

The LRA conflict in Uganda: A brief overview



The 20-year-old war in northern Uganda is a complex conflict fueled not only by the Lord's Resistance Army's war against the government and terror against the Acholi tribe, but also by the grievances of Ugandans in the North against the existing government from which many feel excluded.

The war arose out of colonial politics in which British authorities divided and pitted various groups against each other, a dynamic that has been perpetuated by post-independence politics. The British branded Northerners as the fighters, Westerners were servants, and Southerners as leaders in business and politics, creating a North-South



Consy Aloyo, age 25, is another young woman being assisted by the Gulu Support Children's Organization. Abducted in 1991 when she was 12, she was freed in June 2005. In her 13 years of captivity she bore two children at the insistence of a commander, one of whom died.



(Above) Fr. Tony Wach, SJ is briefed by members of the Gulu Support Children's Organization in a barracks tent provided by the United Nations. The organization has repatriated almost a third of the 25,000 children who have been abducted in the last 19 years.

Agnes Ayet (center), age 25, with her 5-year-old daughter Fatuma Akamy (last name of the child's father and Lord's Resistance Army commander), one of two children she bore in captivity; her other child is 2. Janet Nonno (right), age 35, has six children and is the matron in charge of the GUSCO compound kitchen.



Fr. Tony Wach, SJ, gives an impassioned, 30-minute homily at the Sacred Heart School for Girls run by the Little Sisters of Mary Immaculate. The school is attended by 960 girls, 400 of whom are displaced, and live in refugee camps. Girls are most at risk in Uganda. If they get an education, they are more likely to become leaders and bread winners in their families.

divide and competition for power and prestige. Coupled with Uganda's cultural acceptance of violence as a political tool, conditions gave rise to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in 1986. When the current president, Yoweri Museveni, and his National Resistance Movement took power that year, they alienated people in the North, creating perceptual and actual incentives for rebellion. The insurgency has undergone four stages since, beginning with a more popular rebellion of former army officials and evolving into the current pseudo-spiritual war-lordism of Joseph Kony and his LRA. To date, the LRA is comprised predominantly of abducted children who are brainwashed by rebel commanders and forced to fight and kill. At least 30,000 children have been abducted to date – horrifying tactics that seriously eroded any support the rebellion enjoyed in the North. Alienated from the people, the LRA resorted to terrorizing civilians to maintain attention and challenge the government, but posed no serious threat to Museveni's regime. After peace talks collapsed in 1994, conflict dynamics changed for the worse.



Fr. Tony Wach, SJ visits with Archbishop John Baptist Odama in Gulu. They talked and explored the possibility of establishing a Jesuit presence in the Gulu Diocese.

When the Ugandan government supported the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in southern Sudan, the Sudan government responded by offering weapons and safe haven to LRA rebels. The West, particularly the United States, saw the war in Sudan as a front in its battle against Islamic fundamentalism and pumped significant amounts of aid to the SPLA through northern Uganda. New elements of a war economy and arms trafficking made peace more elusive. Since the early 1990s, President Museveni has been hailed as a new brand of African leader, but has been unable to deal successfully with the LRA. And while international pressure has brought the Ugandan government and the LRA to the negotiating table on numerous occasions, mistrust has foiled all attempts to date. Following Sept 11, Museveni became a U.S. ally in the war on terror. The U.S. then declared the LRA a terrorist group and increased military aid to Uganda. Recent battle victories against the LRA, coupled with a dramatic decrease in Sudan's assistance to the LRA with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan, makes the time ripe for a negotiated end to the conflict.



Children rest in the safety of Cathedral Parish. The parish is run by Comboni priests and nuns who have opened their grounds and buildings for the last seven years to the "night commuters" as they walk to Gulu nightly to avoid abduction.

Eliya, 10, is another child born in captivity. None of his relatives have been located so he rotated among the young mothers in the camp for care and must keep changing caretakers as they are repatriated and move out of camp.

