

Notes for Ecumenical Advocacy with EU on Northern Uganda

Background

The peace process in Northern and North Eastern Uganda is now at an all time low. The failure by the leadership of Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M) and the Government of Uganda (GoU) to sign the Final Peace Agreement (FPA) on 29th November 2008 considerably damaged the integrity and credibility of the leadership of the LRA/M; the leadership of the Government of Uganda; as well as the leadership of the Peace delegations of the LRA/M and the Government of Uganda. In short, that failure was a monumental anti-climax in the peace process in the Great Lakes region.

The 'integrity and credibility deficit' being experienced at practical and symbolic levels is probably the greatest obstacle to the political level peace process at the moment; it is being felt rather than being seen. The level of integrity and credibility of key parties has whittled, virtually in equal measure, to the level of creativity and imagination in approaching the current impasse. The popular logic, it appears, is that military action is justifiable since the Juba 'mediation has ended'.

The subsequent military assault by the tripartite military forces of Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Southern Sudan on the LRA/M bases in Garamba forests have further squandered the chances for peace that were in our threshold only a few weeks ago. The violent conflict is now mutating, by the hour, into deeper destruction of civilians in Congo, Uganda, Southern Sudan and the Central African Republic.

The alleged continuing attacks by the LRA/M on the civilian population in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's Oriental Province are worsening the humanitarian situation in the country. According to UNHCR's team in the regional center of Dungen, the death toll in the province bordering Uganda and South Sudan is now estimated at 537 people. Another 408 people have been kidnapped by the LRA/M since the outbreak of violence in September last year, including victims abducted in attacks. Rough estimates of the number of forcibly displaced persons in this part of the Democratic Republic of Congo have now surpassed 104,000. That notwithstanding, the LRA/M spokes person has attributed the above atrocities to other emerging militia groups in the volatile region.

Negotiations between the two parties, the LRA/M and the Government of Uganda closed with the Final Peace Agreement (FPA). However, dialogue between the two parties should be facilitated so that they reengage on the contentious issues in the FPA.

Recommendations

To the European Union:

The European Union should undertake advocacy at the multilateral level, with the UN Security Council and the AU Peace and Security Council, and with the two parties, the LRA/M and the Government of Uganda on the following:

- That the military option is not realistic in ending the Northern Uganda conflict. There is a need for an immediate ceasefire and cessation of hostilities by the

- tripartite armed forces of Democratic Republic of Congo, Southern Sudan and Uganda and the LRA/M;
- After the cessation of hostilities there is need for designation of a new assembly point for LRA/M combatants and the provision of soldiers and military observers from countries not involved in the current military offensive on the LRA/M. These could be drawn from the Republic of South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and Mozambique. Their mandate would be to assure security to LRA/M combatants and allow for the two parties to sign the FPA. The mandate could later be expanded to oversee the Demobilisation, Disarmament, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programme for LRA/M combatants from the Sudan and those from Uganda;
 - The UN Security Council should review the mandate of the UN Special Envoy for the LRA affected areas, Joachim Chissano, for him to assume a more visible and facilitative role (including mediation¹) to the peace process; and
 - The UN Special Envoy for the LRA affected areas, Joachim Chissano, should facilitate dialogue between the LRA/M and the Government of Uganda to deal with the weaknesses in the FPA and develop clear benchmarks and time frame as these are lacking. This dialogue should be moved to a neutral country such as Tanzania.

The EU should also undertake the following advocacy and demands with the two parties:

To the Government of Uganda:

- To be sincere in its commitment to the FPA and set clear time lines on how to handle the alternative to the ICC indictments of LRA/M top leadership. The government could prepare its submission to the UN Security Council on the formation of a special division of the High Court to try the LRA/M leadership and commit to present it to the UN Security Council immediately after the signing of the FPA; and
- Commit resources and undertake programmes that address the legitimate grievances and feeling of marginalisation of Northern Uganda communities.

To The Lord's Resistance Army/Movement (LRA/M):

To reclaim credibility and seize the initiative, the LRA/M could enhance and demonstrate their commitment to peace by:

- Halting, with immediate effect, all attacks on innocent and unarmed civilians, abduction of girls and boys, raping of girls and women and destruction of property of unarmed populations;
- Declare a unilateral ceasefire and, on which grounds, ask the governments of Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan to also declare an immediate ceasefire;
- Release of all children under the age of 16 and all lactating women to UNICEF and other relevant agencies;

¹ This is out of the contention that the current mediator, Dr. Riek Machar, has been compromised.

- General Joseph Kony should directly communicate to the UN Special Envoy for the LRA affected areas, Joachim Chissano, the day when the LRA/M shall sign the Final Peace Agreement (FPA); and
- The leader of the LRA/M Peace delegation should, at the earliest opportunity, meet with UN Special Envoy for the LRA affected areas, Joachim Chissano, to make the offers/options for peace as seen by the LRA/M. This can also serve as a forum for opening possibilities for dialogue with other parties and stakeholders.