers from the Sudan border. The position, defended by an NRA/FEDEMU unit, was overrun and the defeated forces withdrew to Namu-okora.

Immediately following this defeat, the NRA/FEDEMU forces threatened brutal reprisals against the Namu-okora civilian population, invoking the Luwero atrocities as well as the Ukuti defeat. They arrested 44 men and one woman and placed them in the back of a truck. Soldiers armed with automatic weapons in the bed of a pick-up seized from the Catholic parish followed the truck as it departed west on the road to Kitgum. Fearing the worst, some of the detained civilians attempted to escape from the truck. The NRA/FEDEMU forces fired on and killed all of the prisoners. UPDA forces, galvanized by this incident, attacked and overran the NRA forces in Namu-okora and for more than one month controlled the town, the only occasion of the sustained occupation of a town anywhere in Gulu and Kitgum during the decade-long war, according to several sources.

President Museveni reportedly reacted angrily to news of the Namu-okora massacre. He is reliably reported to have ordered the arrest of its perpetrators. Some of them, temporarily held in an enclosed truck, died of suffocation. Others were jailed, where according to reliable sources they remained at least through the mid-1990s.

Nonetheless, the Namu-okora incident persuaded many former UNLA soldiers and some youth who had been awaiting developments to join the UPDA rebels.

Notwithstanding the sequence of events described above, a number of Acholi interviewees asserted that until mid-August the Acholi had no intention of opposing the NRA. They state that the war began – in a spontaneous and disorganized form in August – as a result of the Namu-okora massacre, an assertion which the facts do not appear to support.

### **UPDA popular support/NRA brutal response**

Almost all of the assessment's sources agreed that the UPDA enjoyed overwhelming popular support among the civilian population of Gulu and Kitgum. Most recruits joined voluntarily, and civilians shared food, livestock, intelligence and other support with these forces. It appears that although the UPDA was unable to capture and control towns and trading centers, it controlled extensive portions of the countryside and regularly attacked NRA positions.

Operating in a hostile civilian environment, the NRA reacted in an angry and brutal manner against the civilian population. During certain stages of the 1986 - 1991 period, its conduct included the execution of suspected collaborators and prisoners and the killing of groups of victims, harsh beating during questioning, widespread destruction of granaries, mass detentions and other such practices.<sup>7</sup> Rape was also a frequent complaint. As a result, particularly during the 1986 - 1988 period, relief workers report that civilians fleeing army operations frequently sought protection in rural areas under predominant UPDA control. However, nothing learned during this assessment suggests that the frequency and magnitude of these periodic NRA abuses were in any way comparable to the large-scale mass murder and brutality that characterized UNLA operations in the Luwero Triangle in 1983/1984.

In the process of a rather unsuccessful military operation, however, the UPDA's arms and ammunition dwindled, and by late 1986 its forces were increasingly demoralized. Into the vacuum created by this slump arrived a figure who transformed and revitalized the Acholi resistance movement.

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<sup>7</sup> In September 1992, Amnesty International published Uganda: The Failure to Safeguard Human Rights, which includes detailed descriptions of numerous incidents in Gulu, Kitgum and in eastern Uganda attributed to the NRA and to rebel groups about which it received reports.

## **Phase II**

### **Alice Auma “Lakwena” late-1986/end-1987 Holy Spirit Movement (HSM)**

Alice Auma was a spirit medium or messenger (“Lakwena”) who, according to her own accounts, channeled messages from the spirit of an Italian World War I veteran who had died at age 95 and was buried near Murchison Falls. According to Alice, after a 40-day immersion in the Nile, she was moved to advise the UPDA on its resistance operations. Daughter of a Madi father and Acholi mother, she was 28 years old when she began her career as a key resistance leader and founder of the Holy Spirit Movement.

Alice's philosophy included the conviction that Acholi never surrender and embraced the objective of regaining power in Kampala. Apparently referring to atrocities against civilians, she asserted that in Luwero the UNLA's Acholi elements had placed a stain on the reputation of the Acholi people which required purification. She exhorted the “pure, clean Acholi youth” to redeem the Acholi people. Alice's “Holy Spirit Safety Precautions” for her combatants reportedly included:

- rubbing their chests with shea-butter oil, to immunize themselves against the bullets of their enemies;
- never taking cover against enemy fire, but marching straight toward the enemy;
- transforming stones into exploding grenades by placing them in pails of water in which hot metal had also been immersed;
- singing Christian hymns as they march into battle;
- neither eating food nor shaking hands with non-Holy Spirit members;
- killing no bees or snakes, the allies of the Holy Spirit Movement; and
- having no more or less than two testicles.

Alice urged attendance at Sunday Christian services and adherence to the Ten Commandments, as well as obedience to her teachings and the orders of Holy Spirit commanders. Her religious ideology is rejected by conventional Christian churches.

### **Alice's military campaign**

Alice seized the opportunity of the UPDA's demoralization in November 1986 to obtain from one of its commanders in Kitgum the services of 150 UPDA combatants and their weapons. She planned to demonstrate the effectiveness of the military approach she advocated. In November and December 1986 in her first attacks, Alice achieved two stunning victories. In Kilak Corner and in Pajule, both in southern Kitgum, her methods took the NRA by surprise, defeated its forces after sustained fighting, and captured many weapons and supplies.

Alice's success reportedly electrified thousands of Acholi youth, who in the next months were eager to join her. Many people believed that, indeed, she had spirit power and she enjoyed strong support among the Acholi population. When her young soldiers were killed, at times in large numbers, she explained that it was because they were impure or had not followed her orders faithfully.

After her first two successes, her UPDA sponsors came to collect the captured weapons. She refused to turn them over and generally repudiated the ex-UNLA forces among them. Eventually she developed a method for purifying them and insisted that the UPDA subordinate itself to her. Alice attacked those UPDA units which refused, further demoralizing the organization which had helped to launch her movement. Though her human rights conduct with the civilian population was generally reported to be good, several sources indicated that she dealt with those who refused to support her in a brutal manner.

During 1987, however, the Holy Spirit Movement suffered increasingly serious reverses. In January, hundreds of her soldiers were killed in a battle near Kilak Corner. She withdrew to Opit in southeast Gulu and reorganized. After a respite, in July she conducted an Acholi purification campaign in the region. By September 1987, her forces were moving south towards Kampala through ethnic Lango and Iteso areas, picking up support from local people along the way. Among her supporters at that time was Professor Isaac Newton Ojok, the Obote II Minister of Education. In November, however, her forces were surrounded and destroyed in the Bugembe Forest outside Jinja, just fifty miles from Kampala. Alice herself escaped to Kenya, where at first she was detained and later accorded political asylum.

### **Why did the Acholi people follow Alice?**

According to many Acholi sources, Alice enjoyed wide support among the Acholi people. Many were inclined to believe her claims of spirit power, especially after her early victories. Her effort to “remove the stain” from the reputation of former UNLA combatants resonated positively. Many Acholi – particularly after the NRA human rights abuses – felt that aliens were indeed ruling in Acholi.

A number of the attitudes and perceptions which motivated the formation of the UPDA and its popular support at the outset remained undiminished. Alice's methods were different, but her fundamental objectives were similar to those of the UPDA. The Alice Lakwena movement emerged and was completely destroyed within the period of the UPDA's activities.

The UPDA's “Lakwena gambit” had spun out of control, led to the death of many Acholi youth and to more ruin and humiliation for an already demoralized group.

### **June 1988 NRA/UPDA peace accords**

The NRA seized this opportunity to reach out to the UPDA. In June 1987, the Government offered the first amnesty for those who abandoned the armed struggle (the amnesty system evolved further over time). In addition, NRA commander Major General Salim Saleh, President Museveni's brother, traveled by helicopter to a UPDA base and conducted discussions with senior officers such as UPDA High Military Commander Brigadier Odong Latek and directly with the UPDA troops. This process culminated in the June 1988 peace treaty between the Government and the UPDA, which was witnessed by the late Catholic Bishop Cipriano Kihangire. Many Acholi, while not reconciled to the new Government, recognized the hopelessness of the insurgency and its impact on the region, and welcomed the agreement.

Several thousand UPDA troops abandoned the armed struggle and accepted an amnesty. The January 1997 Makerere University/ActionAid report asserts that the NRA absorbed 2,000 former UPDA combatants; the NRA had already integrated some Acholi soldiers who had not joined the UPDA. Those not absorbed into the NRA returned to their villages.

However, Brigadier Odong Latek and several units loyal to him, apparently on the advice of the UPDA political wing in London, remained in Sudan and resolved to continue the struggle. Their motivation may have been stiffened by the NRA's human rights conduct; they may have been serving the personal political ambitions of some expatriate Acholi; they may have lacked confidence in the amnesty; or they may have included former UNLA soldiers responsible for

Luwero atrocities. Or they may have been unable to overcome their bitterness over the loss of cattle.

### **The cattle factor**

Cattle has long been the main repository of Acholi wealth. By 1985, their nearly 300,000 cattle (and even more numerous goats, sheep and other livestock), represented not only their savings, but also their contingency reserve for sickness, drought, retirement, education and marriage dowry. In 1986 and much of 1987, farmers provided livestock to the UPDA, sometimes against promissory notes payable after the victory they expected. The UPDA used most of this livestock for food, but some might have been traded in Sudan for arms and ammunition, which were in short supply.

The NRA confiscated cattle as needed to support its operations. Fearing such confiscations, some Acholi preemptively liquidated parts of their herds. Local veterinary experts report that a small part of the herd was also lost to diseases like rinderpest and pleuro-pneumonia which they believe originated in southern Sudan. Karamojong cattle raiders continued, as they had throughout history, to harass livestock owners on Kitgum's far eastern border.

However, beginning in about August 1987, during the Alice Lakwena period, an event unique in Acholi history occurred: an overwhelming number of Karamojong cattle raiders swept through Kitgum and eastern Gulu and removed almost all the area's livestock. Those who resisted the rustlers were brutally attacked. In areas where both Karamojong and NRA soldiers were present, some farmers reported that the latter colluded in these activities, but in general Karamojong raiders were observed to be operating on their own. In western Gulu, it appears that at about the same time, a similar large-scale removal of livestock was conducted by NRA forces.

Data provided by veterinary officers indicated that the cattle population of Gulu and Kitgum in 1985 was about 285,000. The cattle raids removed almost the entire herd. In 1997 – ten years after the raids – the combined herd for both districts is estimated at 5,000 head, less than 2% the earlier number. Goats and other livestock have been similarly affected. The replacement cost of the plundered cattle herd alone is estimated at close to US\$25 million.

To put this loss in perspective, the Gulu branch of the Cooperative Bank – which serves principally a rural clientele and is one of only two banks in Gulu – observed that in times of insecurity, savings deposits tend to increase. Yet, on average for the years 1991 through 1996, it estimated its total deposits at about US\$1.5 million.



In an instant, the Acholi farmers were deprived of the milk their cows provided; the additional acreage and higher yields which their oxen permitted them; their fallback for marriage dowries and education; and the savings which carried them through drought, hard time, sickness and old age. The self-respect which attached to cattle ownership and the cultural functions upon which exchange of cattle had relied were disrupted. It was one of the greatest economic and morale blows of the war. It also deprived the insurgents of livestock upon which they relied for food and which they might have used to trade for the arms and ammunition upon which their viability increasingly depended.

The attitudes which had motivated the Acholi to launch or continue the armed anti-NRA struggle – pride, military humiliation, sense of betrayal and alien rule, loss of government power and its economic impact – were compounded by the loss of their livestock and the apparent loss of control over their environment, as well as the defeat of the Lakwena forces at the end of 1987. Six months later, the UPDA signed its peace agreement with the NRA. But perhaps in part because of bitterness over the cattle raids, not all the rebel forces abandoned the armed struggle.

The disappearance of the police Tracking Force which in the past had restricted Karamojong raiders to sporadic incidents along the eastern Kitgum border contributed to the lawless environment in which these raids occurred. The Acholi people, except its active insurgents, were disarmed. That there was no reported confrontation in Acholi between the cattle raiders and the police, military or other Government authorities led the local population to believe that they were tolerating the plundering, which later occurred in the same magnitude in other districts. The attitude of most Acholis ranges from deep suspicion to absolute conviction that lawlessness of this magnitude could not have occurred if it had not been instigated – or at least approved – at the highest level of government.

Authoritative government sources acknowledge some of the NRA raids in western Gulu, which they attribute to corrupt elements in the military at that time. Efforts at restitution by the government have been made for a fraction of these thefts. Government sources also concede that the Karamojong raids were carried out with little armed Government opposition. They argue, however, that in 1987 the NRA's armed forces were relatively small and not yet consolidated. Nonetheless, in Acholi they were forced to confront both the UPDA and Lakwena forces at the same time. This allowed the NRA few resources to spare to combat the cattle raiders and made them hesitant to risk opening another major armed front against Karamoja.

The enduring political fact, nonetheless, is the widespread belief in Acholi that the Government instigated or at least approved the raids, a source of irreconcilable and continuing bitterness against the present administration.

### **Phase III      Severino Likoya Kiberu - January 1988 - August 1989                   "God the Father"**

Following the defeat of the Alice Lakwena forces in November 1987, the survivors returned to Acholi. Alice Lakwena's father, Severino Likoya Kiberu, who called himself "God the Father," decided to continue the struggle to "save Acholi male youth from Museveni's plan to destroy them." But his appeal was limited and his actions poorly organized. His activities are remembered for some poorly planned attacks on Kitgum town in which many of his followers were killed, and after which some of the survivors defected to Joseph Kony's group. Angry at the Acholi public for its lack of support, Severino is said to have engaged in violent conduct against civilians who refused to join him. It appeared from the obscure memories of most interviewees that Severino's was the least important of the Acholi insurgencies. He was finally captured by the NRA and later released. At this time, he is reported to be working as a carpenter in Gulu town.

At about the same time that Severino's movement began, Joseph Kony was also mobilizing forces to resist the Government. Kony's movement continues until the present and is the subject of the next section of this report.

### **Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) late-1987 to the present**

The current stage of the Acholi insurgency was initiated by Joseph Kony in late 1987, when his age was about 26. Kony, a cousin of Alice, is from Odek in southeastern Gulu, and had never been a member of the former UNLA. It is sometimes reported that Kony is a former Catholic catechist. An authoritative source indicates this is inaccurate. Kony's father was a Catholic catechist, his mother an Anglican. His brother is believed to have been a witch doctor; upon his brother's death, Kony believed he inherited his brother's powers.

Kony claims to be a spirit medium, as Alice was, and is reported to dress in female clothing during some of his channeling experiences. In the early years, he was reported to be guided by a kind of "spirit general staff." This group included the spirits of a Sudanese female Chief of Operations; a Chinese Deputy Chief (Ing Chu) who commands an imaginary jeep battalion; an American (King Bruce) who commands the stones which turn into grenades; another American spirit (Jim Brickey) who fights with Kony's troops as long as they obey his commands, but joins the NRA forces and fights against them when they disobey; and the spirit of Juma Oris, the leader of the West Nile Bank Front.

Reportedly seized with his guiding spirits in early 1987, Kony joined the UPDA's Black Battalion in Atanga, southwest Kitgum, in April of that year as an advisor. By late 1987, he was said to be in control of UPDA forces in that area. After the UPDA's peace agreement in mid-1988, some of its remnants, as well members of Severino Likoya's group, joined him. His movement is reported to have always been almost exclusively Acholi.

The Kony insurgency can be divided into two distinct phases:

- the period of his earliest contact with the UPDA in late 1987 until the breakdown of peace negotiations with the government in February 1994, including much of 1992 and 1993 during which the conflict continued at a low level of intensity;
- the current period of renewed LRA activity, from March 1994 to the present, during which for the first time the LRA received military assistance from the Sudan Government.

Of course, the two periods are part of a continuous period of insurgency. But in this report, because of their distinct characteristics, these two phases will be treated separately as Phases IV and V of the overall conflict.

#### **Phase IV Joseph Kony's earlier period: late-1987 to February 1994**

In the earlier period of the Kony insurgency, his movement was known first as the Lord's Salvation Army and later as the United Christian Democratic Army. In 1992, its name was changed to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), by which it is known today. Kony's forces actively pursued the war and at the outset reportedly enjoyed some popular support, but apparently considerably less than the UPDA and the Lakwena movements.

In 1991, the Government of Uganda began what appeared to be a coordinated attempt to eliminate this fourth phase of the insurgency.

- ◆ Minister of State for Defense Major General David Tinyefuza was instructed by the President to conduct a major anti-insurgency operation. "Operation North" distinguished itself for its brutality and heavy-handedness reported on by a number of human rights organizations and which was similar to NRA conduct reported during the UPDA period which began in late 1986. A prominent incident which took place in mid-April 1991 involved the torture of approximately three dozen prisoners in an underground pit in Burchoro village northeast of Gulu, where a number of the prisoners were killed.
- ◆ Local government officials also mobilized the civilian population into local bow-and-arrow defense units. The population was urged to organize itself to resist rebel intrusions with these implements until the NRA could arrive to join the battle. That many communities, to a greater extent in Kitgum than in Gulu, were willing to participate may suggest a diminishing level of tolerance for continued rebel activity. Opponents of the bow-and-arrow brigades argued that such weapons could not detain rebels armed with automatic weapons and that unnecessary civilian casualties would result. The rebels reacted angrily to the establishment of these civilian units.

- ◆ The Government arrested eighteen notable northerners (and reportedly several hundred others) on charges of treason. A number of the eighteen had their limbs broken and were otherwise severely mistreated. At the end of up to two years' detention, they were all acquitted and many received compensation for these baseless arrests.<sup>7</sup> It appears that at least some of the arrests were reprisals against their victims for denunciation of local government corruption (for example in connection with the finances of the Kitgum Senior Secondary School). They also seemed, collectively, an attempt by the government to project political power in the north.

Operation North and other factors appear to have had considerable impact on the LRA. Some observers who resided in the north at the time assert that its forces were reduced to a fraction of their original strength and that their movements were circumscribed.

