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THE HIDDEN WAR: THE FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

WAR IN ACHOLILAND AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS FOR PEACE AND
SECURITY IN UGANDA

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I. FOREWORD

As we proceeded to embark on this two-month research in Gulu district, we were struck by the news that the Lords Resistance Movement/Army (LRM/A) had resumed with new determination its attacks on the civilian population and abduction of children in the troubled region of Acholi. The renewed attack this time went beyond the state and community institutions to include religious institutions, especially the Catholic church, raising new fears that the rebel group was now broadening its strategy. The attacks on Opit and Pabbo camps were especially troubling. In Opit, the rebels attacked the Catholic church killing five people and torching some 50 huts¹. They had first attacked Opit trading centre and then moved on to the church buildings. This was the fifth time this year that they had attacked a Catholic Mission in Acholi. Pabbo camp, which is located only 40 kms from Gulu Municipality with a population of 50,000 people, was attacked six times in the month of June 2003 alone resulting in the death of 20 and abduction of 15 people². This exposed the failure of “Operation Iron Fist,” which was intended to eliminate the LRA bases in Sudan and destroy their determination to fight the war.

In a chilling message that came with blood, it was reported that Joseph Kony had sent instructions to his commanders inside northern Uganda to “kill all priests in northern Uganda.”³ The Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) spokesman, Major Shaban Bantariza, confirmed that the army had received similar reports from someone who had recently escaped from the LRA bases. At the same time, Fr. Julio Albanese, editor of *Misna*, reported that the rebels had stolen a lot of communication and other equipment from Catholic missions in the area, which they were now using in their communications. With this development, it became necessary for the Catholic church in particular, to enquire why it was being targeted despite the vanguard role it was playing in seeking peace between the rebels and the government. In response to these recent attacks, the Archbishop of the Catholic church in Gulu denied that there were any conflicts between the church and the rebel movement.

In another attack, the rebels ambushed and burnt down a Gateway Company bus in the Murchison Falls National Park, killing 14 and abducting 31 passengers.⁴ Several others were injured and rushed to Pakwach Hospital. In what appeared as a move to make their intentions ever clearer, the rebels seized a 17-year old youth, Godfrey Obita, working as a Local Defence Unit (LDU) soldier, cut off his ears, lips and fingers and stuffed the them

¹The *Monitor*, 31st May 2003.

²NGO Forum Gulu [2003]: A Brief Paper on the Situation in the North, presented by James Otto, Chairperson, Gulu District NGO Forum to Dr. Francis M. Deng, Representative of the UN Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons on Behalf of the CSOs Operating in Gulu District, Northern Uganda.

³The *Monitor*, 16th June 2003.

⁴Ibid.

into an envelope and put it in his pocket⁵. In the envelope too was a message addressed to the Acholi people warning them not to co-operate with the government. The message warned: “all those who form part of the militia faithful to the government military forces will receive the same treatment.”

Although the UPDF, as usual, rushed in its reinforcements to beef up security in the area, it was feared that the rebels had embarked on a new offensive, perhaps with renewed support from Sudan⁶. Fr Carlos Rodriguez of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of Gulu archdiocese revealed that the Sudanese government was still giving military support to the LRA, despite their claims to the contrary.⁷

The renewed attacks have in fact been going on since November 2002. The Catholic Church in Kitgum has 500 children who have sought refuge there⁸. Indeed, one of the recent developments in the conflict was the emergence of what is being called “night commuters.” These are hordes of children streaming every evening from surrounding villages into Gulu municipality and other urban areas to seek refuge from possible abductions from IDP camps by the LRA⁹. The government had failed to provide security to the communities in the IDP camps, thereby rendering the very purpose for which they were created meaningless. “Night commuting” also demonstrated that the UPDF had lost effective control over the villages in Acholi to the rebel forces. The only secure areas in the rural areas were UPDF army detachments. Furthermore, UPDF control over urban areas was quickly becoming contestable by rebel attacks. This was demonstrated by the closeness of the latest attacks to urban areas, including those in north-eastern Uganda

In the week that followed, the LRA began to infiltrate and make raids in the districts of Katakwi and Soroti where they distributed propaganda leaflets advocating their imminent defeat of the government¹⁰. The security issue was no longer restricted to Acholiland, as the government might have wished it to be. The LRA threat was becoming a nation-wide issue and people from other parts of Uganda began to fill uneasy, especially in the districts neighbouring Teso. Suddenly it began to register on the minds of many Ugandans that this security threat was not going away and that soon they might all become engulfed in it. *It became clear that the problem of the LRA has never been an Acholi affair, but national one.*

As soon as this became a reality, some voices were heard in a Parliamentary Committee calling for the hiring of mercenaries to fight Kony, while others called on the government to intensify peace efforts with the rebels. Indeed, on 22nd July 2003, the Minister for Northern Uganda in the Office of the Prime Minister, Grace

⁵The *Monitor*, 2nd June 2003.

⁶The *Monitor*, 31st May 2003.

⁷The *Monitor*, 3rd June, 2003.

⁸*Ibid.*

⁹The *East African* June 2-8, 2003.

¹⁰The *New Vision*, June 17th, 2003.

Akello, called a one-day “Dialogue” to discuss conflict management and resolution in Northern Uganda. In the opening address, the minister referred to the conflict in Acholi as no longer being an Acholi affair, but a national one. Yet, any hopes that this might be the beginning of a new government initiative to find peace were soon dashed when the President addressed the one-day “Dialogue” on the conflict (see Appendix I for notes of the speech).¹¹ He announced that he was going back to the north to continue fighting Kony.

In West Nile in the district of Adjumani, the LRA attacked a Catholic orphanage from where they abducted a number of children, including some from the Sudan¹². The UPDF response came well after the rebels had accomplished their mission and this left many to question their capability and capacity to end this rebellion militarily. The government complaint that the Sudanese government had resumed supplying weapons to the LRA was not surprising in view of the history of their involvement in the Sudan conflict in support of the SPLM/A. This suggested that, outside an internal settlement, a solution to the conflict in the region would have to attract an international involvement, as indeed many of the local actors on the ground such as the religious leaders now began to demand¹³. It became increasingly evident that the war in Acholi was closely linked to the conflict in Southern Sudan, and that the US peace initiative between the SPLM/A and the government of Sudan would have to be extended to the LRA and the government of Uganda. Short of this the wars in both countries would rage on.

These developments suggest that the situation of the conflict in Acholiland has reached a point of no return unless some very serious intervention is made from the international community. Indeed, in a recent press statement by the US delegation to Uganda, the US government pledged itself towards the alleviation of humanitarian suffering and support for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.¹⁴ The statement added that the “initial steps” in this direction “could include agreement on a third party to promote dialogue and humanitarian access to the affected populations.” But such third party involvement could only bear fruit if the on-going peace initiatives by the religious and traditional leaders were encouraged. The President’s speech on 22nd July 2003 dashed the hope for a co-operative approach in the search for peace¹⁵.

