



LRA Profile

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There is a conflict in the north of Uganda that, since 1988, has taken thousands of lives, displaced millions of people, and seen whole armies created from the children of slaughtered villagers. The main instigator of this insurgency is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a rebel group founded on less than clear ideologies and employing brutal tactics. The LRA is led by Joseph Kony, an enigmatic figure who seems to justify the actions of his organization through a combination of spiritual beliefs and the Ten Commandments, and who, in 2005, was indicted by the International Criminal Court on thirty three charges, including war crimes and crimes against humanity. Negotiations between the LRA and Ugandan government are ongoing, but progress has been slow due to resistance to any real commitments from either side.

The LRA takes its roots in the revolutionary upheaval that took place in Uganda in the mid-eighties. In 1985 Tito Okello, an Acholi from the north of Uganda, overthrew Milton Obote's government. Six months later, the newly installed government was overthrown again, and Yoweri Museveni, the current president of Uganda and former head of the National Resistance Army, seized power. When Okello had been in power, he had treated the people in the south of Uganda with very little respect, so when Museveni came to power, the Acholi feared retribution. It



The mud huts of an IDP camp in northern Uganda.

was at this point that a resistance developed in northern Uganda, under the leadership of an Acholi named Alice Auma (aka Alice Lakwena), who claimed to be a spirit medium, receiving messages from the dead. These spirits instructed her to lead a rebellion against Museveni. The rebellion was eventually defeated and Auma fled the country, leaving a power vacuum in the north. Into this vacuum stepped Joseph Kony who, in 1987, formed the Lord's Resistance Army.

Little is known of Kony's personal life before he formed the LRA. He was born in Odek, a small village in northern Uganda. Childhood friends say they recognized nothing overly peculiar in Kony, who was an avid soccer player and dancer. Like Alice Auma, Kony claims to be a spirit medium, receiving divine messages from the spirits of the dead. Kony is also reported to staunchly support the Ten Commandments, although the

actions of the LRA show he does not strictly adhere to them. Kony has also periodically claimed to be Jesus Christ reincarnated.

The Lord's Resistance Army is known to commit acts of brutal violence. Reports from those who have escaped from the LRA tell of villages being raided during the night, and children being kidnapped and inducted into the LRA. Often these children are sent back to the villages to kill their own parents so that if they escape, they have no one to return home to. According to the UN, over 25,000 children have been abducted and forced to fight against the Uganda People's Defense Force (formerly the National Resistance Army), or raid villages kidnapping other children. The boys are forced to fight, the girls are used as sex slaves; Joseph Kony himself reportedly has over 60 concubines, taking his pick of the young girls abducted from the villages. The children are told that if they run away, the Ugandan army will poison them, and failed escapes usually end with the beating and execution of the children at the hands of LRA commanders. It should be noted that the LRA is not alone in enlisting children. The Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF), the government's army, has been known to recruit children as young as twelve to fight the LRA.

The LRA is composed almost eighty percent of child soldiers and the bulk of the LRA forces, and essentially all of the children, are forced to fight with machetes, knives, and clubs. In fact, the UN estimates that the LRA only has modern weapons (i.e. guns) to equip 200 soldiers. The LRA acquires most of its resources from pillaging the villages of northern Uganda, which brings a sense of insecurity to the population. During the last few years over 1.6 million people were driven into IDP camps from fear of the LRA, but as peace talks have carried on, around 300,000 have returned to their villages. Although the risk of raids have not disappeared, most people living in the north are resigned to the situation and would rather risk living in their villages than spend more time in the camps, where health conditions are poor and children are still a risk when night falls.

The LRA does not acquire resources only by stealing them. Their main source of external funds is Southern Sudan. After peace talks collapsed in 1994, South Sudan began funding the LRA, hoping that increased support would allow the LRA to leave South Sudan and return to Uganda. In response, the Ugandan government began siphoning funds to the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army), a rebel group active in South Sudan. After the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center, the United States began to support the UPDF and President Museveni.

With this large increase in funding and military support, the north of Uganda has seen a slide towards a war economy and an even larger weapons trade. This has further exacerbated the plight of the people in northern Uganda, and has reduced the motivation



Children "play" in an IDP camp in northern Uganda.

for Museveni to seek a peace deal with the LRA (due to overwhelming military superiority), but has failed to put a stop to the actions of the LRA.

In 2005 the International Criminal Courts at The Hague indicted Kony and four of his lieutenants for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Although the UPDF claims to have killed one of these lieutenants in August of 2006, the rest, including Kony, remain at large. Kony has told reporters in the past that he would refuse to stand trial at the ICC because he had done nothing wrong. The indictments have also put a strain on peace talks taking place in Juba, South Sudan, which Kony has refused to attend, reportedly for fears of being apprehended. Many have called for the charges to be dropped, hoping that this move may benefit the peace talks, but the International community has largely ignored these calls. With no incentives for Kony to end the war and sign a peace agreement, most people in northern Uganda agree that rapid progress is unlikely.

Since peace talks resumed in the summer of 2006, a certain amount of stability has returned to the region, but little has been accomplished. Most recently the LRA has refused to continue negotiating with Museveni's government in South Sudan, where the talks have been held, asking for the process to be moved to Kenya or South Africa, who are seen as more neutral. The ongoing jockeying by both parties gives little hope to those living in north Uganda who wish to finally see a resolution to the conflict, and although fighting has declined, the lack of an agreement between the government and the LRA has left a cloud of uncertainty hanging over the people.