One of the enduring questions from this period – a source of concern to Acholi and non-Acholi alike – is why the NRA did not pursue these remnants and destroy the LRA when it appeared to have the chance. Detractors of the government insist that its armed forces chose not to do so in order to justify continued receipt of operational allowances and to continue to engage in corrupt practices. Some allege that the LRA conflict provides a convenient “smokescreen” for delivery by Uganda of military supplies to the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), an armed anti-Sudan government insurgency based in southern Sudan. They also allege that the war provides a convenient justification for defense expenditures which Uganda’s donors would otherwise not accept.

Government sources assert that a lack of technical competence in the correct deployment of air and ground resources prevented a complete victory in 1991. One expatriate military expert asserts that in the final phases of such conflicts local military commanders hesitate to risk the lives of their soldiers. Instead, they typically rely on indirect fire and other ineffective means to combat the remaining enemy troops. Finally, some observers asserted that Ugandan participation in military operations in neighboring countries other than Sudan has not appeared to require a “smokescreen.”

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<sup>7</sup> Many of the 18 notables were represented by attorney Hon. Alfonse Owiny Dollo, currently Minister of State for the North and an elected Member of Parliament for Agago County, Kitgum. Mr. Owiny Dollo had also participated in the drafting of the June 1988 peace agreement between the Government of Uganda and the UPDA.

## **Evolution in human rights conduct**

The 1992 period witnessed important changes in the human rights conduct by both parties to the conflict. Major General Tinyefuza was replaced and the NRA underwent military reorganization. The NRA's human rights conduct improved significantly. The Government campaigned to persuade the civilian population of the desirability of peace and the hopelessness of the conflict. Acholi leaders may have noted that the Iteso in Soroti and Kumi were on the verge of a peaceful settlement of their dispute with the Government.

At the same time, the LRA was apparently angered by its gradual abandonment by the civilian population. The formation of the bow-and-arrow brigades signaled an evolution in the Acholi public's view of the conflict. The LRA retaliated by stepping up human rights violations against civilians. Dozens of LRA mutilation victims were referred to Lacor Hospital in Gulu after their lips, noses and ears had been severed. Some knowledgeable observers assert that there were hundreds of such victims, particularly in the 1991/1992 period, although this was difficult to independently confirm.

## **Government of Uganda peace initiative**

Both 1992 and 1993 were years in which stability appeared to return to the two affected districts. Many Acholi believed that, in effect, the war had ended. In February 1993, Pope John Paul II visited Gulu town, an event of profound social and religious significance. General Tito Okello returned from exile and pronounced himself impatient with the continuing rebellion, reportedly describing it as "useless and just killing our own people." The Iteso insurgency in Soroti and Kumi had ended in a peace agreement achieved through the efforts of the Teso Commission. Displaced people began to return to their homes and plant their fields.

The Government of Uganda seized this moment to initiate a well-planned and coordinated peace initiative with the LRA. Minister for the North (resident in Gulu town) Betty Bigombe, with strong direct Presidential support, led the initiative in the field and involved traditional chiefs and elders of the Acholi community in the process. Minister Bigombe is herself an Acholi. Following a period of patient preparation, in late 1993 and early 1994, she met on several occasions with Joseph Kony and his representatives. A cease-fire was in effect and safe-conduct guarantees had been provided by the government to LRA insurgents. Hundreds of LRA soldiers were visibly clustered near trading

centers awaiting a favorable conclusion of the negotiations. A number of knowledgeable sources reported that Kony angrily denounced the elders during his meetings with them. He accused them of having encouraged the anti-government insurgency in the beginning, and of then abandoning and betraying him. However, just as the peace process appeared close to fruition, ominous developments occurred.

#### On the LRA side...

Government sources believe that concurrent with its peace negotiations with Minister Bigombe, the LRA had stepped up its negotiations for military assistance with the Government of Sudan. LRA recruitment of men – induced by assurances they would be in LRA service for a short time and then receive resettlement benefits under the peace treaty – resumed, as did abduction of young girls. Some sources suggest that LRA hard-liners demanded that Kony scuttle the talks.

As described earlier, hundreds of LRA troops under safe-conduct guarantees were already clustered near trading centers and could have rapidly abandoned the conflict under a peace agreement. Many Acholi believed that, in fact, the war had effectively ended. Nonetheless, Kony demanded a three- to six-month delay in the proposed peace implementation period. This particular demand raised a doubt on the government side about whether Kony was using the cease-fire and the negotiation period to conclude his agreement with the Government of Sudan and resume the conflict. Combined with the other factors, it raised doubts about the LRA's commitment – or ability to commit itself – to the negotiation process.

#### On the Government side...

The advent of a cease-fire had curtailed the operational allowances which NRA personnel in the combat zone had been receiving. Corrupt practices through which NRA officers enriched themselves were widespread. These factors appeared to combine to discourage the kind of active military support for the Government's peace process which would have been desirable.

To a certain degree, the NRA's excessive confidence in its ability to launch heroic efforts to quickly defeat its enemy – a chronic problem which continues in the present – persuaded senior military advisors to the President that peace negotiations were not essential: the army could crush these few hundred

rebels in a month, they claimed. Some Acholi politicians who were not included in the peace process are reported to have undermined it as well.

It appeared that there were influential elements in the Government and in the LRA who opposed the peace process. All indications suggest that it had enjoyed the strong personal support of the President until its final days. But in February 1994 he appeared to lose confidence in the process and issued an ultimatum: if the LRA did not abandon the armed struggle in seven days, the NRA would destroy it. The designation of a week as a period for surrender seemed designed to destroy the negotiations, and it did. In fact, an authoritative government source confirms that the week's notice was intended as simply a "grace period" to cover the cancellation of the safe-conduct guarantees.

It is difficult to know to what degree the Government's abandonment of the peace process was justified by the facts – for example the LRA's negotiations with Sudan. However, it appeared that military assistance from Sudan followed immediately after the failed peace negotiations. It is also difficult to know to what degree the failure of the peace talks was influenced by extraneous factors, such as the economic self-interest of some military personnel, or the view that a military victory was easily attainable and more desirable than a peaceful settlement.

However, the seven-day deadline created a public perception that – like the LRA's demand for six months – the period of time allotted was unreasonable and that therefore the Government was not serious about peace. Predictably, the LRA did not comply with the seven-day deadline, nor did the Government carry out its threat to destroy the insurgency.

**Phase V      Joseph Kony's LRA - current period  
March 1994 - present**

Following the collapse of the peace talks, LRA forces withdrew to southern Sudan, where they regrouped, retrained and were equipped with weapons, ammunition and land mines provided by the Government of Sudan. In the resumed operations, which began soon after the peace talks collapsed, the LRA seemed to some observers more focused on the abduction of youngsters, perhaps because the availability of military supplies was no longer a constraint. It is estimated that the LRA currently consists of 3,000 to 4,000 combatants – the majority abductees. The introduction of land mines in the conflict was noted prominently in 1995. Sudanese Government assistance to

the LRA seems certain. In addition, the destruction of schools has intensified. Just since October 1996, the LRA has burned close to eighty primary schools.

The LRA has aggressively pursued its operations in Gulu and Kitgum through the present, particularly during the rainy season when the bush is overgrown and its forces are easily concealed.



## **NRA/UPDF<sup>1</sup> effectiveness**

During the early 1990s, the strength of the national army began to be reduced from 90,000 to 50,000. In the north, its resilience has been strained by the prolonged nature of the Acholi conflict. While the number of army casualties is unknown and was not a subject of this inquiry, it was probably considerable. Civilians may now be increasingly opposed to the LRA. But because of earlier Acholi support for the rebels, the UPDF remains wary. The potential that misleading information from a civilian or rapid response to a reported incident could lure its units into an ambush in which their lives are forfeited, restrains the speed and vigor of the army.

UPDF personnel may harbor resentments against Acholi military elements for the Luwero atrocities. They also recall that for many years the Acholi populace supported the insurgency. In the dangerous security environment of the north in which most of them may feel like outsiders, they may be hesitant to risk forfeiting their lives to protect Acholi civilians from an Acholi insurgency which in their view the Acholis themselves created. The army has been slow to recognize that popular support for the insurgency has diminished. Corruption at officer levels has also limited the army's commitment and morale and has filtered down to the enlisted ranks.

Periodic Government and military statements which exude excessive confidence and which are not followed up or which fail have diminished its stature. Public statements allegedly demeaning the Acholi as a people by senior Government officials have not advanced its objectives.

All of these factors explain the wide public perception of the army's lack of protection for Acholi civilians, its ineffectiveness and its reputation for slow reaction to the tips which it encourages the public to provide.

Nonetheless, the army has withstood, contained and inflicted significant defeats on the armed opposition for more than a decade. The present assessment was conducted at the end of the 1997 dry season, when the UPDF enjoys its greatest advantage in the terrain. Criticisms from some interviewees concerning certain actions by its mobile units suggest that the UPDF was actively conducting operations in remote rural areas. The task of defending not only their own fixed positions, but a virtually limitless number of vulnerable civilian targets, would tax the resources of a much larger defending force.

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<sup>1</sup> Under the September 1995 Constitution, the national army's designation changed from NRA to the Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF).

It was almost universally asserted by interviewees in Gulu and Kitgum that when President Museveni takes personal command of operations in Gulu, UPDF activity becomes dramatically more vigorous and certain types of corrupt practices decrease.

Northern interviewees and diplomats remarked on the swift successes in recent years of reported UPDF operations outside Uganda's borders. In such operations the UPDF enjoys the same tactical advantages which benefit its opponents in Gulu and Kitgum. It can choose and control the timing, the venue, its force strength, and other variables of its engagements.

## **Human rights conduct of the parties - 1994 to the present**

This section will address separately the human rights conduct of the LRA and the UPDF, respectively, during the current phase of the conflict, since February 1994.

### **LRA human rights conduct**

LRA human rights violations fall into two main categories:

(a) “signal incidents” – well-coordinated brutal attacks and massacres in which the indiscriminate murder or large-scale abduction of civilians is the object, or in which the attacking forces demonstrate callous indifference and unnecessary infliction of death in the course of operations which are of little military consequence; and

(b) smaller-scale low-intensity assaults in remote areas in which civilians are murdered in small numbers, in which boys and girls are abducted, houses looted and burned, and victims mutilated.

This section begins with a description of signal incidents. The evidence that these actions were carried out by the LRA appears conclusive. The report uses the opportunity of some of these cases to convey [in brackets] information concerning UPDF response. The lack of speed and vigor of army response does not mitigate the LRA’s responsibility for the incidents described, but illustrates the slow army response of which civilians frequently complain.

### **LRA signal incidents...**

#### **Atiak massacre - 22 April 1995**

On April 22, 1995, eyewitness interviewees report that the LRA attacked the trading village of Atiak in northern Gulu at about 5AM. Its first target was the local defense unit center, said to be manned by about 75 Acholi militia. In the one-hour engagement which followed, about 15 of the soldiers were killed, the center was overrun and the remaining soldiers fled.

In the six hours which followed, the LRA maintained unchallenged military control of Atiak. During this period, in the absence of armed opposition, between 170 and 220 unarmed civilians were detained and killed, including

the families of the local defense unit, students from Atiak (Secondary) Technical Institute and others.

[Although it is widely believed that the army had advance warning of the Atiak attack, the first army units arrived in the late afternoon, following the LRA's departure.]

### **Karuma/Pakwach convoy ambush - 8 March 1996**

This incident occurred a few kilometers west of Karuma on the road to Pakwach in southeast Gulu. The convoy was passing through Gulu headed for the West Nile region, which felt the main human and economic impact of the attack. For this reason, it is often associated with the West Nile and not with the Gulu/Kitgum conflict. Nonetheless, the attack took place well inside Gulu at a location remote from the West Nile and was carried out by the LRA.

On the morning of March 8, 1996, the convoy received permission from the local UPDF military post to proceed to Pakwach. The convoy contained four densely-packed passenger buses, commercial trucks, church vehicles, post office and government vehicles and was accompanied by fourteen UPDF soldiers. Shortly after departing Karuma, it was assaulted by an overwhelming force of LRA troops. One reliable eyewitness interviewee account states that the ambush began with no warning. An interviewee who spoke with some survivors in the passenger buses states that it began when a passenger bus tried to continue on its journey after being ordered to stop.

Both accounts appear to indicate that little resistance was offered and that after it ceased, when LRA forces were in unchallenged control, the majority of the killing took place. Over 50 persons were estimated by some sources to have been killed, many burned alive in the passenger buses, others executed. Wounded survivors were estimated at over 30, many of whom were treated in Nebbi Hospital. Additional accounts from abductees who later escaped were provided to the author by reliable interviewees.

[According to the Arua-based newsletter The Nile Arrow of March/April 1996, Minister of State for Defense Amama Mbabazi "apologised on behalf of government to the people of West Nile for the insufficient protection given by the UPDF to the convoy."]

### **Acholpi refugee camp massacre - July 1996**

This camp, established under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in about 1994, is located in southern Kitgum east of Kilak, about one hundred miles from the Sudan border. It is home to some 16,000 southern Sudanese refugees, principally Sudanese Acholis. They fled reprisals in 1994 by the SPLA's predominantly Dinka faction after the defection of minority groups. The camp extends several kilometers in an east/west direction. It had no armed defense, the LRA had overwhelming force, and during the three attacks which comprise this incident, no armed opposition or challenge was reported. According to reliable and eyewitness sources:

-- On Saturday morning, July 13, on the camp's eastern wing, the first attack was aimed principally at destruction of trucks and a health center. Two drivers (who later returned) and two local police (at least one of whom was executed shortly thereafter) were abducted.

-- That evening, in an attack on the camp's western wing, about 22 refugees were killed.

-- In the final and most sustained attack on Sunday morning, July 14, some 76 civilians in the eastern wing were gathered up and systematically shot, hacked and clubbed to death; an additional 21 were seriously wounded but survived.

Although he would have been a primary target, the Uganda Ministry of Local Government's civilian camp administrator, Mr. Esau Berender, remained hidden nearby with the refugees during each attack. He returned to the camp promptly after each LRA departure. His courage was commented upon by relief workers and refugees.

[UPDF units were reliably informed of the LRA's presence on Saturday morning shortly after the first attack. Its forces reached the camp for the first time on Monday morning – two days later -- at about the same time as representatives of UNHCR/Kampala.]

LRA forces are reliably reported to have crossed through Acholpi again in February 1997 and clubbed a refugee to death.

### **St. Mary's College, Aboke abductions - October 1996**

St. Mary's College, is located near Aboke town in northern Apac District, which is twenty miles south of the Gulu/Apac border. The private Catholic secondary school is staffed by Catholic nuns and local teachers. The October 1996 incident, which provoked international attention, was the third LRA attack on the school.

The first attack occurred in March 1989, when ten girls were abducted from St. Mary's and 35 boys were abducted from a nearby school. A pregnant woman was killed during the raid. Following that incident, the NRA stationed a few soldiers at the school.

In January 1994, the army had just withdrawn its small protective force. Although the school was in recess, 65 girls remained in the dormitories. The headmistress received a tip that the arrival of LRA forces was imminent and evacuated the girls to safe locations. The LRA's visit to the area apparently occasioned a great deal of gunfire, though no girls were abducted. The NRA reassigned a small unit to the school which was later replaced by local defense forces.

Just before October 1996, with school in session and 230 girls in residence, the protective force was again withdrawn. The nuns had in the meantime taken the precaution of equipping the dormitories with steel doors, window frames and bars. At 2AM a force which one eyewitness estimated at 200 LRA soldiers, cut through the school fence and assaulted the compound. They could not readily enter the dormitories because of the steel fixtures. But from 2AM to 5AM they chiseled the concrete around the steel windows and finally succeeded in entering two of the dormitories. Children in another dormitory were frightened into acceding to the LRA order to open their doors.

Having in the meantime looted the school and destroyed its vehicles, the rebels departed, taking 152 abductee girls, aged thirteen to sixteen. At 7AM, one of the expatriate Catholic sisters, accompanied by a guide, decided to follow the column and try to convince the LRA commander to release the girls. After wading through a swamp and surviving several security incidents (in which some of the abductees managed to escape), the nun reached the advancing LRA column and persuaded its commander to release 109 of the girls. Thirty abductees were kept by the LRA, of whom the majority remain unaccounted at this writing.

This unusual incident attracted national, diplomatic and international attention. Much of this attention – and the hope that the Government of Sudan may intervene with the LRA to secure the release of the remaining St. Mary's girls –

has been due to the persistence of the abductees' families. On March 7, 1997, President Museveni wrote to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan highlighting the plight of the St. Mary's girls and alerting the United Nations that thousands of other abducted children remain unaccounted.

### **Lokung/Palabek massacre - January 1997**

The massacre at Lokung and Palabek constitutes the largest single massacre of the northern war. Between the night of January 7 and January 12, 1997, LRA units systematically assaulted villages throughout the Lamwo sub-counties of Lokung and Palabek in northwest Kitgum. At no time was armed defense or resistance offered against the attacking force, nor was the UPDF present in the vicinity.

According to eyewitness interviewees, the operation began simultaneously during the night of January 7/8 in both sub-counties with the abduction in each of a few civilians. Beginning early in the morning of January 8 and until about January 12 these units gathered up and methodically hacked and clubbed to death a total of about 412 men, women and children. Breast-feeding women were spared in a few cases. Thousands of homes were looted and burned. As word of what was occurring spread, the civilian population fled in panic. Almost no gunfire was reported through the five-day period.

[The UPDF arrived on the fifth day, January 12. In a few cases in one of the areas, it is reported to have engaged the LRA forces at that time.]

Between January 12 and 31, an additional twelve unarmed civilians were reported killed in the same manner by the LRA outside Lokung and Palabek trading centers.