There has also been concern that the President’s own Presidential Peace Team is not getting sufficient support and facilitation to pursue the peace effort. In the month of August 2003, as we finished writing this report, the president announced that he was “returning” to the north to “finish” the war. These claims and promises had been made several times before, but the war has not been

¹¹ *The New Vision*, July 23rd 2003.

¹² *The Monitor*, 19th June 2003.

¹³ *The Monitor*, June 23, 2003.

¹⁴ *The East African* of June 2-6, 2003.

¹⁵ The Archbishop of Gulu replied to the president’s criticisms of the religious leaders in a statement the following day. See *The Monitor*, 24th July 2003.

finished. Indeed, it appeared as if the LRA extension of the war in the east of the country signalled a new kind of war in which new forces were becoming visible.

According to Charles Onyango-Obbo's column "Ear to the Ground,"¹⁶ the war in Katakwi and Soroti had a local component of the commanders unlike the earlier rebellion of the Uganda Peoples Army (UPA) led by Peter Otai, a former minister in the Obote II government. Obbo revealed that the infamous LRA's Brig. Charles Tabuley was not an Acholi as had been alleged by the government, but an Atesot by the name Okiring¹⁷ from Katakwi, and this explained why the war had moved from the north to the east of the country. The "Ear to the Ground" column also revealed that the extension of the war front to the east had introduced "secondary" actors such as, James Opoka, the former national organiser of Kiiza Besigye, a candidate in the 2001 Presidential elections. Although reported killed by the government, Opoka was reported to be "alive and well." According to the report, these new actors had joined the rebellion, including 300 well-trained men from other rebel groups. This tended to suggest that a new kind of war was emerging: a war with a new force called the Peoples Redemption Army (PRA) in the west, the LRA in the north and the UPA in the east. With this emerging scenario, Onyango-Obbo concluded, "If this were true, the tragedy for Uganda then would be that the war in the north is not about to end. It might just have begun¹⁸." Indeed, this fear has been reinforced by the recent announcement by the UPDF that the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) was re-emerging and was preparing to attack the country from the Ituri province of the DRC¹⁹.

This demonstrates that the war in Acholi is not an Acholi war, but a war that was connected with other political dimensions in the country that need to be addressed comprehensively through a national conference and an internationally mediated settlement. The objective of the research was to strengthen civil society organisations to engage in advocacy strategy aimed at getting all the parties to a dialogue with a view to ending the war and bringing about national reconciliation.

¹⁶ *The Monitor*, August 27, 2003.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ *Ibid*:

¹⁹ *The Monitor*, September 30th, 2003.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 Introduction

The conflict in northern Uganda began on August 20, 1986 and has now gone on for nearly eighteen years without any end in sight. Whereas at first part of a wider range of guerrilla activities in the eastern and north-western parts of the country, in Acholiland it has continued unabated. It has persisted and has assumed regional and global dimension across the Sudan border and beyond. Although in this period other conflicts have sprung up, these have been reduced in intensity.²⁰ The conflict in Acholiland has instead maintained momentum and has now again spread to the east of the country, where the LRA is beginning to establish a firm base. Indeed there are new fears that what at first appeared to be an Acholi war is now assuming a Uganda-wide dimension. Old rebel groups and new ones are coalescing their forces with greater impetus. This development, if they it is true spells an unstable future for Uganda and may even threaten the peace efforts now being brokered by the US government between the Sudan government and the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Indeed, there are new fears that the US may give more military assistance to the Uganda government to continue the war for another two years on the ground that it is a struggle “against terrorism.” If this is true, such a move is oblivious of the fact that this war has wider dimensions that go beyond its conception as “terrorism.”

2.2 Background

This research was undertaken as part of a wider consultation and collaboration between international Non-Governmental Organisations and their Ugandan counterparts. It is part of earlier initiatives made in Canada by Lloyd Axworthy, former Canadian Foreign Minister, and now Chief Executive Officer of the Liu Institute for the Study of Global Issues, to get Canada involved in some kind of response to the war in northern Uganda. Later Professor Stephen Owen, QC, the Lam Professor of Law and Public Policy and Director of the Institute for Dispute Resolution at the University of Victoria, Canada, made a trip to Uganda in order to carry out an assessment of the situation. Professor Owen met national, district, and local government officials as well as local and international humanitarian, peace building, and human rights organisations, legal and health professionals, clan elders and chiefs, and religious leaders to form an assessment of the situation.

Later HRW came to Uganda and carried out a quick preliminary investigation as a basis for an international advocacy on the issue of abducted children in the war-torn region. This quick intervention resulted in two reports. The

²⁰ Reference is made here to the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) in Kasese and Bundibugyo districts.

first report²¹ was released in March 2003 and was used to undertake advocacy work in international organisations to advance the idea of the need for a “Special Envoy” to conduct “shuttle diplomacy” between the government of Uganda and the LRA to release abducted children. The second report²² made a number of calls to the LRA to stop the abduction of children and ensure and immediate release of those already abducted. It also called upon the Uganda government to end the impunity of human rights violations by its security organs. The report also called for the involvement of the international community in the conflict through the United Nations.

This report is a result of the continuing effort aimed at contributing to the amelioration of the suffering of the people of Acholi, especially the abducted children and internally displaced people (IDP) living in camps. The Liu Institute and the Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPPEC), Makerere University, sponsored the research to gather more views in order to enable more advocacy work directed at ending the war and strengthening civil society interventions. The launching of the HRW report²³ in mid-July 2003 in Kampala added interest to the work of this research and drew attention to it. What is presented in this report therefore is the result of a three-months research undertaken towards achieving these objectives.

2.3 Causes and Complicating Factors to the Conflict in Acholi

The impetus behind this report is the renewed awareness that the conflict in northern Uganda cannot be ended unless its underlying causes are addressed. In exploring this side of the research, the report has revealed the deeply embedded divisions brought about by the colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’ and the consequent resort to the politicisation of ethnicity by the Ugandan political elite as the channel through which they can acquire and maintain political power in the country. Evidence from historical sources and the statements of the different actors in the post-colonial period point to this factor as being behind the break out of the war in the “Luwero Triangle.”