According to eyewitness interviewees, in some cases the LRA gathered civilians together, delivered short speeches, and then killed some of their victims in front of the group. The group was then dispersed, presumably to convey the content of the speeches to others. According to survivors, LRA soldiers expressed anger that some Kitgum abductee youngsters had revealed to the UPDF the location of hidden arms caches in their area. They complained that Kitgum abductees escaped in greater proportion than the

children from Gulu. According to one eyewitness, an LRA soldier said, "You are Banyankole [the ethnic group of President Museveni] now, since you support the Government. Go to Kitgum or to Museveni's house, but leave here."

The LRA's allegation that escaped abductees had assisted the UPDF is accurate. In fact, this assistance continued after the January 1997 massacres. In

February, residents led UPDF troops to two additional caches which held 165 boxes of ammunition and 58 anti-tank mines.

### **LRA low-intensity incidents...**

During most of the previous two years, the LRA has conducted frequent low-intensity, small-scale assaults on rural farm families and villages. These assaults are carried out exclusively in the absence of armed persons, challenge or opposition. Small armed LRA units enter villages or detain civilians in their fields, along pathways and roads. These incidents are estimated to have taken place – and continue to take place – almost daily in the region.

Some of these assaults begin with the purpose of demanding food or other property. Civilians are abducted as porters. After reaching a far enough distance from their home villages, they are usually released. Resisters are killed on the spot. Visits to villages which LRA units suspect of collaborating with the government may result in several killings.

The LRA targets members of local resistance councils, government officials and employees, teachers (of whom over 100 have been killed in Gulu alone), secondary students, suspected collaborators, and others they associate with the Museveni government.

In some areas, persons walking to or from markets are killed; being on the road violates LRA rules. Persons on bicycles (forbidden by the LRA) are killed or (more recently) have their legs chopped off, a type of mutilation reminiscent of the LRA's 1991/1992 period. These people are killed because the LRA fears they may share information on rebel whereabouts with the UPDF.

Periodically, LRA units conduct operations whose principal aim is the abduction of youngsters of both sexes. Those who attempt to escape at any stage of their captivity, or those who cannot physically continue the journey and ask to rest, are clubbed to death. Escaped abductees report that other abductees are forced to carry out these murders, lest they themselves suffer

the same fate. The boys and a small number of the girls are trained in a brutal manner to serve as combatants. The girls are assigned as "wives" – in effect as concubines – to LRA personnel.

UNICEF's May 1997 publication, Shattered Innocence, illustrates with case histories the experiences of abductees. Its estimate that 3,000 to 6,000 children have been abducted in the course of the Acholi conflict seems moderate. Two knowledgeable and separate sources assert that 60% of these abductees have been boys, 40% girls. But among registered escapees, more than 90% are boys.



When the signal incidents are included, it is certain that the LRA has shot, knifed, hacked and bludgeoned to death thousands of unarmed Acholi civilians during the past two years, in the absence of armed persons, opposition or challenge of any kind.

In addition, land mines, first used by the LRA in 1995 cause further injuries: in the past fifteen months, 150 cases of seriously wounded land mine survivors have reached the referral hospitals in Gulu and Kitgum. The number killed is estimated at several times that figure. A reward to civilians who bring such mines to the UPDF's attention was recently instituted by Major General Salim Saleh (now Presidential Advisor on Northern Military and Political Affairs) and has resulted in the detection of many of them.

In this unusual conflict, in which the perpetrators and the victims are both Acholi, the author believes that it is the LRA's demand for obedience – and its expression of anger at its perceived betrayal by its natural ethnic constituency – which motivates a great deal of the violence. The low-intensity assaults and the signal incidents are a low-risk method of demonstrating continued viability. Demonstrating the Museveni Government's inability to protect civilians is a motive speculated upon by some of the assessment's sources, and that is an effect of this conduct.

Some Acholi in Kampala attribute the particularly brutal nature of the violence to the influence of the LRA's Sudanese sponsors. However, most of this type of conduct pre-dates the Sudanese involvement. Sudan's influence on the West Nile Bank Front is believed to be far greater than on the LRA. Yet the WNBFF's conduct is only somewhat similar to the LRA's, and then on a far smaller scale. Some non-Acholi assert that much of this type of conduct had already been demonstrated in Luwero – by some of the same individuals who

are now associated with the LRA; the difference is that these methods are now being inflicted on the Acholi people themselves.

### **UPDF human rights conduct**

The UPDF's human rights conduct, despite some recurrent problems, appears to have made a significant, sustained improvement since about 1992, a view in which even some of President Museveni's most strident critics concurred. In comparison with LRA conduct, for example, the author received no allegations of massacres or major incidents. Asked to identify the worst UPDF human rights incidents of this period, the same events were repeatedly mentioned:

## **UPDF prominent incidents...**

### **Gulu town mob killing - 16 August 1996**

On 16 August 1996, four LRA suspected collaborators were turned over to a mob by UPDF personnel in Gulu town and then beaten to death. The incident is reported to have taken place in the presence of two senior UPDF officers (4th Division Commander Col. James Kazini and his deputy, Major Sula Ssemakula).<sup>7</sup>

An issue of concern in the north is whether the officers voluntarily turned the prisoners over to the mob, or whether, as the Government apparently contends, they were forced to do so by threat of further violence. The import of this case, in addition to the deaths themselves, is the degree to which the population can rely upon the government to administer law and order.

### **Kitgum helicopter gunship incident - 31 August 1995**

On 31 August 1995, a UPDF helicopter gunship detected an LRA column which was moving toward the Sudan border, apparently in the Lokung area of Kitgum. It opened fire on the column and, in the process, killed a number of abductees who were being forced to accompany the LRA forces and who had their hands tied behind their backs. It was not possible during the assessment to interview some of the abductees who survived and to independently obtain details about this incident.

One government source explained that army helicopters sometimes attack such columns – among other reasons – in order to give the abductees a chance to escape and that the killing of the abductees was an unforeseen and unintentional result of the attack.<sup>8</sup>

### **Kitgum District bar incident - 1995**

According to one report whose details could not be ascertained, a number of UPDF (or possibly Local Defense Unit) soldiers who were drunk in a bar became engaged in an altercation and opened fire on the other patrons, killing more than a dozen of them. The interviewees who reported this incident stated that the perpetrators had been arrested, but could not say whether or for what duration they had been punished.

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<sup>7</sup> The August 20 - 22 edition of *The Crusader* newspaper provided a reporter's detailed eyewitness account which asserted that the suspects were turned over to mobs at two different times and in two different neighborhoods of Gulu town.

<sup>8</sup> Details concerning this incident appeared in [NRA Kills Rebels](#), Billie O'kadameri, the [New Vision](#) newspaper, 2 September 1995.

Many interviewees were asked to identify the UPDF's worst or largest human rights transgressions in the past three years. The foregoing incidents were most frequently mentioned, particularly the first two. A few of the Government's most strident opponents sought to substantiate their claim that there had been no improvement in UPDF conduct by describing incidents which are well-known to have taken place more than five years ago (and which are referred to, in some cases specifically, earlier in this report).

### **UPDF low-intensity incidents...**

In general, it appeared that stationary UPDF detachments in towns and trading centers were not, during the period of the assessment, treating civilians in a harsh manner. During rural operations, however, males of military age who fled UPDF mobile units appeared likely to be fired upon or brutally questioned, and in isolated cases executed on the spot. No close observer of the situation described this conduct as UPDF policy or asserted that it was systematic. Rather, they asserted that it depended on the individual commander and that they comprised a series of isolated incidents.

Brutal beating of civilians during questioning in rural areas was described as routine. This is reported not only when army patrols reach villages through which rebels may have passed, or which they believe to be collaborating with the LRA. Several close observers assert that villages sometimes inform the

army of LRA presence, which they have been encouraged to do. But by the time the army arrives, the LRA has already departed. Civilians are then brutally questioned and accused of having assisted the LRA. If the civilians have done so, it is usually because they had no choice, which the army's slow reaction to their reports tends to reinforce. Rape appears to be a continuing problem.

A widespread complaint in Gulu town is that at night UPDF soldiers in civilian dress, or civilian thugs with whom such soldiers collaborate, prey upon the civilian population through looting and – in isolated cases – killing of those who resist. In cases where such thugs have detailed information about funds which the victims have recently received, more elaborate collusion is suspected. A number of cases have apparently been confirmed by local authorities. During President Museveni's visits to Gulu, it appears these problems are less frequent.

In some cases, depending on local commanders, community leaders who complain of these problems state that they have access to military authorities who discipline the responsible parties. Once arrests are made, however, it is not clear whether punishment is limited to transfer from the region or whether more appropriate measures are applied. Complaints focused to a far greater extent on lack of UPDF commitment and effectiveness in defending civilians against the LRA than on its human rights abuses.

The environment in which the assessment was conducted was unusually open and transparent in comparison with other conflicts. Military authorities did not interfere with the author's travel throughout Gulu and Kitgum. In a few cases in which they advised that he be accompanied by military escort, he was also free to proceed independently but preferred not to. Almost no roadblocks were encountered throughout the journey. Wherever he traveled, he was afforded unlimited freedom to move about by vehicle or on foot; to speak privately with anyone he chose; to remain for the day or, when he wished, to stay overnight in local villages. No effort to follow or restrict his movements was detected.

## **Casualty levels**

During the fifteen-month period between January 1996 and March 1997, close to 1,000 cases of seriously wounded war victims were referred to the hospitals in Gulu and Kitgum. About 15% of these were caused by land mines, the balance by gunshots, knife and machete.

The author will not venture an estimate of the number of persons who have been killed in the conflict since 1986. It appears, however, that these deaths would be measured in the tens of thousands, rather than in the hundreds of thousands.

## **Displacement patterns and policies**

Civilians displaced by earlier phases of the conflict are reported to have fled both to NRA-controlled towns and to rebel-controlled countryside for protection. In the current period, however, conflict victims appear to flee exclusively toward Government-controlled areas for protection. Small numbers of persons who may have reason to fear the UPDF leave the Gulu/Kitgum area and take refuge in other northern Ugandan districts. Research through all locally-available sources produced no reports of civilians fleeing toward Sudan or areas of LRA presence.

One recent exception occurred during the LRA's Lokung attack in January 1997. Residents of Pawora Parish found themselves trapped between the LRA attackers and the Sudan border. Some of them therefore fled to Pageyo, an SPLA-controlled trading center in southern Sudan. When conditions permitted, they attempted to cross back to Lokung center – most successfully, although some of the displaced interviewees reported that several persons detected by the LRA while crossing this area were killed.

Many families said that when living in their home villages they protected themselves by practicing "alup," a Luo word apparently derived from the expression "bed-alup," the children's game of hide-and-seek. This appears to mean that people work on their farms during the day. But in the evening, instead of staying in their homes, they sleep in underground dugouts, caves or other difficult-to-detect-places in the bush.

### **Three categories of displaced families**

Currently displaced families fall into three main categories – differentiated by the motive of their displacement.

#### **(a) Kitgum - approximately 50,000 persons - fled in terror**

This group is located principally in the trading centers of Lokung and Palabek, and in Kitgum town and comprises the families who fled the January 1997 Lokung/Palabek massacres. At the time of the author's visit in April 1997, this population remained in a state of terror. The LRA was still present in the rural areas outside the trading centers and continued to kill some of the small number of civilians who went back to their homes scavenging for cassava or to recover their property. This has kept the displaced families in a state of fear. Local officials stated that they were eager that civilians should return to their homes. Premature encouragement of such a movement would have little effect except to diminish the credibility of government advice.

#### **(b) Gulu - approximately 15,000 persons - spontaneously displaced**

During September/October 1996, LRA activity was relatively intense. Cross-fires, exactions on villagers, and some killings prompted a number of local farmers to seek refuge in their local trading centers. They did so in much the same manner as the Kitgum displaced, although with less intense provocation.

#### **(c) Gulu - approximately 75,000 persons - involuntarily displaced**

In October 1996, the UPDF ordered the remaining rural population of Gulu to move into trading centers, in which it designated the locations for the construction of their temporary grass-hut accommodations. In most cases, civilians were given a three-day deadline for moving. Although reluctant to leave their homes, they were advised that if found in rural areas they would be "treated as rebels." The Government had made no advance arrangements for health, sanitation, food or other assistance, aggravating the increased infant mortality which predictably arose in these locations.

The author's estimate of 75,000 displaced persons refers to those displaced more than a few kilometers from their homes and is somewhat lower than current official estimates, which are more inclusive.

The centers to which displaced families were directed have become known as "Protected Villages," because their objective, according to the UPDF, is the population's protection from LRA exactions. During April 1997, visits to a number of such centers revealed two types of settlement patterns:

-- the temporary huts erected in Anaka, Koc-Goma, Opit and Atiak were widely dispersed within a kilometer or two of the village center, not immediately near military detachments; and

-- those erected in Pabo (and reportedly others in Aswa County) were closely clustered around military detachments.

Concern about the co-location of civilians and military detachments in Pabo (and reportedly in other places) is well-placed. International organizations which try to apply rules to protect civilians in warfare have argued throughout the world that such co-location exposes the civilians to the dangers of cross-fire.

During March 1996, LRA elements penetrated the commercial center of Pabo, looted shops, fired some shots and departed. As they withdrew, the UPDF fired some mortar rounds at them within the population area, killing eight displaced persons who were in temporary huts clustered nearby.

In the protected villages visited during April, the rules concerning civilian egress – reportedly quite strict at the outset – were more flexible. All but military-age males were permitted to return to their farms if they wished, but were generally required to return the same day. Some families, fearing encounters with armed elements of either side in their home areas, decided not to attempt such forays.

Relatively frequent – but not daily – security incidents involving LRA killings, abductions and looting between October 1996 and April 1997 in and around the protected villages were reported, particularly affecting persons walking to and from their farms or on roads. Nonetheless, if these families were permitted by military authorities to return home, the majority would do so, despite the hardships and dangers they know they would face. Many of their homes have been looted and burned since they abandoned them; their fields are not plowed or planted. But the longer they remain displaced, the more difficult their return will be. This is a population which longs to re-establish its normal self-reliance and economic self-sufficiency; displaced families do not at present prefer to rely on the meager assistance they receive.

### **The "Protected Villages" debate**

When the protected villages were established, a debate ensued among some elements of the humanitarian assistance community and non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) concerning the appropriateness of assisting their involuntarily displaced residents. Some organizations, such as the World Food Program and World Vision, did respond promptly to requests for assistance.

Some opponents of the protected villages withheld their assistance. They argued that these villages were established as a military tactic, and were not a spontaneous civilian response to conflict. To assist the protected villages would therefore violate the neutrality of NGOs. They also questioned the military effectiveness of the strategy and whether civilians were better protected in them. A few, including some who had not visited any such places, asserted that they were all similar to the site at Pabo (i.e., they were all co-located with the military detachments), which was inaccurate. Referring to cases like Pabo, they characterized all the centers as “protecting villages” or “protected barracks,” alleging that the civilians were used as a first-line of alert against rebel attacks against the military.

Advocates of the “protected villages” argued that the UPDF was in the process of an aggressive operation against the LRA. To the degree that the LRA could replenish its losses by abducting more youngsters – which in the highly dispersed rural areas the army could not effectively prevent – its effort and sacrifice seemed futile. By eliminating the LRA’s ability to loot food and abduct youngsters – frequent complaints of the rural population – rebel forces would be weakened. Able to concentrate its stationary units in a limited number of locations, the remainder of the army would be freer to pursue the rebels. The Geneva Convention, it was argued, permits the Government to displace populations for their protection [although it also requires that adequate arrangements for their material well-being be provided].

As long as the LRA continues its attacks and exactions on undefended civilians, advocates argue, it is impossible for the UPDF to protect so many potential targets in such a vast area. The army is criticized for not effectively protecting the civilian population from LRA assaults, yet it is also criticized for attempting to concentrate the population so that it can address the problem more effectively.



## **Considerations of involuntary displacement**

The protective displacement strategy was unwelcome by the civilian population, has been involuntary and is perceived as punitive. With no end to the conflict in sight, the rural Gulu population could be displaced indefinitely. Most displaced civilians in Gulu seemed to prefer the dangers of rural insecurity to the economic destruction which such endless displacement entails, i.e., the looting and burning of their homes, the abandonment of their fields, the disappearance of seed stocks. Since they can no longer fall back on the livestock that used to sustain them in such emergencies, they immediately become dependent on external assistance.

Independent organizations, multilateral institutions and donors must decide for themselves whether their rules and policies permit them to offer assistance to the protected villages. To the degree that such assistance is withheld, it deprives the affected population of life-sustaining aid which it urgently requires. Most organizations seemed to eventually reach the conclusion that such assistance should be provided.

In Kitgum, there was no debate about assistance to those displaced by the LRA in the January 1997 Lokung/Palabek massacre. One of the objectives of the LRA's action appeared to be a military tactic, i.e., to remove an unsupportive civilian population from an area it uses for transit and concealment of weapons caches. In Gulu, the UPDF, a force constituted by a recognized elected government, ordered the civilian population of Gulu into protected villages – in theory for their own protection and for other motives as well – but did so without resort to mass killing. One interviewee questioned why assistance to the Kitgum victims could be characterized as “neutral” while such assistance to the Gulu group would not. While some assert that voluntariness is the threshold issue, neither the Kitgum nor the Gulu residents had a choice in their displacement.

The population was evacuated from the outlying farm areas to the trading centers just before harvest. Thereafter, the displaced population had only restricted access to their farms. Had the displacement taken place immediately following the harvest, the farmers could have brought their produce to the protected villages to sustain their families until external food aid could be provided. An unintended result of the displacement's timing was that abandoned cassava and other crops were available in abundance in the fields for use by LRA forces.

In sum, the Gulu protected villages have caused significant economic losses, were inadequately organized and have increased disaffection from the government at a time when public support for the insurgents was at its lowest

ebb. Had the policy been effectively explained to the affected population as part of an overall strategy, it might have encountered less opposition. Security in Gulu has improved somewhat since late 1996. Access by road to most areas of the district was open at the time of the assessment. But to what degree this improvement is attributable to the protected villages or to what measure it may reflect the LRA's distraction with events in Sudan is not certain. The protected village policy merits serious re-evaluation and should be phased out as quickly as possible.

### **Conflict resolution in the current period**

Since their breakdown in February 1994, there have been no similar direct government/LRA peace negotiations. However, one local initiative in 1996 to resume the talks ended with tragic results.

### **Death of elders Olanya Lagony and Okot Ogony**

Just before the May 1996 Presidential elections, the Acholi Council of Chiefs attempted to revive the peace dialogue which had been abandoned two years earlier. With President Museveni's approval, the group contacted Joseph Kony to request a meeting. Kony responded that he would engage in no talks prior to elections. Two issues may have influenced Kony's thinking:

First, the LRA actively supported the President's electoral opponent, Dr. Paul K. Ssemogerere. The defining issue between the candidates in Acholi was their position on negotiation with the LRA. President Museveni was perceived to have preemptively concluded the previous negotiations in February 1994 and to be pursuing solely a military solution to the conflict. Dr. Ssemogerere promised to resume peace negotiations, a position which was enthusiastically received by the Acholi electorate (who later gave Ssemogerere an overwhelming victory in Gulu and Kitgum). Kony had already expressed hostility to the elders in his 1994 meetings with them and Minister Bigombe. Coming soon before the elections, and bearing the permission of the President, Kony may have perceived the elders' initiative as an effort to mitigate the President's anti-negotiation image – another type of betrayal by the elders.

Second, the elders conducted private discussions with the government to obtain financing to cover travel, transport, office space and other costs which would have enhanced their ability to conduct grassroots mobilization in support of the peace process. One of the country's main newspapers revealed the details of these discussions to the public. Several knowledgeable sources speculate that Kony may have been convinced that the elders were seeking this money "to sell him out" politically – or to actually lead the UPDF to him so that he could be killed.

After the May elections, the elders pursued their initiative. A prominent participant was Okot Ogony, Chairman of the Council of Elders Peace Committee and himself a Council coordinator of Cwero (in eastern Gulu). His son was given a message by the LRA that Kony wished to meet with him and with the Chairman of the Council of Chiefs, Rwot Achana. Senior government officials urged the men not to attend the invitation, warning that danger from the LRA awaited them. But the group dispatched a two-person delegation consisting of Okot Ogony and Olanya Lagony, a respected person from Koc-Goma, in southwestern Gulu. Lagony was the brother of a senior LRA commander, Oti Lagony, and his presence on the team may not have been anticipated by the LRA.

According to knowledgeable sources, the two men reached Ogony's home at Pagik (seven kilometers from Cwero trading center) on June 7, 1996. That afternoon, at a location distant from their home, the two were seen to meet LRA representatives who told them to return at 4PM the following day to meet Kony himself. On the next day at the appointed time, they were seen to disappear with an LRA unit headed by Commander "Beba Beba" ("Carry, Carry!"), a native of Anaka in southwest Gulu. The bodies of the elders were found shortly thereafter.

A different account suggests that the elders were encountered and killed by UPDF soldiers as they were bathing in a nearby river. The motive of the killings in this account was presumably an effort by the army to prevent the resumption of the peace process.

However, indications that these killings were carried out by the LRA is persuasive. Knowledgeable persons directly concerned with the incident are certain that this is so. Further investigation to independently verify the facts was beyond the purview of this assessment.

The significance of this case lies not in the number of persons killed, but in the implications for the peace process of the murder of such emissaries. To the degree, as evidence suggests, that it was carried out by the LRA, it is another of

many demonstrations of the increasing disaffection – if not hostility – between the Acholi community and the rebel group.

### **Parliamentary committee report**

In August 1996, the Ugandan Parliament instructed its Committee on Defense and Internal Affairs to conduct a broad-gauged inquiry into the causes and prospects for the northern conflicts. The 18-member Committee, under the Chairmanship of Hon. Ali Gabe Akida of the West Nile's Nebbi District, submitted a thorough report<sup>1</sup> in January 1997, following an extensive series of public hearings and field visits.

The Committee report recommended against direct peace talks with the LRA, but instead “strongly recommend[ed] that [the] Uganda Government talk to the Sudan and Zaire governments to end the insurgency peacefully.” Based on the testimony it had received, the Committee acknowledged a “genuine and desperate desire to end this insurgency swiftly and decisively by all available means.” However, it expressed skepticism about direct talks with the LRA itself based on moral, political, legal and Constitutional grounds. Uncertainty about LRA leader Joseph Kony's character and intentions, and potential manipulation of the talks by internal and external political opponents of the government, were also cited.

Two committee members from the northern Uganda – Hon. Norbert Mao (Gulu Municipality) and Hon. Daniel Omara Atubo (Otuke County) – filed a Minority Report. They asserted that “...an overwhelming majority of the witnesses, especially where the conflict is taking place, called for direct peace negotiations between the government and the rebels.” The report urged that,

“Parliament should be the last organ to shut the door on peaceful resolution of conflicts...[A] military solution to the ten-year war has failed with heavy casualties and costs on both combatants and innocent civilians. Therefore, the additional option of direct dialogue between the rebels and the government should be undertaken and tried...A purely military approach will only serve as [a] death sentence on the people who are at the mercy of the rebels.”

### **Acholi Parliamentarians' report**

A report issued on 10 February 1997 by nine elected Acholi Parliamentarians echoed the Minority Report. The group's January 1997 fact-finding mission in

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs on the War in Northern Uganda, The Parliament of Uganda, January 1997

Acholi had concluded, according to the report, that, “The people are of the view that the war should be brought to an end using a negotiated settlement between the rebels and the government.” The report added that “the barbaric act [sic] by [the] LRA against humanity in Acholi and elsewhere is a shame to those who associate themselves with [its] activities.”

### **London conference**

In April 1997, several hundred expatriate Acholis from Europe and North America gathered at the “Kacoke Madit” forum in London to consider the ongoing conflict in Gulu and Kitgum. The Anglican Bishop of Kitgum, several elected Parliamentarians, two Government of Uganda Ministers (Dr. Martin Alier, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Minister for the North Alfonse Owiny Dollo, who are from Gulu and Kitgum, respectively), the Gulu Resident District Commissioner, and an LRA spokesman were among the participants. A frank and vigorous discussion of the issues, aimed at better understanding of the problem and opening channels of communication for settlement of the conflict, took place.

### **Treatment of amnestied UPDA veterans**

Following the June 1988 peace accords, as described earlier, several thousand UPDA combatants accepted an amnesty and abandoned the armed struggle. Some were absorbed into the NRA; others returned to their villages. The overwhelming majority of interviewees indicated that they were aware of no pattern of systematic persecution or targeting of these veterans. Several sources indicated that two categories of UPDA veterans might have nonetheless encountered problems:

(a) Those who were residing in their villages in 1991 when Operation North was underway could have been caught up in the brutal practices attributed to the NRA during that period, and some could have been killed during this process.

(b) Also during 1991, when eighteen notable northerners were arrested and charged with treason, a number of prominent ex-UPDA officers were arrested, and, in one well-known case, killed under circumstances some of whose specifics remain uncertain.

This well-known case involved Major Mike Kilama (known also as “Kilama Part II”), considered one of the UPDA’s most capable and popular officers. He had been absorbed into the NRA as a division-level Operations and Training Officer.

According to two sources, the major opposed the heavy-handed human rights tactics being employed in Operation North and may have created the impression through some statements that if these methods continued he might be forced to "return to the bush." Informants told the major that he had been placed on a list for arrest and perhaps for elimination. According to one source, he requested and was granted an appointment to clarify the matter with President Museveni personally. But before this meeting could take place, the major was killed -- reportedly as he attempted to flee Uganda by boat -- in an exchange of gunfire with government agents. Some of the underlying circumstances of the death of Major Mike Kilama Part II remain unclear.

A handful of other prominent ex-UPDA Acholi officers associated with "Kilama Part II," are Lieutenant Colonel Ocheru-Nangai (who was arrested and is believed to have died in prison several years later of natural causes) and Major Walter Odoch. One of these prominent officers is believed to be in exile in London.

These two categories of amnestied UPDA who encountered problems after June 1988 comprise all of the reports received with respect to several thousand amnestied UPDA veterans. The assessment did not detect a systematic pattern of such problems.

### **Treatment of veterans of other insurgencies**

The author spoke with a small number of knowledgeable sources in neighboring districts which had been the scene of similar insurgencies or recruiting areas for such groups. The sample of those consulted is too small to be conclusive, but includes the following reports:

(a) From 1987 to 1992, an active anti-Government insurgency was conducted in the ethnic Iteso areas of Soroti and Kumi districts. This conflict was resolved in significant part through the mediation of the Teso Commission. Hon. Grace Akello, a former Commonwealth Secretariat staff member in

London, was Secretary and later Chairman of the Teso Commission, and is currently an elected Member of Parliament from the region. Ms. Akello indicated that no cases of Government persecution or killing of insurgents amnestied under the auspices of the commission she chaired have come to her attention.

(b) In Nebbi District, about six hundred youth were reported to have joined the West Nile Bank Front. Of these, about half were estimated to have returned home. While a small number encountered rejection in their villages, these problems were reportedly overcome through local mediation. A cross-section of traditional, religious, local government and other leaders indicated that they knew

of no cases of Government persecution or killing of returned or amnestied WNBFC combatants.

Nonetheless, several northerners advised that the identity of insurgent leaders who led LRA attacks in the “signal” incidents described earlier are known in the Acholi community and, in future, could be the target of community reprisals if they returned to their home areas.

### **Acholi attitudes to the conflictive parties**

The attitude of grassroots Acholi people in Gulu and Kitgum towards the LRA and the Government differed in some respects from the views of Acholis and others in Kampala, and is thus described separately.

#### **...at the grassroots**

Asked about their views of the LRA, most interviewees referred almost immediately to the human rights conduct of which they and their villages had been victims, or to the negative impact which the conflict was inflicting on them. They often expressed bewilderment about the LRA’s purpose in “killing their own people” and about their political aims. They found the LRA’s attacks on Acholi people – sometimes on their own clans, villages and families – incomprehensible. “If they are fighting for us, why are they killing us?” asked one farmer. “If they have taken my child, why have they burned my house?” asked another.

Of the Acholi people in Gulu and Kitgum, more than 90% do not respect, welcome, encourage, support or voluntarily assist the LRA. The proportion of those who repudiate its conduct and continuation of the conflict is probably even higher in Kitgum than in Gulu. They explain their disaffection on several grounds:

- ◆ the human rights conduct of the LRA. This conduct has been so widespread and sustained that no part of Acholiland has been immune.
- ◆ the destruction of the Acholi people. They perceive this destruction in terms of loss of human life, the disabilities arising out of wounding and mutilations, the deepening economic abyss, and other social and political consequences summarized later in this report.
- ◆ most of those being killed are Acholis. The victims of the war comprise principally Acholi civilians, local defense units which are almost entirely Acholi, LRA combatants (who include a large number of abductee Acholi children), and even Acholi in the UPDF, all of whom they commonly refer to as “our children.”
- ◆ the war is hopeless, or “useless” as it is commonly described. Whatever its merits at the outset, the LRA is fighting in isolation and has no chance of gaining power or influence in national affairs. In fact, its conduct is probably having the opposite effect.
- ◆ the LRA has no political program or ideology, at least none that the local population has heard or can understand.
- ◆ the LRA has no area of control and no area where it could offer protection for supporters even if it had any.
- ◆ as other areas of Uganda achieve greater economic prosperity, Acholi is falling farther behind.

The attitude of the Acholi people appears to have evolved from enthusiastic support for the UPDA and Alice Lakwena; to skepticism during the Severino and early Kony period; to total opposition during the current LRA period, characterized by bitter anguish over what they fear is the “disappearance of the Acholi people.”



A number of factors suggest that these views are authentic:

-- the LRA's human rights performance as Acholis describe it is objectively correct. When they illustrate their views with personal experiences, they are recounting incidents which are consistent with well-known LRA patterns of conduct throughout the two affected districts. This includes practices such as the cutting of lips, ears and noses during the 1991/1992 phase, and the chopping off of legs in the current phase.

-- when spontaneously displaced by the conflict from their home villages, civilians move exclusively into UPDF-controlled areas. Despite persistent research, no case in which people voluntarily moved toward the LRA in the region or towards its bases in Sudan could be detected. The female population of LRA base camps appears to be almost entirely the result of abduction and concubinage.

-- the abduction of thousands of youngsters suggests that almost all recruitment into the LRA is involuntary. That children who attempt to escape are routinely killed illustrates the involuntary aspect of this recruitment.

-- the provision to the UPDF by Acholi civilians of crucial information about the LRA's whereabouts and the location of its arms and ammunition caches.

The population appears to be so disaffected that no alteration in the LRA's policies, purposes or conduct could regain their support. The bridges that once existed between the population and the UPDA and Lakwena movements, weakened during the Severino and early Kony periods, have been irrevocably burned. The grassroots population states almost unanimously that it wants no more war.

Statements attributed to Joseph Kony and LRA members suggest that this disaffection is mutual. The large-scale LRA killings themselves, and other statements and actions attributed to the LRA and described earlier in this report suggest an LRA hostile to the civilian population. They suggest a pattern of punishment for the disobedience and betrayal by the civilian population which is consistent with what civilians report as their attitudes and conduct.

Two interviewee farmers reported that LRA officers had made statements to villagers which further illustrate why they are uneasy, specifically:

“It is the working class farmers whose work has been a blessing to Museveni. When we come to power we will kill all of them,” and

“The young children we take are groomed for the army. These will be the new generation. All others will be killed.”

### Kony's spirit powers

Belief in spirit power and in channeling remains widespread and vigorous among the Acholi people. Faith in Alice Lakwena's spirit channeling was a central part of her popular support. The failure of the Lakwena and Severino movements generated skepticism among some about whether they truly possessed spirit power. The Kony movement's more profound failure and its many killings have caused many Acholi to re-examine and reject, based on empirical evidence, the assertion that Kony has spirit power. This rejection may be more common among the general population than among the LRA's young abductees, who are subjected to intense psychological indoctrination.

The population still fears Kony. But many stated they now believe that his power derives not from spirits, but from Sudan. They fear him deeply, but mainly because of what they perceive to be his violent behavior and his “evil heart,” rather than his spirit power. If Kony truly possessed spirit power, they add, the spirits would have caused the Acholi to triumph by now; the spirits would have assisted him to defeat the UPDF, not prompted him to kill his own people; and the children would not have to be abducted – the men would follow voluntarily under spirit guidance.\*

To the degree that spirits influence events in Acholi, a small number asserted that the ghosts of Luwero – the spirits of victims of Acholi soldiers – were taking revenge on the Acholi people. One interviewee asserted that some Gulu residents believe that a pregnant Baganda woman who was killed and disemboweled, and whose fetus had been hung on the branches of a tree, is punishing all Acholi for her suffering.

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\* A few experienced expatriate residents of Gulu and Kitgum, however, assert that, despite what they say, most Acholis continue to believe in Kony's spirit power.

### Sources of LRA local support

According to most sources, residual encouragement for the LRA comes from those few who profit from its actions, such as traders who receive money and property looted by the LRA. The identity of some of these traders is said to be known to Government officials.

Parents of abductees are in anguish over the plight of their young sons and daughters. While they oppose the LRA in principle and object to its actions, they fear that their children would be killed in a vigorous UPDF military campaign and are therefore of divided mind about the manner in which the conflict should be pursued. Several interviewees reported that when their children return home they refuse to eat food prepared by the parents. Some parents also fear they could be killed by their own children if they oppose them.

Civilians who reside in remote areas along routes frequently traversed by the LRA have little choice but to accede to the demands of their armed visitors. To the degree that Government forces are not present in a sustained manner or too distant to protect them – which is the case in some of these remote areas – they must relinquish food, information and whatever else is demanded. Unlike assumptions reportedly made by some UPDF forces, this acquiescence does not necessarily equate to support for the LRA.

The author was unable to detect a division of opinion about this conflict among the Acholi people along clan lines.

### Attitudes toward government

Repudiation of the LRA should not be construed as support for the current Government. The National Resistance Movement and President Museveni are viewed as alien to the area. While support for the armed anti-Government struggle has evaporated, the population's political opposition to the current government remains. The then-NRA's human rights conduct during the 1986 - 1991 period does not seem to be a central factor. But the 1987 cattle raids enduringly deepened political hostility to the President. These were not the causes of the war. But at certain moments, they may have prolonged it – or served as pretexts for its continuation.

The involuntary displacement of the rural population to the protected villages has not enhanced local attitudes toward the Government. But the UPDF's perceived failure – illustrated earlier in this report – to protect the civilian population from the LRA is probably the most frequently raised criticism of the Government. Whatever the historical or current political relationship between the Acholi and the current Government, local civilians believe they are entitled to its protection.

A number of interviewees acknowledge that since 1996, and especially when the President has taken personal command in Gulu, security has improved and the LRA is more vigorously pursued in Uganda and, through cooperation with the SPLA, in southern Sudan. But their perception of their safety is based more on the results: whether they feel safer in their homes, and most do not. Many believe that when the NRA had the opportunity to do so, it did not pursue a military solution which could have ended this conflict. Whether the Government is committed to doing so now – through military means or through negotiations – is a question which lingers among grassroots Acholi and others in Kampala and abroad. Some fear that the war's continuation is a type of benign neglect in which the interests of elements within the Government are served by permitting the decimation of the Acholi people.

Given this degree of political opposition to the current government, the LRA's inability to mobilize political support among the Acholi people, and the extent to which it has alienated its own ethnic base, are particularly striking.

#### **...in Kampala and abroad**

Among Acholi residing in Kampala and abroad, attitudes are less informed than the views of grassroots residents. Acholi who reside outside the area expressed deep concern for the area's welfare. Like others who reside at a distance from the conflict area, they do not feel the war's impact as directly: they are not the objects of attacks, exactions and killings; their children study in schools where they are not subject to abduction and disruptions; and they participate in the increasingly prosperous Kampala or more affluent international economies.