The report reverses the explanations that have hitherto been given to the effect that the war in Acholi was an extension of the war in the “Luwero Triangle” because of the atrocities that had been committed there by the Acholi soldiers. It postulates rather that the atrocities committed in the “Luwero Triangle” were the consequence of an ethnic-oriented war that was initiated by the NRM/A in “Luwero Triangle” against the ‘northerners.’ This was because of the belief by the NRM/A leadership that Uganda’s politics had since independence been ‘dominated’ by the ‘northerners’ in the country as a result of their domination of the armed forces. According to this leadership therefore, this ‘domination’ by the ‘northerners’ was no

²¹ Uganda: *Stolen Children: Abduction and Recruitment in Northern Uganda*, Vol. 15, No, 7 (A), March 2003.

²² Uganda: *Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda*, July 2003, Human Rights Watch, New York, Liu Institute, Vancouver, Canada, Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPPEC), Kampala, Uganda and Human Rights Focus, Gulu, Uganda.

²³ Ibid.

longer acceptable and had to end. This suggested that until that objective of removing the 'northerners' from power had been achieved and all threats from them removed the war in the north had to continue. This historical statement and hypothesis seems to be backed by the evidence presented and verified in this research.

The report further reveals that the ethnicisation of politics has in fact obscured the regional and global dimensions of the conflict in Uganda. Apart from the internally complicating factors, the report shows the existence of ample evidence that the support to rebel movements inside Uganda and Sudan by the governments of these two countries has exacerbated the conflict. This has also been part of the US and British policy in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes regions. The US support to Uganda in fighting the then Islamic fundamentalist regime in Sudan and Uganda's support to the SPLM/A is what motivated the Sudan government to give military assistance to the LRA.

The US also financially supported "Operation Iron Fist" inside Sudan, but this further complicated rather than eased the conflict within Uganda. The report also reveals that the events of 9/11 have added another dimension to the Acholi conflict in that the US administration has designated the LRA a "foreign terrorist organisation." This has had a rather queer implication that the bulk of the LRA composed of abducted children (estimated at over 80%) are now regarded as international terrorists! The report points out also that the war in Acholi has undergone so much transformation that the LRA cannot be referred to as 'remnants' of old armies. It shows that there was a transformation in the conflict from the UPDA "war of the generals" to a peasant rebellion led by Alice Auma "Lakwena." Alice Auma is shown to have tried to cure the ills of the fighting forces in the "Luwero Triangle" and those of the UPDA by resorting to spiritual means. Her resort to metaphysical interpretations of the conflict was the result of the uncertainty that prevailed in the country at the time. According to the report therefore, Alice Auma can be a relevant factor in bringing an end to the conflict and contributing to the post-war reconciliation process. She is viewed as the only Ugandan who can "ideologically" engage Joseph Kony since the latter claims to have inherited the spirit of "Lakwena" from her.

The report looks at the LRA in a new light and gives evidence to show that Kony's war was infected by elements from various sources, including Islamic spiritual adaptations on top of the Christian and traditional elements. He claims to have been traditionally 'blessed' to fight the war and yet wages that war against those traditions. He also claims to have inherited Auma's "Lakwena" spirit but at the same time commits crimes against the people, which Alice Auma's movement did not do. More still, he claims to be fighting to 'restore' the Ten Commandments of God yet his movement attacks the churches and threatens to kill "all priests." These contradictions may explain why the LRA has not enjoyed the same enthusiastic support among the Acholi peasants that they gave to Alice Auma 'Lakwena' and her Holy Spirit Movement and Mobile Forces. Because the LRA did not receive this enthusiastic support, it became easier for the government to mobilise the youth in

the “Bow and Arrow” groups to pursue his forces. As a result of the “Bow and Arrow” attacks, the LRA began to resort to committing atrocities against the people and abducting children into forced recruitment and forced “marriages.” These activities have brought great suffering to the people of Acholi.

These transformations and other complicating factors point to the increasing complexity of the conflict in Acholiland. These include economic factors, social and cultural factors, political factors, metaphysics, external factors, arms trafficking as well as the post-9/11 anti-terrorism global policies.

The economic factor underlines the underlying interests of top military commanders of the UPDF and the LRA to continue the war from which they make substantial financial and material gain. The persistence of “ghost soldiers” on the payroll of the UPDF partly explains why the war has tended to continue. The war in Acholiland has become a big “gravy train” from which the top military commanders are fleecing the country of its resources. It has become an income-generating project for some. The determination to prolong the war for economic reasons also provides another insight into the continuance of the “no party” political system under the NRM.

Governance under NRM is tailored on the determination by the government to maintain power *at any cost*. This can be gleaned from the constitutional manipulations the NRM has been engaging in since it took power in 1986. The manipulation has turned normal politics of individuals into “state politics” in which the state has laid out the political agenda for individuals in the “personal merit” approach, which undermines freedom of association. The NRM political organisation also became state organisation, which restricted other legitimate forces to play their role in running the country²⁴. Thus the issue of monopoly of governance became embedded with the prospect of a never-ending war. The two are intractably linked. Hence any effort directed at the democratisation of governance in Uganda must include the ending of the Acholi war as part of the process. There is thus a need for a national conference.

2.4 The Role of Sudan and the United States

The report argues that the involvement of the government of Sudan through the provision of military support to the LRA is one of the most devastating and complicating factors to the conflict. The Sudan government renders this support on a “tit for tat” basis since it also accuses the government of Uganda of giving similar assistance to the SPLM/A. The NRM government and the SPLM/A failed to unite their respective ethnic groups with the result that some have been mobilised to fight the others for very divisive reasons. In fact, ethnicity obscures the global geo-strategic interests of different kinds of players in the conflict. Ethnicity and neo-

²⁴ Human Rights Watch [1999]: *UGANDA: Hostile to Democracy: The Movement System and Political Repression in Uganda*, New York.

tribalism provide a good local political explanatory power to certain local ethnic constituencies about the conflict, but it does not solve anything.

The US has been another actor in this conflict. It has worked closely with the Uganda government against some Islamic fundamentalist forces in the Sudan. It also supports the SPLM/A as a liberation movement, while financing the war against the LRA, which it has categorised as a terrorist organisation. It is continuing to finance the Uganda government to pursue the war against the LRA, while at the same time talking about the need for peaceful resolution of the conflict. It is therefore using the “divide and rule” strategy to global and ethnic conflicts. Accordingly, abducted children who constitute over 80 per cent of the LRA forces are now called “terrorists” while those whose duty is to protect citizens from abduction are regarded as friends of the US. The US should be urged to stop pursuing these contradictory policies and instead pursue a consistent policy aimed at resolving conflicts peacefully within the framework of the United Nations and regional mechanisms.

2.5 Reconciliation

The report proposes a way forward by insisting on cultivation of a spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness by all parties concerned. It points out that the people of Acholi do acknowledge the suffering the LRA and the government have imposed on them, but they insist that despite the suffering, they would like to forgive Kony and the other rebels for these actions. They do this in the full knowledge that the overwhelming majority of the rebels in the LRA ranks are abducted children who have been forced into the war. They have already demonstrated this willingness to forget and pardon by accepting the returnees back into the communities under the amnesty law. They now insist that this amnesty be broadened to lead to the ending of the war on the basis of reconciliation.

The people in Acholi also insist that for the war to come to an end there must be an apology from the NRA/UPDF for having unleashed the war on them in 1986 when they were targeted on ethnic grounds, leading to untold loss of lives and property. The people were attacked, the women raped and their cattle robbed by both the NRA and the Karamojong, whom the people of Acholi believe, were collaborating with the government forces. It was these initial attacks that forced some of the young people such as Alice Auma and Joseph Kony to spontaneously get involved in rebellion to defend their communities. The people have since been caught in this spiral of conflict and they demand that reconciliation on the basis of acceptance of responsibility and payment of compensation be accepted. Such reconciliation would go a long way in reuniting the people and healing the wounds that have been opened up in the body politic of the country since the war began.

As already indicated the Acholi war is interlinked with the issue of national governance. The report argues that if this war is to end, steps must be taken to hold a national conference, which should include all the stakeholders in the country. This conference should discuss the democratisation process as part and parcel of the need to end the rebellion. It should also help the country to develop a consensus on how

to deal with a myriad burning issues facing the country, not only about the constitution, but also about growing poverty, corruption that exists in high places, abuse of power, nepotism and political culture. This last issue is crucial because there is a growing fear that Uganda is again falling back into the political culture of a tyrannical one-person rule, which Ugandans thought had ended with the Amin era. The report therefore suggests a four-pronged comprehensive recommendation for ending the war.

2.6. Recommendations

This report argues that because of the foregoing intricate factors present in the conflict in northern Uganda, a comprehensive approach to ending the war is necessary. This approach requires that several measures be simultaneously invoked so that they all build up into a single process that is self-reinforcing.

2.6.1 Involvement of the international community

Under this approach, the following measures are recommended:

- The parties should be prevailed upon to agree on cessation of the fighting through a ceasefire;
- A third party mediator should be agreed upon to act as a go-between the parties to initiate the talks;
- A neutral-country should be agreed upon at which talks can take place with international observers;
- A peace keeping force should be formed by the UN Security Council with the African Union and the East African Community to stand between the opposing forces to ensure that hostilities do not occur during the peace talks;
- A safe zone for the LRA and a peace-keeping force between the forces of the conflicting parties should be created so that certain mediatory and reconciliatory contacts with the rebels can be undertaken by the local actors such as the traditional and religious leaders who could have influence on the situation;
- The peace agreement that is reached should be fully enforced by providing all the necessary supports;
- Resettlement and rehabilitation of the IDP and abducted children as well as former LRA fighters back into their communities should be a joint effort.

2.6.2 Holding of the national conference

The following measures are recommended:

- The political parties and other stakeholders should prepare for the conference since the issue of governance is intractably linked to that of the conflict;

- The conference is also necessary as another venue where the political demands of the LRA and other armed groups are discussed and resolved. These cannot be handled at the peace negotiation talks, hence the need for comprehensive approach
- Since the NRM has agreed to “opening up of the political space” and turning itself into a political “organisation” instead of a “system,” the conference would be a good forum for charting a road-map towards this process of liberalising and democratising the political system to the satisfaction of all the parties;
- A consensus on constitutional reforms should be developed to remove lingering concerns about the emergence of a political culture of a one-person rule;
- The conference should have high up on its agenda the reconciliation of all parties, including acceptance of responsibility for past and present wrongdoing in an atmosphere of forgiveness. An agreed programme of rituals and religious prayers throughout the country, including the affected communities should be worked out and agreed as part of the process.

2.6.3 Embarking on resettlement and socio-economic rehabilitation

- Resettlement of the IDPs from the camps should be facilitated and embarked on as soon as the ceasefire is agreed. This is to ensure that any opportunity that is opened up for peace is seized upon for the community to go back to their socio-cultural environment instead of continuing to strengthen the existing IDP structures;
- As talks begin, the IDPs, returning abductees and former LRA soldiers should find anew life in their villages, which they abandoned due to insecurity;
- The Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) is preferred as a good starting point in carrying out this work because within it there are in-built reconciliation provisions that can assist communities to return to normal life and restore the families and communities in their spiritual and cultural environments;
- The Security Production Programme (SPP), whose official status is not clear and which is already being implemented, should be abandoned and instead the money allocated to it should be channelled through the NUSAF and such other appropriate programmes for social and economic rehabilitation of Acholi;
- These programmes should also address the issue of compensation, which would strengthen reconciliation at both national and local levels;
- The constitutional provisions with regard to land should be respected and no attempt should be made to alienate it without the consent of the Acholi people.

2.6.4 Embarking on community reconciliation processes

- Reconciliation at a national level will not cure the trauma suffered by the communities unless this is combined with local reconciliation processes between individuals, families, clans, religions and the communities at large;
- The treatment of trauma is not an individual act of counselling. It is a process through which the affected individuals are readmitted within their nuclear and extended families for reunification and healing, hence any such community reconciliation must take this into account;
- Community reconciliation should support the transition of communities from a situation of conflict to that of sustainable peace and minimise the recurrence of conflict by healing local wounds;
- Local reconciliation efforts should identify innovative traditional and non-traditional approaches to conflict resolution, testing out community-driven approaches to conflict prevention as well as targeting cultural, elected, and religious leaders to review and strengthen the processes of community reconciliation;
- Civil society organisations must move quickly to assist the communities to resettle, reconcile, and engage in long-term rehabilitation and development programmes.

2.6.5 Further research

The process of reconciliation in Acholiland will require a thorough understanding of what has happened for the society to pull itself together and take stock of the new situation. This is a learning process through self-enquiry, self-understanding and self-empowerment. We therefore recommend that a research programme be undertaken on the Acholi traditional reconciliation processes and the impact of the conflict on them. The programme should, among other issues, focus on the following areas of concern:

- Restorative justice in Acholi and global contexts;
- The changes in cultural behaviour and patterns, especially the position of women, the youth and the elderly;
- Acholi traditional religion and its links to Acholi traditional beliefs and cultures, and their relationships with the Christian and Islamic religions;
- The rebel movement and its basis as well as its impact on the social-psychological health of the young people of the region;
- Post-conflict management and reconstruction;
- The environment, land, and natural resource control, use and management;
- Human security and sustainable development.