Those residing outside the area appear to fall into three categories:

(a) Those who visit the area and maintain direct contacts are relatively well-informed and share the views of the grassroots. They are therefore genuinely committed to advancing the peace process. These include some appointed officials, some elected Members of Parliament, and some prominent citizens who no longer reside permanently in the area.

(b) Those who do not visit the area, maintain tenuous contacts, and – sometimes abroad – receive information through second- and third-hand sources. This group, though well-intentioned, is at times misled by lack of information or by parties who provide distorted information. Their perceptions are sometimes based on earlier periods when they fled Uganda, such as during the Acholi persecution by Amin or during the 1986/1991 period when the NRA's human rights conduct was poor. Some individuals hesitate to denounce the LRA because they fear this view will be construed as an endorsement of the current Government administration, which they politically oppose.

(c) Those who for their own ends appear to purposely distort information, mislead others through selective presentation of sometimes outdated information, and pursue their political opposition to the current Government by misrepresenting the situation. They create doubts about which party to the conflict is responsible for major massacres widely known in the affected areas to have been committed by the LRA. While they do not outrightly endorse the LRA, the confusion which they generate diverts the national debate (including among non-Acholi opponents of the government) and may be misused to justify continued external political and material support for the LRA. Such individuals may perceive themselves as having the long-term benefit of the local Acholi at heart, or as serving as their future leaders. But the effect of their activities at this time is to critically harm the very people they may be wishing to serve.

Whatever their actions in respect of the above, the great majority of Acholi in Kampala appear to share the anguish of the grassroots communities over a war which had their overwhelming support when it began, but which has spun completely out of their control. Politically opposed to the Museveni Government, alienated from the LRA, and apparently unable to influence the views of many expatriate Acholi, they have little influence on developments.

### Perceived international indifference

Many Acholi interviewees – and prominent non-Acholi political opponents of the Government – highlighted the assertive role played by the diplomatic community beginning in 1984 during the Luwero Triangle conflict. Some acknowledged that Luwero's proximity to Kampala made this type of attention more likely. Such attention, they assert, is notably absent in the northern wars, which have continued for more than a decade. Regardless of the merits of the conflict or which party they believe to have committed the significant recent massacres, many of them argued that although as many as four hundred people had been killed in a single incident, there had been no independent investigation by the diplomatic community.

The LRA itself appears to advocate such independent investigations in an Internet web-site.<sup>4</sup> With respect to the massacre at the UNHCR Acholpi refugee camp, for example, a July 1996 press release signed by Dominic S. Wanyama, Secretary General, LRA/M, entitled We Never Went to Acholpi, states:

“We would like to sincerely deny any association with the attack by unidentified gunmen on the camp. It...has never been any of our intention to target any civilian settlements leave alone refugees...We call upon the international community to quickly institute investigat[ions] into this incident instead of baselessly blaming the innocent LRA.”

The lead paragraph of a broad-gauged 18 February 1997 press release by the Lord's Resistance Movement Foreign Affairs Committee, The International Community Must Act to Stop Uganda's Aggression, states:

“1. The LRM calls upon the international community to constitute a special human rights commission to investigate the reports of human rights abuses in Northern and Eastern Uganda, and particularly in Acholi. We welcome an impartial investigation of Alleged [sic] human rights violations in these parts of the country, and elsewhere.”

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<sup>4</sup> The web-site is located at <http://www.columbia.edu/~bo23/>. The authenticity of the documents and whether they represent official LRA policy was not independently verified.

Given the duration of the war and the prominence of these incidents, many of the assessment's interviewees have concluded that this lack of attention demonstrates international indifference to the north in general and to the Acholi people in particular. They conceded that the disasters of Rwanda and Zaire had, for obvious reasons, dominated international attention of the region in recent years. But, they also asserted, diplomatic and press coverage of Uganda has focused almost exclusively on economic prosperity in the rest of country and ignored the anguish of the north.

In this particular rough neighborhood, they believe that international attention to the conflict itself and to its human rights dimension would increase the chances for a durable resolution.

### **Political dimensions**

In the 1996 Presidential elections, more than 90% of the Gulu and Kitgum electorate voted for opposition leader Dr. Paul Ssemogerere, a lifelong Democratic Party political leader who advocates a free multi-party (rather than "movement") form of government.<sup>\*</sup> Dr. Ssemogerere served as Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and in other senior positions during most of the Museveni administration. Dr. Ssemogerere has throughout his career struggled for elective office through the ballot box. Despite electoral frauds which deprived him of high office or more significant influence, he has continued to pursue an electoral path to leadership.

Ssemogerere, a southerner from the Buganda area, was an unusual electoral choice for the Acholi. Their favorable vote for Ssemogerere on this occasion appears to have been an anti-Museveni protest as well as an endorsement of Ssemogerere's advocacy of a negotiated settlement of the conflict between the Government and the LRA, which he correctly describes as "the prayer of the people in the north." At the time of the elections, roughly two years after the collapse of the 1994 Bigombe negotiations, President Museveni opposed this policy.

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<sup>\*</sup> By comparison, Museveni won 74% of the national vote, Ssemogerere 24%. In Luwero District, where the NRA insurgency in the 1980s received widespread popular support, Museveni won 88% of the vote, Ssemogerere 12%.

In the north, according to a number of interviewees, LRA forces visited some villages and threatened massacres against populations which voted for President Museveni. Such threats were unnecessary. Dr. Ssemogerere received tumultuous welcomes during his campaign in the area. As he himself confirmed, he would have won a landslide victory in the area without such threats.

Long-time Democratic Party supporters in the north expressed disappointment, however, that candidate Ssemogerere had not denounced the terror campaign in his behalf. "When all the cattle are being driven into your corral," explained one northerner referring to Ssemogerere's passive attitude on this subject, "you don't close the gate." Mr. Ssemogerere, in a discussion on this subject, indicated that he had no direct evidence of LRA threats and believes they may have been political propaganda originated by the Government.

#### Democratic Party policy paper

A recent policy paper<sup>7</sup> issued by the Democratic Party sets forth a broad-gauged position on northern Uganda which reiterates its call for a negotiated settlement to the war, a prompt cease-fire and "granting [to the north] of substantial constitutional powers for democratic self-governance" and local autonomy.

The policy paper calls for a judicial investigation of human rights violations. With respect to Gulu and Kitgum, the report specifies investigation of only incidents attributed to government forces. These include the Namu-okora massacre and four other reported 1986 incidents; and the arrest, torture and imprisonment of the eighteen notable northerners (and several hundred others) in 1991. For the 1992 - 1997 period, it highlights only the August 1996 mob killings of four LRA suspects. Investigation of corruption of senior government and military officials is also proposed.

The report cites an estimate that 50% of the entire Acholi population – some 300,000 people – have been killed in the war thus far. It includes a detailed exposition of United Nations Security Council genocide resolutions and lists of conduct which define genocide and its punishable acts, explaining that

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<sup>7</sup> Northern Uganda - Towards a Durable Solution: Peace, Justice and Democratic Self Governance with Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Development, Provisional Policy of the Democratic Party, Paul K. Ssemogerere, President, Democratic Party (DP), 19 May 1997



“While the Democratic Party does not assert that genocide has been committed in the North...it is a matter of public knowledge that some of the allegations leveled against combatants border on accusation for genocide.”

By contrast, the report does not refer to specific LRA human rights violations at any time since the beginning of the conflict. Although a few of the report’s oblique references to violence in the north could be construed to include LRA actions, the document makes no explicit reference to LRA conduct.

#### Uganda’s support for the SPLA

In the view of many Acholis, the Government of Sudan assists the LRA as retaliation for Ugandan Government support of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), a southern Sudanese insurgency which for many years has waged an armed struggle against the Khartoum government. Grassroots Acholi interviewees in Gulu and Kitgum in principle support the SPLA cause (though, like many northerners, they are uneasy about the conduct of the SPLA’s predominantly ethnic Dinka element). Nonetheless, they assert that it is their districts which are bearing the brunt of Sudan’s retaliation through its support of the LRA and that the price they are paying is unacceptably high.

Most Acholis and others in Kampala appeared to more strongly support what one source described as “the black man’s struggle for emancipation” in Sudan. But their opinions are divided about whether the price Uganda is paying for this support is excessive. Some advocate a mutual cessation of aid to their neighbor’s insurgents as a way to diminish, if not end, the LRA conflict in the north. Others believe that Sudan’s aid to the LRA is already sharply diminished as a result of the reported SPLA/Ugandan Government 1997 offensive in southern Sudan and that it will be further curtailed as the offensive continues.

### Sudan and the spread of Islam

The people of Gulu and Kitgum associate themselves with the Catholic (70%) and Anglican (25%) churches. Only 0.5% describe themselves as Muslims. As disaffected as the LRA is from the civilian Acholi community, it is difficult to believe it could effectively propagate the Islamic faith or any other belief. No significant proselytism was detected. The LRA has adopted a restriction on the raising of pigs. But there is little pig production in these areas in any case. In theory the LRA has instructed the population to observe Friday and Sunday as days of rest and of no killing, but little emphasis on or adherence to this idea in the current period was detected. It also appears that Muslims in Acholiland are not spared from LRA abductions and killings.

## **Conflict impact: a composite summary**

When residents of Gulu and Kitgum despair over the “destruction of the Acholi as a people,” they are referring to a number of factors described throughout the report:

<b>Death and disability</b>	The death of civilian non-combatants counted in the tens of thousands, with thousands more disabled or disfigured. Rape and concubinage have spread deadly communicable diseases throughout the population. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Economic impact</b>	The vast majority of savings – 300,000 cattle and most other livestock, including oxen upon which agricultural acreage and yield depended have disappeared. Tens of thousands of rural houses have been burned and looted; Gulu town theft has occurred as well. Cash employment has diminished sharply. Agriculture is crippled throughout both districts. A significant proportion of farm families are displaced.
<b>Intellectual impact</b>	For a decade, education has been disrupted. Up to 6,000 children, including many secondary students have been abducted and subjected to LRA indoctrination, and many have been killed. More than 100 schools have been destroyed. More than 100 teachers have been killed. Many educated Acholi are in exile.
<b>Cultural impact</b>	Respect for traditional elders – already threatened – has sharply diminished. Marriage and conflict-resolving restitution customs dependent on livestock are disrupted. Civilian inability to influence the actions of either party may be fostering a self-image as victims rather than actors in their own lives.

## **Security prospects**

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<sup>1</sup> Two UNICEF-financed publications provide data which compares key current social indicators in the north with other regions: (1) Equity and Vulnerability: A Situation Analysis of Women, Adolescents and Children in Uganda, 1994 (authors Barton and Wamai); and (2) Equity and Vulnerability: A Situation Analysis of Women, Adolescents and Children in Uganda, 1996 Statistical Update (authors Nyakuni and Opiyo). At the present time, for example, infant and child mortality is about 25% higher in Gulu and Kitgum than the national average.

Although aspects of security in the region improved during 1996 and 1997, it remains highly unstable. Some of the improvement may be attributable to the assertion, if accurate, that the majority of LRA combatants are presently in southern Sudan assisting their Khartoum-based allies in opposing the reported SPLA/Government of Uganda offensive. Nonetheless, in January 1997 the LRA conducted a five-day continuous massacre in Lokung and Palabek sub-counties of northwest Kitgum. Recent LRA activities and land mines in both Gulu and Kitgum make road travel – which was relatively fluid in March and April – more dangerous.

Small but mobile LRA units have the capacity to keep a relatively wide area in turmoil. The LRA, with limited insurgent forces and minimum assistance from Sudan – or even without it – can disrupt Gulu and Kitgum for a considerable time. The LRA and its predecessors conducted military activities from 1986 until 1994 without Sudanese military aid. By taking undefended civilians as its principal targets, it can continue to make its presence felt, expend little ammunition by minimizing engagements with the UPDF, and force the Government to continue its unpopular protected village strategy. It has demonstrated the ability to operate not only without popular support but in spite of popular opposition and is apparently indifferent to the death and economic damage it inflicts on the Acholi.

Definitive SPLA and Government progress in their reported offensive against Juba and Torit in southern Sudan could further limit the LRA's resupply and training capabilities, and deprive it of a useful safe haven. Should the UPDF follow-up within Gulu and Kitgum with assertive sustained campaigns, it could curtail its activities within Uganda as well. But in the short-term, security as perceived by the local populace and humanitarian agencies may not significantly improve.

## **SECTION II**

## **THE CONFLICT IN THE WEST NILE**

### **Background**

The conflict in the West Nile has been strikingly distinct from the war in Gulu/Kitgum in most essential respects. These include its duration, the level of motivation of rebel combatants, its intensity and degree of brutality, the magnitude of casualties and civilian displacement, and its economic impact.

The West Nile conflict has affected, to varying degrees, parts of Arua and Moyo Districts, whose entire territories – including those marginally affected – comprise 12,000 square kilometers, about the size of Gulu. Its population includes 800,000 Ugandans and up to 200,000 refugees from southern Sudan.

Unlike the ethnically homogeneous area of Gulu and Kitgum, the West Nile is home to a number of distinct groups, including the Kakwa and the Aringa (mainly Lugbara-speaking Muslim) people of northern Arua's Koboko and Aringa counties. The overwhelming majority of Moyo District residents – except in its western Obongi County – are of the predominantly Christian Madi group, which has participated in neither the West Nile conflict nor in the war in Acholi, with which it also shares a border.

### **The Amin regime - 1971/1979**

Like the Acholi people but in reduced proportion, West Nilers were prominently represented in the Obote I army. Muslims in northern Arua were considered to be strong supporters of President Obote's Uganda People's Congress (UPC) party. When Army Commander Idi Amin – an ethnic Kakwa (who was also a Muslim) and who claimed Koboko County as his birthplace – overthrew the Obote Government in January 1971, the prominence of West Nilers in the Ugandan army increased. It is believed that West Nile soldiers participated in the large-scale massacres of Acholi and Langi officers, described earlier (see page 7). Amin replaced the Acholi in the army with combatants who Ugandans still refer to as "Sudanese." His Vice President, Major General Mustafa Adrisi, was an ethnic Aringa from northern Arua.

When Amin expelled and confiscated the businesses of 50,000 Asians in 1972, the spoils were shared disproportionately by his military supporters, his co-religionists and his fellow-West Nilers. But these benefits accrued to Amin's individual allies, not to the West Nile as a whole. Except for the installation of a communications satellite (which has long ceased to function) and a failed project to build an international airport, Amin's home region benefited little from government programs during his regime.

The Amin regime, however, left a legacy of bitterness within Uganda towards the West Nile. The Acholi and Lango military elements of the Obote I army which bore the brunt of the early Amin massacres harbored a hatred for the West Nilers who had supported the Amin regime. Further, many Ugandans believe incorrectly that the West Nile prospered as a region as a result of Amin's favoritism.

### **Amin overthrown - 1979**

During the late 1970s, national and international opposition to the Amin regime reached its zenith. An invasion force consisting predominantly of Tanzanian army units, but which also included troops led by Yoweri Museveni as well as Acholi and Lango forces, overthrew Amin in April 1979. [According to one source, Museveni was almost killed in his home district of Mbarara in a skirmish with Amin army forces.]

Once the Tanzanian invasion seemed imminent, West Nile civilians – fearing reprisals – began to flee to southern Sudan and eastern Zaire. As the invading forces reached closer to the West Nile, the refugee exodus evolved from a trickle to a wave of hundreds of thousands of people. Most of northern Arua was deserted. The refugees were concentrated in southern Sudan, where the ex-Amin forces in exile were also organized.

Tanzanian army forces were responsible for pacification of the West Nile, which they achieved in mid-1979. According to all accounts, their conduct towards West Nile civilians was restrained and correct. In this environment, West Nilers began to trickle back from southern Sudan. Once the invading coalition had consolidated its control of Uganda, the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) was reconstituted, with prominent participation of Acholi and Lango elements.

When during 1980 the UNLA replaced Tanzanian occupying forces in the West Nile, it engaged in brutal reprisals against the local civilian population. In late 1980, ex-Amin forces invaded from southern Sudan and forced some UNLA units out of the West Nile region. They were organized into two main groups:

- ◆ the Uganda National Rescue Front (**UNRF**), based principally among the Aringa people of northeast Arua; and
- ◆ the Former Uganda National Army (**FUNA**) forces, based mainly among the Kakwa people of northwest Arua.

After it regained control of the area from the ex-Amin forces, the UNLA engaged in further reprisals and large-scale destruction of property in both Arua and Moyo. One UNLA massacre on 19 June 1981 gained international prominence: hundreds of displaced civilians had taken refuge in the Comboni (Verona) Fathers Catholic Mission, over which the flag of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was flying. UNLA soldiers entered the mission, located at Ombachi just outside Arua town, searching for ex-Amin guerrillas and in the process killed more than fifty of the civilians, many of them children. As a result of such incidents, as many as 500,000 West Nile civilians fled to Sudan for refuge.

Once security had stabilized in the West Nile, beginning in about 1983 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) implemented an orderly repatriation program. Refugee response was cautious. But a relatively small fraction of families – with their livestock and belongings – were transported back to their homes in UNHCR trucks. However, the overwhelming majority of refugees remained outside Uganda, awaiting developments.

During the 1979/1985 period, which included most of the time in which Museveni's NRA/Luwero Triangle insurgency was being conducted, and in which large-scale murder of local civilians took place, West Nilers had virtually no role in the UNLA. Instead, they remained in exile in southern Sudan and northeastern Zaire.

### **General Tito Okello Lutwa's Government - July 1985/January 1986**

The predominantly Acholi forces which brought General Tito Okello to power in July 1985 invited the participation in their government of both the UNRF and FUNA ex-Amin forces based in southern Sudan. Both groups received arms and initially participated in the Okello Government.

The UNRF, led by Brigadier Moses Ali (whose home was Adjumani in eastern Moyo), had previous political contacts and power-sharing agreements with Museveni's NRA, apparently established in Libya. During the Okello

administration, the NRA was continuing its anti-government insurgency in the Luwero Triangle. When the Okello government began to deploy UNRF forces in Luwero against the NRA, the UNRF reportedly withdrew from the regime.