To carry out such research, it is further recommended that an **Institute of Justice, Reconciliation and Human Security** be established in Gulu by the Civil Society Organisations (CBOs) to undertake such research activities. The Institute's mandate

should include the programming and sustaining of such community-based participatory action research, knowledge creation and learning processes, including developing a curriculum and reading/educational materials for teaching at all levels. Such an Institute should supplement the activities of any such institution that have been set up in the sub-region and should not be seen as duplicating the efforts.

III. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

This research is the result of earlier initiatives by Lloyd Axworthy, former Canadian Foreign Minister, and now Chief Executive Officer of the Liu Institute for the Study of Global Issues, to get Canada involved in some kind of response to the war in northern Uganda. This initiative led Professor Stephen Owen, QC who undertook a trip to Uganda between June 19th to July 1st and again on July 6th to July 8th 2000 in order to carry out an assessment mission. The objective of this mission was to carry out a “document review” and interviews with national, district, and local government officials as well as local and international humanitarian, peace building, and human rights organisations, legal and health professionals, clan elders and chiefs, and religious leaders.

The focus of the assessment was on the children affected by war in northern Uganda. Professor Owen in his report recommended that Canada should enhance the capacity of the Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief-Uganda (CPAR) in order to develop and lead a landmine action and awareness programme in Acholiland. Secondly, he recommended that a short-term (12-18 months) planning project to be administered by CPAR-Uganda be instituted to fully develop a mandate, support networks, work plan and a budget for an Acholi Peace and Research Centre. And this was to be followed by a long-term support (3-5 years) programme to establish and implement the Centre, which in his view should be indigenous, autonomous, and inclusive. The third recommendation was that Canada should immediately offer to provide an Observer Mission to oversee and report publicly on the implementation and administration of the Amnesty Act for the return of abducted and other war affected children.²⁵

Professor Owen also emphasized Canada’s role in the field of human security in foreign policy and the need for her to “add value” to the intervention efforts. He pointed out that Canada had a rich experience to contribute to human security and a deeper interest in learning from research into the application of traditional conflict resolution and reconciliation practices. In his own words: “Peace in northern Uganda will be achieved by rekindling Acholi traditional practices (*Mato Oput*), and this process is directly relevant to Canada’s search for justice and self-determination of First Nation Peoples²⁶. He advocated multi-sectoral governance and shared decision-making in developing and implanting health, social services, environmental and resource management policies, which had become common place in many countries. This involved “new diplomacy” of policy networks with non-state actors, which has led to such initiatives as the landmine treaty, the international criminal court and NAFTA parallel agreements on environmental and labour cooperation. He therefore called for “staged programming” for Canadian involvement in the implementation of these ideas.

²⁵ Stephen Owen [2000]: War Affected Children in Northern Uganda: Assessment of Canadian Programming Opportunities, Overview and Recommendations, Report, July 2000.

²⁶ Ibid: p. 4.

Following this assessment, Lloyd Axworthy paid a visit to Northern Uganda and spent a week in Gulu to establish a basis for such an involvement. The need for such an involvement arose out of Canada's foreign policy experience, which put emphasis on human security. Canada looked at itself as an honest broker and an impartial intervener in this respect because of its non-colonial record and its decades of diplomatic, peacekeeping, observer, convenor, and development advocate in African countries. Indeed this interest of Lloyd Axworthy was revealed when, in a follow-up to the Nairobi Agreement between the governments of Sudan and Uganda, he convened an international conference in Winnipeg on children affected by armed conflict. At the end of this conference a Joint Communiqué was issued and signed by the Foreign Ministers of Canada, Sudan and Uganda as well as the Ambassador of Egypt committing their governments to observe the provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child.

The Liu Institute got involved at this stage as well by sending a mission called the Uganda-Liu Centre for Human Security Initiative in February 2002²⁷. Geoffrey Oyat, Programme Coordinator, Protection of Children Affected by Armed Conflict and Disasters Save the Children based in Kampala, led this mission. Fabius Okumu-Alya, Research Associate, HURIPPEC and Patricia Spittal, Research Associate, Liu Centre for the Study of Global Issues, University of British Columbia, Canada, once again assisted this mission. This mission focused on obtaining a detailed overview of all aspects of the on-going crisis in Northern Uganda, including that of the plight of children abducted by the LRA, as well as the geopolitical dimensions of the peace building process and the impact of the presence of unmappped antipersonnel mines in the region.

The Liu Mission explored how the outcomes of the Winnipeg International Conference could be followed up in Uganda. It also explored the possibility of implementing the recommendations of the Owen Report, among other objectives. The overview was intended to further the recommendations made in that report, which highlighted the fact that the Canadian government intervention "may be urgently required, especially given the events of the post-9/11 construction of abducted children-turned-soldiers as terrorists." In its conclusions, the Liu Mission recommended that immediate action be undertaken by government, with Canadian intervention, to provide an observer/peacekeeping role in an international rescue mission of the children. Secondly, the Mission recommended that in the context of the then government objective of "decongesting" the IDP camps, action be taken to include awareness and sensitisation in a participatory mapping process as well as civilian training and orthopaedic support for those who were disabled in the "decongestion" process.

During the period that followed, contact was established between the Liu Centre, Human Rights Watch and

²⁷ Report of the Uganda-Liu Centre Human Security Initiative Assessment Mission to Northern Uganda, February 2002.

HURIPEC to further this initiative and process. Lloyd Axworthy was again the key person in these contacts. A project proposal was made by HURIPEC seeking funding from Macarthur Foundation for the purposes of monitoring, research and advocacy on the conflict in northern Uganda. This proposal created a collaborative relationship between the Liu Centre, Human Rights Watch and HURIPEC. It was pointed out in the introduction to this proposal that “the main partners in this project would conduct research on the nature of the conflict, reconciliation possibilities, situation in the IDP camps, child abduction, demobilisation of rebels and their resettlement and integration.” In addition, it was pointed out, that the research would be used “to engage in advocacy with Ugandan and international authorities, publicize abuses to the international community and strengthen the ability of local non-governmental organisations on the ground to monitor and decry abuses against civilians.

In the month of January 2003, HURIPEC instituted a coalition of local NGOs to participate in defining the way forward for the project. A series of stakeholder meetings were held, which were attended by the Liu Institute and HRW in February 2003. In these meetings, it was agreed that HRW would undertake an immediate Mission to Acholi to undertake its research component for the purposes of compiling its own report to be released dealing with the issues stipulated above. The launch of this report was expected to put forward an up-to-date investigative research on the situation in northern Uganda. This report entitled: *The Stolen Children*²⁸ was released in March and was used to undertake some advocacy work in international organisations to advance the idea of the need for a “Special Envoy” to conduct “shuttle diplomacy” between the governments of Sudan, Uganda and the LRA in order to release the abducted children.

It is understood that not much response emerged out of this effort. Many African representatives at the Commission in Geneva did not at this moment support the proposal. There is no indication what the UN Secretary General’s response was. But the Human Rights Watch did not give up the fight. They continued with the compilation of the full-report,²⁹ which was released and launched in Kampala by the Acting Chairman of the Uganda Human Rights Commission, Omara-Aliro. This report, which is more comprehensive, adds to these earlier efforts and it is hoped that it will generate an interest aimed at involving the international community to act to bring about a cessation of the war.

This research was carried out by a team of researchers led by Professor Dani Wadada Nabudere, Executive Director of Afrika Study Centre and Principal Investigator of the research. James Otto and Martin Komakech of the Human Rights Focus (HURIFO), Gulu, assisted him as co-investigators. The research team also

²⁸ Uganda: *Stolen Children: Abduction and Recruitment in Northern Uganda*, Vol. 15, No, 7 (A), March 2003.

²⁹ Uganda: *Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda*, Human Rights Watch, New York; Liu Institute for Global Action, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; Human Rights and Peace Centre (HURIPEC), Makerere University, Kampala & Human Rights Focus-HURIFO, Vol. 15 No. 12 (A) July 2002.

included Leander Komakech, Abbas Wadala Wetaka (researchers), James Latigo Ojera, Mathew Otto, Henry Newton Obote, and Sunday Kilara (research assistants). Professor Dani W. Nabudere compiled the report, which was reviewed and discussed first by the research team and then by the stakeholders who constituted the Steering Committee of the research. The report is therefore a collective product of the sponsors, the researchers, and the stakeholders.

IV. EMBARKING ON THE RESEARCH

4.1 The First and Second phases of the research

The first phase of the research was embarked on from 3rd June 2003. During the researchers' meeting, it was decided to restrict the research to Gulu district due to time constraints and the insecurity prevailing in Kitgum and Pader districts. The four research assistants visited five IDP camps in Gulu, while the researchers interviewed individuals, groups, and the officials at district level.

In the second phase, the researchers concentrated on interviewing leaders at district and national levels. This involved interviewing Members of Parliament, religious leaders, traditional leaders, persons with special knowledge and information on the conflict in the north, and stakeholders. It had been hoped to interview the President, but during this period due to time constraints, it was difficult to arrange such an interview. However, on the 22nd July, the Principal Investigator attended a "Dialogue" on the war in Acholi, and extensive notes were taken of the President's speech which gave background information to the conflict, the President's attitudes to the conflict as well as his future plans for dealing with it (see Appendix I).

In the first phase the researchers covered accessible IDP camps and settlements in Gulu district. Kony-Paco is a suburb of Gulu town that has been host to displaced persons since 1989. It is one of the first settlements for displaced persons in Gulu district, but it is not considered an IDP camp. Rather it is considered a suburb of the rapidly expanding Gulu Municipality. The population of Gulu Municipality has grown since the conflict began. The municipality was planned for 38, 000 people, but today it is estimated to be the home of some 160,000 people. The increase has been enhanced with greater rebel activity particularly following the return of the rebels from Sudan as a result of the failure of "Operation Iron Fist" since June 8th, 2002. There has been further increase resulting from the UPDF ultimatum of October 1, 2002, ordering the population remaining in the villages to relocate to specific camps or town centres within 48-hours.

The displaced people's settlement at St. Mary's Hospital, Lacor is located 5 kms west of Gulu Municipality on the Gulu-Juba road. The settlement has a population of more than 1, 800 people during daytime. However, during nighttime the population goes up to between 5000-6000 people, who are now called "night commuters." These are children from the surrounding villages. Pece-Lukung is a suburb located 1km east of Gulu Municipality on the Gulu-Moroto road. The population of Pece-Lukung, like that of other suburbs, has grown tremendously over the years of the conflict with people coming from all the 3 districts of Acholi sub-region: Gulu, Kitgum and Pader. Estimates put the figure to about 10,000 people displaced by the insecurity in their villages of origin. Unyama IDP "protected camp" is located 7kms north east of Gulu Municipality on the Gulu-Kitgum road. The people in this camp came from different parts of Gulu district like Cwero, Alero, Paicho, Bwongatira, and Ajulu.

These suburbs of Gulu Municipality have very similar characteristics of IDP camps in the countryside, except for the absence of military detachments. However, they have not been categorised as camps. In some cases one hut accommodates as many as 20 persons. Sanitation problems exist in terms of limited access to clean and safe water, poor latrine facilities and over-crowding. The persons displaced to those locations hail from various parts of Kitgum, Pader, and Gulu districts.

Open-ended focus group discussions were held with a cross-section of the camp residents comprising camp leaders, vice camp leaders, secretary, women leaders, secretary for defence, security overseer, health orderly, local council officials, former abductees and other key personalities within the camps. Whereas the people were evidently weary of being interviewed, having been subjected to other interviews before, our introductory approach raised a glimmer of hope to many that our research may make a difference in their lives.

By and large, the respondents exuded a highly suppressed feeling of extreme annoyance and hopelessness in grappling with a situation in the camps. The desperate situation in which the people of Acholi find themselves in IDP camps is reflected in proverbs and aphorisms such as *‘Arwot ki oda’* meaning “I am self-governing and self-sufficient when I live in my home.” The other is *‘Gin caka pe moko odeyo’* meaning “what is given as a result of begging is never sufficient or long lasting.” Taken together, these two proverbs mean that confining the Acholi in camps is a denial of the humanity and independence they enjoyed in their respective homes.

4.2 Methodology

The investigation used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The qualitative approaches were mainly used since the research team was quite aware of the vast amount of quantitative research that has been undertaken by other researchers and practitioner interventions. Our objective was to get as much information as possible from different kinds of sources, including the stakeholders who were involved on the ground. This required the use of a dialogical approach, which could engage the interviewees and the researcher into some effective communication. For that reason, the researchers discussed and agreed on the following methodological approaches:

4.2.1 Literature Review

This involved going into earlier research and getting as much information as possible. It also meant referring to earlier writings and books, which gave an independent overview of the historical developments in Uganda. This is because more recent explanations, especially as regards the root causes of the conflict, have tended to be influenced by current political declarations, thinking and opinions as well as writings of leaders who have interest in the perpetuation of the conflict for their own political ends. This earlier literature proved invaluable in giving balance to the background of the conflict. We had also access to several reports written by

different stakeholders in the zone of conflict as well as government sources. In addition, we accessed several Internet websites from which we obtained material that was of much assistance in enriching the report. The researchers also had access to the daily press, which carried stories about the conflict almost on a daily basis. These sources have proved invaluable in the writing of this report.