In January 1986, when NRA forces overthrew the government in Kampala, General Okello dispatched representatives to Arua. On 29 January, according to eyewitnesses, they met with the elders of Arua and asked them to join them in a united armed northern resistance to the NRA. The elders reminded the Okello delegation of the treatment they had suffered in the early 1980s at the hands of the UNLA. Another war at this time would be useless, they reasoned. They were unwilling to risk another iteration of a mass refugee exodus into Sudan and the destruction of livestock and property which would inevitably follow. If Okello's forces felt obliged to offer continued armed resistance to the NRA, the elders urged, it should exclude victimization of civilians.

Nonetheless, it appears that both sides took the opportunity of this dialogue to reconcile their past differences (Amin's slaughter of Langi and Acholi military in 1971; and the UNLA's reprisals in the West Nile in 1980/1981). They agreed to engage in no further conflicts with each other. Shortly after these meetings in Arua, a delegation of Arua elders traveled to meet a similar Acholi delegation in Gulu District's Patiko trading center. In a traditional ceremony (which was reportedly interrupted by the imminent arrival of NRA forces), they celebrated a mutual non-aggression pact.

### **Advent of the NRA**

In late-March 1986, the NRA reached the West Nile, meeting no resistance within the region. The conduct of NRA forces was generally reported as positive. President Museveni visited Arua during the following month and consulted with the elders on his plans. The UNRF forces, led by Brigadier Moses Ali, joined the Museveni government. For almost a decade thereafter, the West Nile enjoyed relative peace.

During this period, however, a number of factors contributed to tension or disaffection in the area. While together they may not have risen to the level of causes or justifications for the conflict which followed, they contributed to an environment in which the events which followed can be more easily understood.

### **Anti-SPLA resentment**

While the trickle of refugee returns under the UNHCR orderly repatriation program from southern Sudan continued after the NRA came to power in 1986, the overwhelming majority of the estimated 500,000 West Nile refugees remained in



refugee camps in southern Sudan. In 1987, SPLA units attacked and burned these camps, occasionally killing some of the camps' residents in the process. Rape and looting took place in some of these attacks. The refugees lost most of their possessions and, without benefit of UNHCR repatriation assistance, fled on foot back to their homes in the West Nile. Upon their return, they were not ill-treated by NRA forces, and UNHCR reintegration assistance was facilitated by the government.

Most West Nile interviewees believe that the SPLA attacks were conducted at the behest of its ally, the Ugandan Government. They speculate that the government feared that a concentration of 500,000 refugees in southern Sudan could be used as a base for a Sudan-based anti-NRA insurgency by ex-Amin forces. The government was already combating two local insurgencies (the UPDA and Lakwena's Holy Spirit movement) in neighboring Acholi, and may have anticipated a similar revolt among the ethnic Iteso in the Soroti and Kumi districts. Its request to the SPLA to disrupt the West Nilers' camps in southern Sudan, they believe, was designed to eliminate the possibility of still another front. While West Nilers resent the Uganda Government's presumed collusion in these events, they reserve their most enduring anger for the SPLA itself.

When in 1989, the Ugandan government permitted SPLA units to base themselves in northern Arua, the results were inevitable. Local residents assert that the predominantly-Dinka SPLA combatants behaved arrogantly toward local civilians, forcing several border villages to be evacuated. "Aringa is our land now," some SPLA soldiers are reported to have announced. Incidents of looting, cattle rustling, and dozens of cases of rape and murder of local Aringa in remote border areas were reported to Ugandan civilian and military authorities, who did not respond, even as SPLA soldiers, weapons in hand, were seen walking through Arua town. According to some interviewees, when irate local citizens took the law into their own hands, however, they were punished by these same authorities.

## **Unemployed and unanchored population**

A number of factors combined to create an element of unanchored, uneducated and disaffected former soldiers and youth who were available to be mobilized in the conflict which followed.

- ◆ Among the Muslim population of northern Arua, secular education had historically been neither available nor perceived as desirable. Talented youth were encouraged to pursue Koranic education. Families who encouraged their children to pursue higher secular education were ostracized by their neighbors. Catholic mission schools were available to Muslims in earlier historical periods. But according to some Muslims, to continue beyond primary level, students were in practice obliged to convert to Catholicism, which their families refused. Muslim rejection of secular education was reversed in the 1980s, when they became convinced that it was essential for their economic futures to possess educational qualifications. But they still lag behind most Ugandans in this critical area.
- ◆ One segment of the West Nile population became accustomed to receipt of free support. For some, this expectation began with their participation in the spoils of Amin's confiscation of Asian businesses in the 1970s. Others became accustomed to free UNHCR distributions during the 1980s, when hundreds of thousands were refugees in southern Sudan. This pattern of free resources was perpetuated to some degree by reintegration assistance they received upon return to the West Nile. A generation of youth was unaccustomed to the hard agricultural work upon which livelihoods in the West Nile depend and was thus vulnerable to mobilization for other ends.
- ◆ Not all of the ex-Amin soldiers had been absorbed into the NRA after 1986. Most FUNA combatants remained in exile in northeastern Zaire. Some of the ex-UNRF were deemed unqualified for NRA service and remained at home or in exile in northeastern Zaire or southern Sudan awaiting developments. Those who were absorbed into the NRA were subject to retrenchment beginning in the early 1990s, as army strength was reduced from 90,000 to 50,000. To the degree that educational qualification was a factor in de-selection, Muslims from northern Arua tended to be disproportionately retrenched. Internal fissures within the UNRF created still another class of dissidents. Thus, a fair number of former soldiers were unemployed and disaffected.
- ◆ Educational reform in Uganda led to the systematic replacement of teachers without educational degrees with fully qualified ones. Hundreds of Arua teachers found themselves de-selected and unemployed.

## **The Sudan factor**

Neither anti-SPLA resentment nor the accumulation of the unanchored, unemployed former soldiers and youth, described above, was sufficient, in the author's view, to provoke an armed anti-government insurgency. However, together they created an environment which a third party, in cooperation with a few local surrogates, was able to exploit for this purpose.

Some incipient low-intensity anti-government conflict began in the early 1990s in northwest Arua's Oraba "finger," which juts into northeastern Zaire and southwestern Sudan. As these incidents began to gather momentum, and later when WNBf recruitment patterns were noticed, the elders of Arua, who had helped to keep the peace until that time, alerted the government to these occurrences but, apparently, received little government response.

A turning point in the West Nile occurred in 1994, when Sudanese Government forces recaptured from the SPLA the strategic town of Kajo Keji in southern Sudan, and consolidated their control of the Sudan/Uganda border west of the Nile. [This was the same year in which Sudan's assistance to Joseph Kony's LRA began.] With Sudan's assistance, former Amin Foreign Minister, Juma Oris, a Muslim and, at that time, resident of Juba, organized what became known as the West Nile Bank Front. Interviews in the West Nile suggest that WNBf officials offered the equivalent of a US\$300 recruitment bonus to former soldiers and young men to join the rebel organization. Recruiters reportedly predicted a rapid defeat of the Museveni government and attractive employment in a future government in which the WNBf would be a powerful force. It appears that some recruiters appealed to the Muslim religious background common to the WNBf's Sudanese sponsors and residents of northern Arua.

WNBf activities began to affect the West Nile in 1995 and intensified in 1996. In 1995, the WNBf (and Kony's LRA) began to use land mines apparently provided by Sudan. In September 1996, Moyo town was bombed by aircraft which appeared to originate in Sudan. WNBf activities were based along the Uganda/Sudan border as well as in the towns of Aru and Mahagi in northeastern Zaire, from which it pursued its insurgency.

However, in comparison with the eleven years of Acholi insurgency, WNBf attacks were intermittent, uneven and less effective. Although their activities ranged from time to time throughout Arua and western Moyo – and even marginally in eastern Nebbi – to an outside observer, it appeared that the motivation of WNBf forces was lower than their LRA counterparts, even in some respects half-hearted.

During 1997, the WNBF's strategic capabilities were critically diminished. Banyamulenge operations in northeastern Zaire deprived the WNBF of its refuge along the Zaire/Uganda border. Military operations led by the SPLA recaptured control of most of the Sudan/Uganda border. Both military offensives were reportedly supported directly by UPDF forces. Significant numbers of WNBF leaders and combatants were captured and returned to Uganda. WNBF activity diminished considerably.

The fate of a separate splinter anti-Museveni insurgency, called the "Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF) - Part II," is not certain.

### **Human rights conduct of the parties**

The human rights conduct of the insurgents in the West Nile is strikingly different from that of the LRA. No major massacres on a scale of the LRA "signal incidents" were alleged by any interviewees. A total of roughly 200 deaths were attributed to the WNBF during the past two years by well-informed sources. These included 70 civilians who died as a result of WNBF land mines; 30 who were the victims of assassinations targeted at government officials and Museveni political campaign workers; and up to two dozen Sudanese refugees who had fled the SPLA/Sudan Government conflict in southern Sudan and who had been given refuge in UNHCR camps in eastern Arua. During the attacks on UNHCR refugee camps, WNBF combatants cut off the ears of roughly a dozen refugees. [WNBF attacks on UNHCR camps occurred during about the same period as the LRA's attack on Acholpi Refugee Camp in southern Kitgum.]

Neither did interviewees report large-scale human rights violations by the UPDF. Complaints of beating of civilians during questioning in rural areas were raised, as were allegations of relatively isolated incidents of execution of suspected insurgents and collaborators. Mortality arising from such incidents was generally characterized as of less frequency and magnitude than similar WNBF actions. Two sources alleged that a few of the many land mine explosions attributed to the WNBF may have been attributable to UPDF forces. There were allegations of dozens of arbitrary arrests and mistreatment in government prisons.

Civilians wounded in Arua and Moyo districts during the 15 months from January 1996 to March 1997 – the most intense period of the West Nile conflict – appeared to be about one-third the Gulu/Kitgum number for the same period.

## **Displacement patterns**

At the time of the assessment, the number of West Nilers still displaced by the conflict appeared to be minimal. A relatively small number of farm families remained displaced from the areas close to the Sudan/Uganda border. A population of several hundred or more displaced persons was reported to be clustered near Ombachi.

A number of sources, including government authorities, reported that tens of thousands of Ugandans were displaced to the Koboko/Gbengi area. These reports specified that some 25,000 were temporarily residing in an abandoned UNHCR transit camp in the area, or alternatively in certain specific neighborhoods of Koboko. A visit to all of the specified areas, however, revealed only a few dozen residents at the ex-UNHCR transit center. It may be that some farm families from Oraba and neighboring parishes, as well as other areas, remain displaced. In April/May 1997, however, it appeared that there was a general trend toward return home by previously displaced families.

### Displaced Sudanese refugees

Roughly 200,000 southern Sudanese refugees reside in agricultural settlements in northern Arua and Moyo districts. The settlements are provided by the Government of Uganda and financed largely by UNHCR. With an annual cash budget of nearly US\$10 million per year and considerable external food aid, the program employs over 1,000 people and dozens of non-governmental organizations which assist both refugees and Ugandans residing near the settlements.

Refugee settlements in eastern Moyo appear stable, with little displacement or returnee movement. But in northeast Arua, more than 50,000 Sudanese refugees who fled or departed UNHCR refugee settlements at Ikafe, Mvepi and Rhino Camp remain displaced or in transit within Uganda. Many of these refugees had fled their settlements after WNBF attacks, described earlier. Some appeared to be voluntarily returning to southern Sudan, following SPLA recent successes there. Several reliable sources asserted that the SPLA was exerting undue pressure on some refugees to return before they felt safe in doing so. This refugee issue was not carefully examined as part of the present assessment.

## **Conflict resolution**

The elders of Arua, according to many accounts, have been an effective force for peace in the West Nile. Their decision in early 1986 to oppose an armed insurgency against the NRA, described earlier, was the beginning of a sustained effort that included periodic public peace demonstrations in Arua over the years. According to several well-informed sources, two elders lost their lives, apparently as a result of these efforts:

- In June 1994, a group of Arua elders met with government representatives to discuss heightening tensions in the “Oraba finger” area and their perception that active insurgent recruitment had begun. The group unsuccessfully urged early government attention. Shortly thereafter, Mr. Kokole Ciriaco, Secretary General of the Arua Elders Association, was gunned down, allegedly by WNBFF agents in reprisal for statements made at the meeting.
- During 1997, Sheikh Moro Sali, a respected Aringa elder, spoke openly about the need to end the conflict and encouraged the youth who had been recruited by the WNBFF to return from the bush. The sheikh was himself a World War II veteran and former member of the Amin army. He was assassinated, allegedly by WNBFF agents in reprisals for his statements.

The author was unable to independently verify these incidents.

## **Material impact of the conflict**

The material impact of the current West Nile conflict appears to be a fraction of the impact suffered by the Acholi area.

In comparison with the destruction of more than one hundred primary schools in Gulu alone, for example, about ten have been destroyed by the WNBFF. [An estimated one hundred teachers were killed in Gulu district, compared with fourteen killed by the WNBFF.]

According to district veterinary officers and others, the cattle and livestock herds of Arua and Moyo districts disappeared in the 1979/1981 period because of the mass exodus of local residents to Sudan and the conflict between ex-Amin forces and the UNLA. At the present time, however, Ugandan-owned cattle in the two West Nile districts is estimated at a fairly sizable 165,000 head. In addition, Arua alone is estimated to have about 650,000 goats and sheep.

## **West Nile attitudes to the conflict**

Attitudes of grassroots civilians in parts of northern Arua toward the current conflict seemed to vary from those of other West Nilers.

### Aringa County attitudes

Like most West Nile interviewees, civilians in Aringa believe that the anti-government insurgency has no chance of success. Some asserted that the war's continuation is the greatest obstacle to achieving one of its purposes – to call attention to and overcome the lack of development and the insufficiency of NGO programs.

At the time of the assessment visit, however, Aringa residents seemed to have a relatively positive attitude toward the participation of their men in the WNBFB. A feeling of pride that this local group was sustaining a viable military opposition to the government was detected. Despite the profound military setbacks the WNBFB had suffered in 1997, local residents insisted that the government must negotiate with the remaining WNBFB elements as equals.

A frequently expressed regret, however, was that their men had never actually received the full US\$300 recruitment bonus to which they had been entitled by promises given by Sudan-based WNBFB recruiters. Several people asserted that, as a result, the combatants are using the weapons they received to steal from civilians. If cash employment were available, some stated, many of the insurgents would put aside their weapons to go to work.

Attitudes in Aringa contrasted starkly with grassroots Acholi repudiation of the LRA conflict in neighboring Gulu and Kitgum. Aringa's greater tolerance – even sympathy – for the rebels may be based, in part, on the dramatically lower level of suffering the civilian population has felt. The duration of the conflict in the West Nile has been less than a fifth of the Acholi war's. Casualty and displacement levels and economic impact are dramatically less. The intensity and brutality of the Acholi war and the widespread toll it has taken on civilians are not present in the West Nile. The much lower price paid by civilians in West Nile for continuation of the conflict there may permit civilians in Aringa a luxury which the Acholi people cannot afford – support for the insurgents which is at least rhetorical.

### Madi attitudes

The Madi people represent the overwhelming majority of the population of northern Moyo (west of the Nile) and eastern Moyo District. The Madi people share borders with the Aringa and with the Acholi. They have declined since 1986 to participate in the anti-government insurgency with either group but have suffered economic and security disruptions from both.

Moyo's western county of Obongi, a fertile rice-farming area located between Aringa County and the Nile's west bank, is a concern for the Madi people. Since the late 1950s, Kakwa and Aringa families – mainly Muslims – from northern Arua have migrated to northern Obongi, whose population had been mainly Christian Madis. Obongi has been the scene of some ethnic elbowing which has incidental religious overtones. During the current conflict, many Madis have been forced by insecurity to flee across the Nile to eastern Moyo. Several sources alleged that Christian chapels in southern Obongi have been targeted by the WNBF. The religious dimension of these events could not be verified.

According to some sources, the Acholi historically expanded their territory at the expense of the Madi. Some Madi assert that their ancestors used to occupy what is today northwestern Gulu up to the town of Pabo. Acholis and Madis intermarry in the border areas between the two ethnic groups. But the spillover of the Acholi conflict, which has included looting and abductions in eastern Moyo, has been unwelcome.

Asked why they have abstained from the current conflict, some Madi explain that as a small group, numbering less than 200,000, they cannot afford miscalculations. They refuse to risk the types of mass exodus and economic catastrophe which occurred in the early 1980s (at the hands of the UNLA, including its Acholi contingents), from which they are still recovering. The Madi never possessed the political power which their northern Arua and Acholi neighbors enjoyed to varying degrees under different administrations. They are not motivated to fight to regain something they never had.

Madi leaders asserted that their people would also not involve themselves in a conflict without careful analysis of its concrete objectives and a reasonable chance for success. The current conflicts in West Nile and Acholi, they asserted, meet neither of these tests.



Moreover, the Madi have distinguished themselves in Uganda through their pursuit of education. They pride themselves on the number of doctors, teachers and other professionals they have produced. The majority of Madis voted for President Museveni in the 1996 elections. A prominent member of the Museveni cabinet is former UNRF Commander Brigadier Moses Ali, whose home is Adjumani in eastern Moyo.

Although they have not participated in the northern conflicts, they have suffered because of them. In addition to conflict spillovers into the district, its road access to the rest of Uganda has been seriously impaired by insecurity, which has crippled commercial activity and government services.

### **Political dimensions**

The Madi population of Moyo has refrained from participation in the current conflict and supported the current Government.

Attitudes in southern Arua appear to be less supportive of the WNBF than in Aringa. But differences over the conflict do not translate into support for the current President. In fact, about 80% of Arua's electorate voted for Dr. Ssemogerere in the 1996 presidential elections. It appears that the WNBF urged his election, but did not use the types of threats allegedly used by the LRA in Acholi to do so.

Anti-NRM attitudes do not appear as pronounced or irrevocable in Arua as they are in Acholi. One theme which emerged in several discussions, and which probably affected the vote, concerned a series of incidents, whose details could not be independently verified, between the current government administration and the West Nile's Catholic Bishop, Frederick Drandua.

#### ■ The Nyagak dam project

Bishop Drandua is known as a pro-active clergyman interested in the economic development of the West Nile, his home region (he is said to be of Madi background). During the late 1980s, he persuaded the Italian Government to study the feasibility of constructing a hydro-electric dam along the Nyagak River in central Nebbi District. The study revealed that such a dam could generate sufficient electricity for the entire region. Italy agreed to finance the project with a US\$30 million grant, subject to provision by the government of a small counterpart contribution (which a private Italian group was reportedly willing to donate) and official approval to proceed.

For reasons which are not clear, the government withheld its approval of the Italian offer. [Some West Nilers believe that President Museveni himself, at this early point in his new administration, was not prepared to see the church play such a prominent role in national economic development.] Instead, the government indicated, North Korea would undertake the project. A North Korean study reportedly endorsed its technical feasibility, but financing was not forthcoming. The government then requested assistance from Norway, which also did not materialize. But in the meantime the Italian government changed and the US\$30 million offer was lost, to the dismay of the people of the West Nile, for whom electrical power was – and remains – a top priority.

■ Alleged assassination attempt

In September 1994, according to newspaper reports and independent accounts, events occurred which created further friction: an Mvara senior secondary school student, Edward Azumanga, confessed that he had been paid US\$2,500 by a government official to assassinate Bishop Drandua. According to these reports, the official was identified as Presidential Advisor on the West Nile, Mrs. Hanuna Omari. According to some sources, Mrs. Omari is a Muslim whose home is in the West Nile and who is believed to have served in a security department of the Amin administration. Azumanga did not carry out the killing. But on 30 September 1994, days after he first confessed the plan, another individual was killed within meters of the Bishop's residence.

Azumanga was arrested, allegedly put in a mental hospital for several months and later charged with perjury. He was acquitted of the perjury charge. Government investigators were criticized for failing to properly investigate the underlying allegations.

Whatever the facts, distrust and disaffection has increased between the people of Arua and the current administration as a result of these incidents and contributed to the administration's poor showing in the past elections.

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\* Some further details concerning this matter were reported in the September/October 1995 Nile Arrow newsletter.

### **SECTION III                    CONFLICT IMPACT ON NEBBI DISTRICT**

#### **Background**

Nebbi District in the West Nile region shares a western border with Zaire, a northern border with Arua District, and an eastern border (the Nile River) with Gulu. Nebbi's 3,000 square kilometers make it about one-quarter the size of Gulu, though its population of 300,000 is almost the same.

The predominant ethnic group of Nebbi is the Alur, whose traditional kingdom is currently ruled by King Jobi II, who resides in the eastern Nebbi village of War. Minority groups include the Lendu, who reside principally near Zeu in eastern Nebbi, and the Kebu people, who are concentrated near Kango.

Like the Madi people of Moyo, the Alur and other groups of Nebbi are small and inclined to avoid conflict. They have generally abstained from the current war as well. Although several hundred Alurs, including some Muslims, joined the WNBF, many complain that the promised US\$300 recruitment bonus was not fulfilled. In June and again in November 1996, King Jobi issued public appeals to the WNBF combatants "begging you with misery" to return home. Most have done so. According to King Jobi II, religious and civil officials, no WNBF returnees have been killed or persecuted by the government. [60% of the people of Nebbi voted for President Museveni in the 1996 elections.]

Few Alur have been associated with Joseph Kony's LRA. Alur leaders assert that historical enmity divides the Alur from the Acholi. The Alur have never been a predominant force in the military or in government. Like the Madi people, they are a small group which cannot afford miscalculations. The people of Nebbi have, nonetheless, been affected by the conflict in three ways:

#### **■ Jonam County - attempted infiltration**

Jonam County, on Nebbi's eastern wing bordering the Nile River, depends on cotton cultivation and fishing for its livelihood. It has remained relatively conflict-free. In 1996, a WNBF unit, reportedly carrying land mines, was detected in Jonam and denounced by the local civilian population. After five insurgents were killed by UPDF forces, the rebels withdrew.

### ■ **Western Nebbi - occasional disruptions**

From a base near Mahagi in northeastern Zaire, WNBF elements launched occasional incursions into Zeu, Kango, Erussi and Paida sub-counties of western Nebbi. [A prominent WNBF officer, Lt. Col. Athocon, comes from this area.] In late 1996, isolated WNBF attacks included the killing of a dozen government officials, destruction of two schools and several homes, some brief abductions, and the theft of an NGO vehicle. Two dozens civilians have been wounded in various incidents. Short-term temporary displacement occurred in a few villages.

### ■ **Nebbi's economy: victim of the Karuma/Pakwach convoy attack**

An earlier section of this report (see page 39) described an LRA attack on 8 March 1996 against a mixed civilian and commercial convoy traveling through Gulu District en route to the West Nile. Nebbi Hospital provided emergency care to 32 survivors. Nebbi interviewees reported that this incident and related insecurity have significantly affected Nebbi's commercial life. In past years, Nebbi hosted eight seasonal cotton buyers; that number has diminished to three. Cotton prices have fallen and overall cotton revenues have been slashed by more than 50%. At the same time, the cost of commercial products transported from Kampala has increased. These events have slowed Nebbi's normally prosperous economy.

According to local sources, farmers in parts of Nebbi have sold some of their cattle to compensate for reduced income. An estimated one hundred head may have been stolen by WNBF combatants and pleuro-pneumonia has claimed some of the herd. Nonetheless, district veterinary officers report that Nebbi's cattle population has increased from an estimated 50,000 in 1985 to 70,000 in 1997.

## **SECTION IV      PROSPECTS FOR CONFLICT EXPANSION**

An assessment of the prospects for the revitalization of the LRA and WNBF or their expansion beyond their current geographic areas depends upon their internal vigor and potential appeal outside their home areas.

### **Prospects for the Lord's Resistance Army**

#### **...within Acholi**

The LRA is by far the stronger and more dynamic of these two insurgencies. It has inherited a revolt which has kept most of 15% of Uganda in turmoil for over a decade. However, it is strikingly devoid of political content. Given the anti-Museveni sentiment of most Acholis, the LRA's inability to mobilize support – or to at least avoid repudiation by its own ethnic base – is remarkable.

The insurgency's military prospects have waxed and waned over the last decade. At the moment, they are in a slump. Prospects for continued refuge in and military assistance from Sudan, which are increasingly critical for its viability, are dimmer than at any time since they began in 1994. This does not preclude the possibility that in future the fortunes of the Sudan/LRA alliance will improve. But the next few years will more likely involve an LRA struggle for survival than the launching of an expansion of its activities beyond its current geographic boundaries.

The author believes it is highly unlikely that an LRA revitalized by wiser leadership and a more forward-looking political message would persuade any significant segment of the Acholi population to continue this insurgency. The Acholi have been morally exhausted and economically ruined from five successive phases of this conflict. What they seek is an end to the war, a chance to rebuild their economies and to enjoy the fruits of peace.

Nor are the LRA's neighbors yearning for its presence. Thus far, five separate phases of Acholi insurgency has had little appeal beyond its borders, although Alice Lakwena's 1987 march to Kampala attracted some support along the way.

...among the Madi, Alur, Banyoro and Karamojong

The Madi and Alur people of Moyo and Nebbi districts – the Acholi's eastern neighbors – have for over a decade abstained from participation in the LRA's conflict. They will not likely alter this disposition in the near future. The LRA's struggle is more hopeless and self-destructive than it was at the outset when, for reasons described earlier in this report, these groups first decided to stand back. In addition, the LRA's human rights conduct of the past few years – of which these groups have been occasional victims – has increased their fear of the LRA. In any case, the 1996 presidential election results suggest that a majority of Madi and Alur people support the Museveni administration.

The Banyoro people reside in Masindi District, separated from southern Gulu by the Victoria Nile. According to some Ugandan sources, the Banyoro are cultural descendants of the Acholi. One source asserted that in 1996 when a new Banyoro King was coronated, Acholi consultants participated in organization of the traditional rituals.

Hundreds of families displaced from Gulu and Kitgum by actions of both parties to the Acholi conflict over the last decade have sought refuge in the peaceful Diima area of northeast Masindi; others have transited the Karuma and Diima areas en route to more distant locations within Uganda. Despite their cultural and historical ties with the Acholi, the people of Masindi delivered 88% of their votes to President Museveni in the 1996 elections. Masindi seems unlikely as a propitious environment for LRA activities.

Having rustled virtually the entire Acholi cattle herds nearly a decade ago, the main interest of the Acholi's eastern neighbors, the Karamojong, will more likely be to pick off remaining livestock than in joining together with the LRA. The Museveni government appears to have achieved positive relations with the Karamojong. More than 95% of Karamoja's 84,000 voters supported candidate Museveni in the 1996 presidential elections [about 57% of Karamoja's registered voters actually went to the polls].

...among the Langi

The Langi people of Apac and Lira districts, who with the Acholi share a common language and the bonds of decades of shared participation in the Obote I and II military, have had traditional border rivalries with their northern neighbors. The overthrow of the Obote government, the expulsion of the Langi from the government and ill-treatment by the Acholi in 1985 must be factored into the appeal which a potential alliance with the LRA holds for the Langi.

Recent LRA activities in northern Lango districts of Apac and Lira have probably reinforced these negative attitudes. The abduction of 152 school girls from St. Mary's College in northern Apac described earlier (see page 41) is the most dramatic recent example of LRA action in this area. But dozens of smaller incidents in which Langi farm families have been killed, abducted and looted (especially after harvest seasons) have heightened local fear of the LRA.

The Langi people are considered by some other northerners to be astute and cautious politicians who prefer to play background roles in such conflicts. The possibility of the re-establishment of links which would permit or complement LRA activities outside of Acholi seems tenuous. Nonetheless, the Langi share with the Acholi (and with the people of Arua District) electoral opposition to the Museveni administration. More than 80% of the Langi electorate voted for Dr. Ssemogerere.

#### ...among the Iteso

The Iteso people of Soroti and Kumi districts are separated from Kitgum District by a narrow corridor through Lango and Karamojong areas. The Iteso conducted their own revolt against the Museveni government between 1987 (following major cattle raids) and 1992, allegedly with training and military assistance from Kenya. The predominantly Iteso Uganda People's Army (UPA) was established principally by members of the former UNLA special forces. In that both were comprised principally of professional soldiers, the UPA was similar to the Acholi UPDA of the 1986 - 1988 period. Both Museveni's NRA and the UPA in the Iteso conflict were known for their rough tactics with civilians. A July 1989 incident in which 69 prisoners in NRA custody were apparently purposely suffocated in a rail car at Okungulo railway station in Mukura Sub-County, Kumi District, is well-known throughout Uganda.<sup>1</sup>

According to one authoritative source, even during the early 1990s, when both the Acholi and the Iteso were battling the NRA, LRA forces, during incursions in Soroti, inflicted atrocities on Iteso civilians. The LRA's human rights conduct has worsened over the years, leaving it little appeal in this area.

The conflict in Soroti and Kumi with the Museveni government was concluded in 1992 through the efforts of the Teso Commission, first formed in 1990. It appears that the conflict resolution achieved in the Iteso region in 1992 has been durable. The majority of the Iteso electorate voted for President Museveni in the 1996 elections.

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<sup>1</sup> For details of this incident, see Amnesty International, Uganda: The Failure to Safeguard Human Rights, September 1992. The Monitor newspaper published a retrospective of the incident, including eyewitness accounts, in its 29 June 1997 issue.

...among Ugandans in general

The Luwero Triangle atrocities – with which, justifiably or not, Acholi UNLA elements are associated – coupled with the LRA's recent human rights conduct would probably constrain the LRA's welcome in other areas of Uganda.

### **Prospects for the West Nile Bank Front**

...within the West Nile region

Because the war's impact has been relatively mild, the WNBF enjoys some support in northern Arua and in Moyo's western Obongi County. A recruitment bonus attractive to unemployed former soldiers and youth, local pride and the invocation by rebel advocates of the "better days of the Amin regime," rather than a relevant political program, seem to underlie this support. To some degree, a common Muslim identity with the insurgency's Sudanese supporters resonates in parts of the West Nile. The WNBF appears to lack a political content which transcends some of these narrow sub-regional issues.

Moreover, unlike the Acholi insurgency – which began and continued for almost a decade without Sudan's assistance – the WNBF seems more a product of external stimulation and assistance which has been largely eliminated by military developments during 1997.

This development does not preclude low-level continued disruptions in some parts of the West Nile by WNBF remnants. But the character of these incidents may be more akin to banditry than to the activities of a coherent insurgency.

The WNBF's appeal even within the West Nile has been limited to mainly three counties. Almost all of Moyo District and all of Nebbi District, and parts of Arua have abstained from participation in the rebellion. No indications were detected of a change in their opposition to this insurgency.



...outside the West Nile region

The prospect of a return to power of West Nile forces associated with the Amin military and security apparatus holds no appeal (or perhaps a negative appeal) for Ugandans outside the region. With its diminished military capabilities and isolation in northern areas of the West Nile along the Sudan border, the potential for this movement's expansion outside the region seems tenuous.

## SECTION V

## OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### I RESUMPTION OF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

Direct peace negotiations between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army broke down in February 1994 and have not been resumed since. During the 1994 negotiations, both parties demonstrated the ability to organize effective direct communication which led to a temporary cessation of hostilities and to substantive and constructive discussions. **Both parties might wish to consider resumption of such negotiations at this time. The moment is opportune.**

**Such a process would probably be swifter and more effective if, as in 1988 and 1994, it were arranged and carried out directly between the parties.** Negotiation by those closest to the conflict would sooner reach its essential elements. The intervention or mediation of third parties, including the diplomatic community, would more likely encumber than facilitate a successful outcome. The participation of third parties could slow down or create opportunities for the distortion or manipulation of the process.

**In recent years, direct negotiations have had demonstrated success in mitigating or concluding violent conflict in northern Uganda.** In June 1988, direct negotiations between the Government and the UPDA concluded an earlier phase of the Gulu/Kitgum conflict. The revolt in the ethnic Iteso districts of Soroti and Kumi was resolved in 1992 through direct contacts between the parties. Finally, but for the appearance for the first time of external military assistance to the LRA, a durable agreement between the parties might have been reached through the direct 1994 negotiations.

**Whatever their view of the merits of the insurgency at the war's outset, the overwhelming majority of Acholi people in Gulu and Kitgum oppose its continuation.** They believe, with much justification, that the LRA has no chance to overcome government forces. **While their attitude toward the present Government is not positive, their repudiation of the insurgents is almost universal. This is a conflict without a constituency or, in the view of most Acholis, any beneficial purpose.** The predominantly Acholi LRA forces in these districts will continue to find themselves waging a war against the wishes of those in whose name they are fighting and compelled to extract support from the Acholi people by means of violence. **Negotiation between the two sides would enjoy almost unanimous support among the grassroots Acholi people.**

To facilitate a peace agreement, the Acholi people would be prepared to peacefully reintegrate the vast majority of LRA insurgents in their communities. The Catholic Church, including the Comboni Fathers of Verona, Italy, the Church of Uganda, and Islamic leaders are well placed and in some cases eager to support the peace and reconciliation process.

**During the current period, the Government has pursued a military solution to the conflict, with uneven results.** The majority of LRA forces are apparently deployed in southern Sudan alongside Sudanese Government forces. Together, they are defending against an aggressive SPLA military offensive which is reportedly assisted by Ugandan armed-forces elements. LRA safe havens in southern Sudan are vulnerable. Sudan's ability to deliver arms to the LRA in northern Uganda is being affected. **Deprived of Sudanese bases and material assistance, the LRA's capabilities would be seriously affected and many casualties could be expected. To the degree that the LRA is forced to operate principally within the districts of Gulu and Kitgum, the Acholi people's opposition – though it can be overcome with brutality – will encumber its operations.**

**Nonetheless, whatever the success of the SPLA/Ugandan offensive in southern Sudan, under present conditions a military solution to this conflict by the Ugandan Government armed forces will not soon be achieved.** The insurgency in Gulu and Kitgum began in 1986 and continued without external assistance for more than eight years – until 1994. Some of the region's terrain offers natural advantages to such activities. The LRA's willingness to consider unprotected civilian communities as legitimate targets makes defense extremely difficult. Without Sudan's assistance and with much reduced forces, the LRA's capacity to disrupt Gulu and Kitgum in coming years could still be considerable.

**In this complex military environment, the UPDF has not, in recent years, demonstrated the capacity and commitment required to bring the war to a conclusion through military means.** Peace throughout Uganda – in large part because of the Gulu/Kitgum insurgency – has not been consolidated since the advent in 1986 of the NRM administration. The financial strain of the conflict drains the national treasury of funds which most Ugandans believe could be better invested in reconstruction and social services.

For these reasons, it may be in the interest of both parties to resume negotiations. The first step could be taken by the Government of Uganda itself. A genuine effort in this direction would be warmly welcomed by the Acholi people in Gulu and Kitgum and would dispel skepticism in sectors of the diplomatic community concerning the government's commitment to end the conflict. A positive response by the LRA would have the same effect.

**The leadership of both parties will encounter elements within their own ranks who, for their own motives, will oppose this process.** Moreover, LRA leaders may find they are not as free in 1997 as they were in 1994 to take independent decisions on such matters. Such obstacles could affect the outcome of the proposed process. Those on both sides who share with the grassroots Acholi people a recognition of this war's futility, may through their creative persistence find the means to overcome them.

## **II      ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

Without intruding directly in such negotiations, **the international community should actively encourage their resumption.** Considerable interest for this notion has been encountered in the United States Government and diplomatic missions of other friendly countries. Sustained support for negotiations could be helpful to the leadership of the Government and to others, should they decide to proceed. **Public media attention to the northern conflict and to the negotiation process could have a positive effect.** It would also help to assure the Acholi people that – contrary to the belief of many – the international community is, indeed, concerned with their problem.