4.2.2 Community Interviews

This approach was used in the IDP camps where groups were interviewed together. Data collection guidelines and semi-structured questionnaires were used to enable the researchers ensure that they have a more representative picture on various issues. This enabled us to get a “public” point of view in contrast to the more “private” point of view, which one normally gets when one uses a one-to-one interview approach.

4.2.3 In-depth Interviews and Dialogues

This method was used for deeper discussions, especially on qualitative issues of opinions that sought to clarify issues obtained in the group interviews in the communities. It was used mainly with MPs, religious leaders, traditional leaders, district leaders, and people with special knowledge and information. Sometimes, the interview resulted in a written opinion and these written pieces of particular information have gone into the report and have been acknowledged. This enabled the researchers to get more balanced and truthful viewpoints on the conflict. We have represented through this arrangement the views and positions of the marginalised people, which have tended to be suppressed in the past.

4.2.4 Focussed Group Discussions

This approach was used for groups of four to eight people where more structured viewpoints were required, especially on the issue of what is to be done. We found that this approach was useful in that it offered digested and considered opinions. It gave us a good basis for making recommendations and has very much influenced our conclusions and the discussions on the section dealing with recommendations.

4.2.5 Interviews with Stakeholders

This research was very much the result of the requirements of different stakeholders in the areas of conflict. They participated in framing the questions and gave advice as to how to approach the research. Each of these stakeholders was in turn interviewed in the areas of their expertise. They also provided documents and statistics to back their information and opinions. These pieces of information, documentation, and statistics have been used in the compiling of this report. A Progress Report was also produced which was presented to them for comment. This feedback was organised in Gulu on the 19th of July and there were comments and ideas for improvement on the report, which have been included in the final report.

4.2.6 Meetings and Seminars

The research team also took advantage of any meetings organised around the issue of the conflict in the north. Where we heard of any such meeting, we sought letters of invitation to attend them. Some researchers attended the launching of the Human Rights Watch report in Kampala on the 15th July. During this period, the Office of the Prime Minister organised a one-day “Public Dialogue on Conflict Management and Resolution in Northern Uganda” which was held on 22nd July 2003 at the International Conference Centre, in Kampala. Over 200 people attended this “Dialogue,” including government, the UPDF, traditional and religious leaders from Acholi. The President, Yoweri K. Museveni, ministers, religious leaders and researchers, addressed the Public Dialogue. After the formal addresses, there were group discussions, and some of the results of these discussions and exchanges have been used in this report. Since there was no written speech, extensive notes were made of the President’s address and the notes have been reproduced in this report as Appendix I since they give us an up to date point of view of the government regarding the conflict and prospects for peace. Parts of this address have been critiqued in different parts of the report.

This current research is concerned with establishing the nature and specific character of the war in northern Uganda. It aims at achieving a better understanding of the conflict as part of the process of finding a lasting solution, based on Acholi views on the conflict and its resolution. This research will also attempt to go deeper into exploring the nature of the conflict, its real causes and the politics underlying it on both sides. It also looks at governance as an issue central to the continuing conflict, thus unearthing the inhibiting factors preventing a peaceful resolution of the conflict. It also looks into current and possible responses aimed at bringing the war to an end. Efforts made towards rehabilitation and reconciliation will be focused on in order to indicate the way forward towards improving the human security situation for the population, as part of the process of ending the war and working towards national reconciliation. An element of the role of Acholi traditional systems in the conflict has to be explored and thus a greater involvement of the Acholi people in the resolution processes will be also examined. To this end, the questionnaire, which was agreed by the researchers, gives a good outline of the evidence to be collected to back the results of the research. This questionnaire is attached to this report as **Appendix II.**

V. WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW?

5.1 The Historical Roots

Due to the urgency of this research and its limited time frame, it has only been possible to do a limited literature and “document” review. Since it was considered crucial that a deeper understanding of the causes of the conflict sought, if indeed we are to get to the root of this problem, it became necessary to look at some historical and recent analytical literature in order to get to the bottom of the problem. It is in the course of this limited survey that we examined the manner of colonialisation of the north and its incorporation into present day Uganda. While this review was in itself not deep enough, it became apparent that the British saw the northern part of Uganda much earlier as a “problem” area. At the time, they described it as “a disturbed, hostile territory, in which there were some tribes powerful enough to offer stiff and prolonged resistance” to their occupation³⁰.

The matter was complicated by the infusion of large amounts of weaponry from Ethiopia. Thus when the British decided to take control of the north, it was out of its security concerns to secure the south and west of the country, which it effectively occupied and where it wanted to install immediate administration. It was also out of its determination to exclude the Ethiopians who were seen as an “imperial rival”³¹. Until 1921, therefore, the area called the north was under military occupation by the Northern Garrison, an assumption of power and authority over the area “in which the tribes had no say”³². This historical background and the fact that Uganda was unevenly developed by the British colonisers has also led to a theory of “North-South divide” in which the north is said to have been used as a labour reservoir, creating the south as a producer of cash crops. This was said to explain the reason why the north ‘lagged behind’ the south. The theory has also been used to provide an explanation as to why the Acholi in particular came to predominate in the army. This “theory” has lost most of the explanatory value it might have had and indeed it is very unhelpful in providing a convincing explanation to the conflict underway in Acholiland today³³.

Thus, although the current conflict in the north of the country can be traced to the attempt by the Amin regime to eliminate the Acholi officers and men in the Uganda army whom he regarded as a threat to his regime during his reign of terror from 1971 to 1979, it is these historical events that can provide a clue to the understanding of the conflict. The complexity of the relations created by the colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’ throughout Uganda to a great extent explains

³⁰ Barber, J [1968]: *Imperial Frontier*, East African Publishing House, Nairobi, Chapters 10-11.

³¹ Barber, J: op. cit. p.120.

³² Barber, J: op cit. p. 121.

³³ Onyango-Odongo has been a consistent contestor of this theory in most of his writings on Acholi. For his recent intervention on the conflict see his: [1998]: *The Rebel War in Northern Uganda*, Mimeo, Gulu.

much of these recent events. For instance, the claim that the current “northern problem” arose because the northerners had dominated the political space in Uganda for along time is based on the same logic of politics of ethnic divide and rule, which the British played and which political players since independence have continued to exploit for their own ends.

It is also clear that what has long been regarded as the “northern problem” is based on the myth the British created of the Acholi people being a “martial tribe.” The myth was extended to claim that because of their ‘domination’ of the army since colonialism, the northerners have ‘dominated’ politics since independence. Yet both these claims are myths without any scientific basis. They are based on prejudice and political misrepresentation of fact. A number of papers presented at the first conference on the conflict in Northern Uganda held in 1987 addressed some of these myths. This conference organised by a consortium of peacemakers included the London-based International Alert, International Peace Research Centre of Oslo, Norway, and the United Nations University of Tokyo, Japan. The theme of the three-day conference was “Internal Conflict in Uganda” and some of the papers presented were published as a book³⁴.