## **III     HUMAN RIGHTS PANEL OF INQUIRY**

The human rights conduct of the parties to the conflict has evolved significantly during the five phases of the anti-government insurgency in Acholi which began in 1986. The current phase of the war, which began in February 1994 following the breakdown of peace negotiations, has had its own unique character. Eight prominent incidents involving large-scale loss of human life, mass abductions or other significant human rights violations have occurred during the last three years. **Confusion over the identity of the party responsible for these incidents, and over the facts and circumstances surrounding them, is an obstacle to the peace process and to reconciliation.**

**Ugandans in most districts of the country outside Gulu and Kitgum, in Kampala, and especially Acholi people abroad, have not received clear, impartial and authoritative information about these eight critical events.** A minority of such persons seem to purposefully pursue their political opposition to the current Government by distorting information about them. The facts of these incidents are crucial to an understanding of the current situation.

**As a result of the confusion concerning these events, the perception of the problems suffered by the Acholi people at home by some leaders outside the area who could constructively assist the peace process is out-dated or simply inaccurate.** Important changes have occurred which require accurate current reporting. Attention is misfocused on unnecessary debates about the authorship and nature of the eight incidents, and by extension the overall situation in the north, instead of on the resumption of a peace process. **To some degree, this confusion sustains an environment in which the war is perpetuated.** Acholi and most others of varying political outlooks – in Gulu and Kitgum as well as outside the area – indicated that they would welcome an impartial investigation of these recent incidents. The LRA, in July 1996 and February 1997, urged this type of investigation. Such an inquiry could help create an environment more supportive of a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

**An independent, impartial, authoritative international three-member Panel of Inquiry could be convened to investigate these eight incidents in a thorough manner to establish the responsibility for each of them and to determine pertinent facts and circumstances surrounding them.** The Panel should be convened collaboratively by a small number of interested European and other donors who are not perceived to hold strong views in favor of or against the current Government. Such a Panel could be convened rapidly and complete its task in two months. Its final report should be distributed widely both in Uganda and to the international community.

The eight key incidents proposed for investigation are set forth in the annex. Provisional summaries of the alleged circumstances are provided as initial references which will be subject to the panel's findings.

#### **IV RECONSTRUCTION ASSISTANCE**

**If the peace process proceeds, international donors should be prepared to provide rapid economic assistance specifically designed and targeted to accelerate post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction and economic reactivation in the north. Such activities, if rapidly implemented, could help to stabilize the area and consolidate peace in its early years.** Implementation of sizable activities must await an improvement in security conditions which only a peace process and at least a stable cease-fire within a promising negotiating environment can provide. Interested donors might wish to consider at an early stage what type of assistance they might provide to support the consolidation of peace should such talks succeed. Three particular options stand out among a large variety of possible activities:

##### **A. Seeds and tools for agricultural reactivation**

Nearly 150,000 persons – perhaps 30,000 or more families – remain displaced so distant from their homes that their normal agricultural activities have been disrupted. In addition, the seed and tool supplies of other families who have not been displaced have also been affected. Donors should aim to assist farmers to re-establish their sources of food for both consumption and sale as quickly as possible, as conditions permit. Early provision of seeds and tools for returning displaced families and for others who were not displaced but who are in similar need is inexpensive and essential.

However, to insure that donor funds are used to greatest effect, an extensive process of direct consultation with local farmers should be conducted in advance to determine the proper type, quality, quantity and brand of seed and tool “packages” which will be most practical in each part of the districts.

### **B. School reconstruction**

The resumption of normal educational activities in Gulu and Kitgum would be an important signal that stability has returned and is essential for future development. A donor could opt, for example, to reconstruct twenty-five primary schools in each of these two districts. Lists of schools which have been destroyed are available through the respective District Education Officers. The reconstruction cost for 50 schools would be about US\$1.5 million. Extensive rehabilitation is also required in public secondary schools.

In the past, much local primary school construction has been conducted on a collaborative basis between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the local communities. Unskilled labor and the local materials it can produce have been donated by the communities. Such collaboration, in the view of the implementing NGOs, has focused the community’s attention on the importance of the buildings and their future maintenance. In practice, many communities have collected cash to employ unskilled laborers in the effort. However, this collaborative approach has delayed construction by as much as eighteen months.

For the first eighteen months of the post-war reconstruction period, the requirement for voluntary community participation should be waived. The target areas are cash-poor and will require all of their resources to rebuild their own homes and livelihoods. Donors can contribute more effectively to economic recovery by providing for cash employment of unskilled laborers. Rapid implementation of projects will restore hope in an accelerated return to a

more normal life. Local staff of several large NGOs suggest that communities could be informed that a “waiver” on voluntary community participation has been

temporarily applied because of the economic emergency in which the area finds itself.

### **C. Short-term cash employment**

Eleven years of civil war have collapsed the economies of these two districts. Agricultural production has been disrupted throughout most of Gulu and much of Kitgum. The cattle and livestock herds upon which the Acholi depended in such emergencies have disappeared. Many of their houses have been burned. Most of their tools, clothes, property and cash have been traded, stolen or lost. Cash employment is a decade-old memory for many Acholis. In fact, cash transactions have in some locations been replaced by barter.

Should the conflict be resolved, the absence of cash and the opportunity to earn it will be significant impediments to the acquisition of the essential items which each family will require for its own sustainable economic recovery, including eventual acquisition of livestock. Reconstruction activities and economic reactivation will also be handicapped by the deteriorated state of many roads. Gradual livestock recovery and other rehabilitation will be constrained in Kitgum by the deteriorated condition of river dams and valley tanks.

These problems may combine to create an opportunity which should be carefully evaluated for a donor such as USAID to assist the area's reconstruction. **A three-year US\$5-million short-term transitional employment generation program could be considered with the aim of generating 75,000 person-months of employment, which could be shared in on a rotating basis by up to 15,000 persons.** Under such an approach 75% or more of the \$5 million in project funds would be used exclusively for the salaries of manual laborers. Workers would rehabilitate two types of infrastructure:

- ◆ **Unsurfaced farm-to-market roads** Major rehabilitation would be undertaken with manual tools (such as picks, shovels, wheelbarrows, rammers and pedestrian rollers). No new roads would be built nor would routine maintenance be financed under this project. Aggregate is often crushed manually in this area. Farm-to-market roads are essential to the marketing of agricultural produce upon which sustainable economic recovery and development in this region will largely depend.

[Heavy equipment would be used exclusively for tasks which manual labor cannot economically undertake, specifically for transport of dumper loads of gravel and in rare instances to move large obstacles. Equipment already provided by several donors together with other USAID funds which could be available could finance fuel and spare parts, as needed.]

A system which pays its workers by the task accomplished, rather than by time invested, is recommended. Such a system has been used for recurrent road maintenance by local road authorities in Gulu and Kitgum through the use of "petty contractors." In principle, these contractors are experienced road supervisors who compete for road contracts in which they, in turn, employ crews of manual laborers. The contractors are paid – and, in turn, pay their employees - as each section of work specified in their contract is completed.

This system has at times worked inefficiently in several northern areas because:

- contractors have not been paid on a timely basis (or at all in some cases) and/or their employees have not been paid by them;
- the bidding system has been politicized and has not selected qualified contractors;
- contractors do not have the manual tools to enable them to employ sufficient workers simultaneously;
- supervision has been weak; and
- corruption has been difficult to control.

These weaknesses can be remedied through vigorous implementation by independent institutions. In principle, however, systems which reward outputs will function far more efficiently than systems which reward inputs.

Compensation for each specific task should be computed based on a rapid market survey of minimum prevailing wage rates for temporary unskilled labor. This strategy avoids artificial wage inflation which could undermine economic recovery. Those in greatest need would "self-select" themselves for participation. The temptation to use the program for patronage would be diminished. With whatever funds are available, the largest number of workers could benefit and the greatest amount of infrastructure could be repaired – infrastructure which will directly serve the workers and their families as well.

Labor-intensive strategies for major rehabilitation of roads (and for the opening of new roads, which is not proposed here) are reported to have been used with



considerable success in both Uganda and Tanzania. USAID Mission engineers have observed a similar effort financed by GTZ in Soroti District; authoritative observers assert the employment it created immediately after the 1992 peace accords there contributed substantially to consolidating stability. Similar efforts have been carried out in Tanzania. Such a strategy seems particularly appropriate in northern Uganda, where employment generation is critical.

The labor-intensive approach could create several thousand jobs in a relatively short period of time. The technology is appropriate to the beneficiary area. In comparison with the current reliance on imported heavy equipment, it is more sustainable. It would enable simultaneous coverage of a wider geographical area and avoid the costs and delays associated with equipment breakdown, lack of spare parts and fuel shortages.

The principal target districts for this effort should be rural Gulu and Kitgum districts. To a lesser degree, such a project could include northern Arua, Moyo District, eastern Nebbi and northern Apac and Lira. Experienced experts in the region recommend that roads constructed over black cottonsoil terrain should be excluded from the proposed program.

- ◆ **River dam and valley tank repair** A similar labor-intensive approach should be studied and considered – exclusively for Kitgum District – for the rehabilitation of some of its 34 large river dams and 42 valley tanks. The availability of surface water in this district is unreliable during several months of each year and groundwater potential in some areas is limited. The dams and tanks provide sweet water for drinking, cooking, washing and other domestic needs, and for livestock. While livestock watering is not an immediate priority, the dams will be essential to eventual livestock recovery. They are typically stocked with tilapia and mudfish, a source of food for local communities. They may also be used as take-off points for sustainable development of long-term fish ponds and vegetable farming.

Beginning in the 1950s, a system for harvesting and storing rainwater in earthen collection and storage dams was developed. Most of the initial dams were built exclusively with manual labor using locally available materials. Some of the larger ones, such as those in Namu-okora and Palabek, are designed to store up to 20 million gallons. While their monthly water levels vary, they provide an adequate water supply throughout the dry season.

Most of Kitgum's river dams and valley tanks have received little or no maintenance since their construction up to 45 years ago. The river dam at Namu-okora, for example, has silted up and its earthen retaining wall has been eroded.

When that wall was originally built, it was compacted by cattle driven across its surface. As cattle are no longer available, a labor-intensive approach using manual rammers could be considered. The planting of trees and grass in the run-off areas is recommended. Not all river dams and valley tanks require – or would be suitable for – such rehabilitation.

Frogs and some fish species should again be used, as they were in the past, for insect control. Also in the past, local government stationed a guard at the river dams to enforce rules which safeguarded water quality. Minor improvements, such as simple low-cost low-maintenance sand filtration pipes for drinking water, could be installed.

### **Implementing Mechanism**

**If USAID, after careful field review, decides to pursue employment generation opportunities, it is recommended that it do so in a direct, non-traditional, emergency “hands-on” operational manner.** To succeed, such efforts must be insulated from the pressures of local politics, corruption and inefficiency which typically affect areas recovering from prolonged civil conflict. The establishment of a streamlined operational unit in the north staffed with a small number of expatriate contract staff and with Ugandan engineers and program personnel (to the extent possible from the beneficiary districts themselves) would help to insure that the program goals are met. The operational unit should have the authority in the field to procure commodities and services, and to pay labor and other program costs. The presence of an operational USAID unit would demonstrate the U.S. Government’s concern with the problems faced by residents of this area.

At the field level, such a unit should work collegially at the local level with government engineers and experienced field staff of NGOs such as World Vision, the International Service Volunteers Association (AVSI), and Lutheran World Federation, among others. The Cooperative Bank, which typically serves the rural areas and which is represented by three branches in the two key target districts, should support the program with commercial and accounting services.

Before proceeding, the USAID Mission and the Embassy's Inter-agency Working Group should evaluate their willingness to undertake such an approach in the complex northern environment. **Reductions in staff and resource levels may affect its ability to give such a project the time and attention essential for its success. Under an optimistic scenario, the types of efforts proposed here could not begin before mid- to late-1998.**

USAID has used the "operational unit" strategy with great success in other regions, most recently on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. The Mission may wish to request of USAID/Nicaragua relevant documentation, such as program and financial management descriptions, and to review its evaluations and audits. The names of key USAID/Nicaragua managers involved in this effort have been provided to Mission/Kampala management for further consultation.

## **Eight Prominent Human Rights Incidents**

### **Northern Uganda - 1994/1997**

Following are provisional summary descriptions of eight prominent incidents which should be fully investigated.

#### **Incident No. 1                      Atiak Massacre**

On 22 April 1995, Atiak Trading Center in northern Gulu was attacked by an armed group in the early morning hours. The Center was defended by a unit of local defense forces, which was quickly defeated and whose survivors retreated. During the course of the day, a number of civilians – reportedly between 170 and 220 – were killed. These killings were said to occur in the absence of opposing armed forces or resistance of any kind by the victims. The victims were reported to include the families of local defense force members, students of Atiak (Secondary) Technical Institute and others.

#### **Incident No. 2                      Helicopter Gunship Incident**

On 31 August 1995, a Ugandan armed forces helicopter gunship attacked a column of armed insurgents which was reportedly moving toward the Sudan border in the Lokung area of northwest Kitgum. Approximately 29 persons were said to be killed in the attack. Later reports suggested that sixteen of those killed had been insurgents. But the remaining thirteen were said to be abductees dressed in civilian clothes, some of whose hands were tied behind their backs. Some critics charge that the gunship attacked the column with reckless disregard for the lives of the abductees. Government of Uganda sources have stated that the killing of the abductees was accidental and unintended.

**Incident No. 3****Karuma/Pakwach Convoy Attack**

During the morning hours of 8 March 1996, a civilian convoy was proceeding west on the Karuma/Pakwach road in southeast Gulu. It comprised about four crowded passenger buses, twenty commercial trucks and some government and church vehicles. It was said to include an estimated three hundred civilians. The convoy was reportedly accompanied by fourteen soldiers of the Government armed forces.

Shortly after departing Karuma junction that morning, heading west toward Pakwach, the convoy was attacked by a sizable armed force. The number of civilians killed in the attack has been estimated to be between 50 and 110, although some sources place mortality at a higher figure. Most killing of civilians was said to have been conducted after the convoy's armed escort had been overcome and against unarmed persons who offered no resistance. Some of the victims were executed; others who did not exit the buses when ordered to do so allegedly perished when explosives were fired into those buses. Wounded survivors were taken to Nebbi Hospital. Eyewitnesses and sources of specific data reside in Nebbi and Arua towns. Some civilians were abducted by the armed attackers and were later liberated or managed to escape.

**Incident No. 4****Death of Two Acholi Elders**

On 8 June 1996, two elders of the Acholi community were murdered in the Cwero area. The two men were Mr. Okot Ogony from Cwero (in eastern Gulu), Chairman of the Peace Commission of the Council of Acholi Chiefs; and Mr. Olanya Lagony, a respected elder from Koc-Goma in southwestern Gulu.

The two elders were in Cwero to participate in peace negotiations with the leadership of the LRA. They had been commissioned by the Chairman and members of the Council of Chiefs, who reside in Gulu town.

The meetings were the culmination of a local initiative begun months earlier to resume the peace process, which had ended unsuccessfully in February 1994. They were in Cwero with the approval of the President of Uganda and at the invitation of the LRA leadership.

#### **Incident No. 5                      Acholpi Refugee Camp Massacre**

On July 13 and 14, 1996, a series of killings occurred at the Acholpi UNHCR Refugee Camp in south-central Kitgum. The camp is home to about 16,000 refugees, mainly ethnic Acholis who fled their homes in southern Sudan and sought refuge in Uganda during 1994.

The camp was attacked by armed units in three episodes:

- ◆ During the early morning of July 13, the eastern wing of the camp was entered, four persons were abducted (some of whose bodies were later recovered), the health center was looted and camp staff quarters and vehicles were destroyed.
- ◆ On the afternoon of July 13, the western wing of the camp was attacked, and between 18 and 22 refugees were killed.
- ◆ On the morning of July 14, in a final attack on the camp, 76 refugees were killed and 21 wounded.

These killings are reported to have taken place in the absence of an opposing armed force or armed persons of any kind, and in the absence of resistance by the victims. Numerous survivors witnessed the attack. Some individuals who were abducted by the armed attackers were later liberated or managed to escape.

**Incident No. 6****Gulu Town Mob Killings**

On 16 August 1996, four LRA suspects were turned over to a mob, which beat them to death. The suspects were in the custody of the armed forces of the Government of Uganda until the moment they were turned over to the mob. According to some reports, a few of the suspects were turned over to the mob in one part of town, while the remainder were turned over at a later time in another area. The presence of senior Uganda 4<sup>th</sup> Division army officers, some of whom are said to have initiated the mob vengeance, was reported. Some Government sources asserted that the suspects were turned over to the mob in order to deter even more violent mob conduct

**Incident No. 7****St. Mary's College/Aboke Abductions**

On 10 October 1996 at about 2AM, an armed force, reportedly of 200 men, entered St. Mary's College grounds in Aboke, northern Apac District. In the absence of armed opposition forces or resistance, these forces abducted 152 secondary school girls between the ages of 13 and 16 years, and looted and destroyed college property. They departed the college grounds at about 5AM.

At 7AM, one of the nuns responsible for the college departed the college to pursue the abductors. She succeeded in overtaking the column and negotiated the release of 109 of the abductees. A few others managed to escape on their own at that time and subsequently. Nearly two dozen remain unaccounted.

**Incident No. 8****Lokung/Palabek Massacre**

Between 7 and 12 January 1997, up to 412 civilians were killed by armed attackers in the northwest Kitgum sub-counties of Lokung and Palabek and in nearby areas. The attackers swept through an area in which there were no opposing forces, armed persons or resistance from the victims. They killed the victims mainly with manual weapons (clubbing, hacking, knifing) during the five-day period. Eye-witnesses and lists of those killed may be consulted directly in Lokung and Palabek Trading Centers and at displaced persons camps in Kitgum town and elsewhere.