The paper by Lwanga-Lunyiigo demonstrated that it was the colonial policy of ‘divide and rule’ that was responsible for the ideology of “martial tribes” or “martial races.” When it suited the British colonial policy to rely on the Nubians and Baganda to fight the Banyoro and the Acholi and in order to “pacify” the North, they concocted a theory to the effect that the Baganda had a history of “martial dominance” over its neighbours. They propounded this “theory” because they needed more than 20,000 Baganda armed men to subjugate and “pacify” Bunyoro. They annexed part of Bunyoro territory to Buganda as a reward for their collaboration. At this time also in order to create the enemy images of Bunyoro, they propagated the myth of *Bunyoro irridenta*. In the north and east, the British enlisted the services of Semei Kakungulu, a Muganda protestant, to conquer these territories and bring them under British colonial administration with the promise that Kakungulu would be “rewarded” with his own “kingdom” once he reached Busoga in the east near the Nile. Of course, like all colonial agents he was dropped with a minimal “pension” with no kingdom or honour. The Acholi at this stage were enemies and not ‘martial’ enough to fight British wars³⁵.

The Acholi were never preferred by the British to man the army. As pointed out above, the Nubians and Baganda were the preferred fighters in the initial phase of colonisation. Indeed, as Pain points out, the Nubians were employed to carry out punitive expeditions against Lango and Acholi and were instrumental in putting down the first anti-colonial uprising called the Lamogi Rebellion of

³⁴ Rupesinghe, K (editor) [1989]: *Conflict Resolution in Uganda*, IPRA, Oslo, James Curry, London & Ohio University Press, Athens.

³⁵ Lwanga-Lunyiigo, S [1989]: “The Colonial Roots of Internal Conflict” in Rupesinghe, op. cit. pp. 24-43

1912³⁶ in Acholi. It was after World War I that the Acholi began to feature in British military recruitments, and even then only by inducement of the chiefs who were paid 3 rupees for each Acholi recruit for the war. When they were recruited in the army in large numbers, it was more due to economic conditions in Acholi rather than for cultural reasons. Their numbers dropped markedly in the 1950s when large numbers of recruits were made from Teso and Lango. Indeed, by 1964, Milton Obote, a northerner, took steps to reduce Acholi numbers from the army even more. He did this with the help of Idd Amin, another ‘northerner.’ The 1979 upsurge in numbers of Acholis in the UNLA was a historical accident, because many of those who constituted the *Kikoosi Maalum (KM)* did so because they happened to be in Tanzania at the time and this was because they were bitterly opposed to the Amin regime.

5.2 The Post Colonial Experience

Thus, it is the continuation of these British created myths of Acholi as a ‘martial tribe’ and their ‘divide and rule’ policy that is responsible for the turmoil. The acceptance of these myths and the ethnic divisions based on them by the Uganda political elite is what accounts, as Lwanga-Lunyiigo correctly observed, for “the many skulls that now litter Luwero Triangle³⁷. The NRM leadership fell prey to these myths in whipping up the threat of the “Anyanya” and “northerners” in order to get support for the war in Buganda, where Obote had deposed the Kabaka in 1965. The political blame for this was extended to the “northerners” in general and to the Acholi in particular because of their presence in Luwero. Prof. Yusuf Lule was made leader of the NRM for the purpose of whipping up this support in Buganda.

Political manipulation based on ethnic and religious differences has become the main means used by the political elite in Uganda to legitimate themselves in power with particular ethnic groups considered important in the wielding of political and military power. The manipulation against the Acholi soldiers was not restricted to the NRM. Some of the people interviewed in Acholi were of the opinion that Obote had manipulated the Acholi in the Luwero Triangle for his own political ends. Indeed, as Pain points out, it is true that for his own political survival he had begun to look at the Acholi officers in the UNLA as being rather independent of his political motivations and therefore a danger to his rule³⁸.

Obote increasingly relied on a small core of his own sub-ethnic group, the Langi officers, to take command of the army.

³⁶ Pain, D, R [1987]: “Acholi and the Nubians: Economic Forces and Military Employment” in Wiebe, P. D & Dodge, C. P [1987]: *Beyond Crisis: Development Issues In Uganda*, Makerere Institute of Social Research, Makerere University, Kampala, pp. 45.

³⁷ Lwanga-Lunyiigo, op. cit. 45.

³⁸ Dennis Pain [1997]: *The Bending of the Spears: Producing Consensus for Peace & Development in Northern Uganda*, London.

For instance, Captain Ageta who was a relatively junior officer was put in charge of a newly created “Reconnaissance unit” that was equipped with mounted guns to operate within the Central Brigade where Luwero was located. The Acholi commander Bazilio Okello was in charge of this Brigade, but could not direct Captain Ageta’s activities. Obote gave Captain Ageta a free hand; very much the way Major Kakooza Mutale of the Kalangala Action Plan operates today under the NRM. When Bazilio Okello later discovered that Ageta was engaged in unlawful activities, he tried to apprehend him, but Brig. Smith Opon Acak (a relative of Obote) told Okello that Ageta was directly answerable to him as Chief-of-Staff. This increased the rift between the Acholi and Langi officers in the UNLA, which complicated the war in the Luwero Triangle. At this time, the commander of the “Luwero Triangle” operations was Col. Ogole, a non-Acholi officer in the UNLA.

This rift between the Obote core group and the Acholi officers and men in the army led to their alienation as a group within the Obote II regime. But what made matters worse was the fact that after the death of Chief of Staff Oyite Ojok in a suspicious helicopter crash, Obote could not promote the immediate senior Acholi officers such as Bazilio Okello and Brig. Nyero to the post. Instead, after great delay, he appointed the little known Brig. Smith Opon Acak to the post. Opon Acak turned out to be a kinsman of Obote. It should be noted that prior to the helicopter crash, relations between Obote and his cousin Oyite Ojok were characterised by mutual mistrust and lack of confidence due to suspicions on the part of Obote that Oyite Ojok was colluding and making contacts behind the scenes with the rebel NRM/A along with vice-president Paulo Muwanga.

Obote made a number of promotions, which favoured the Langi officers in the army. This increased the rift between them and other officers so that by the end of 1984 the Acholi officers had lined up behind Vice-president Paulo Muwanga, a Muganda, in opposition to Obote a northerner. Muwanga used this clout to establish links with Yoweri Museveni who was then in exile in Sweden and so the *coup d’etat* that took place against Obote by Bazilio Okello was supported by the Baganda factions in UPC and the Democratic Party as well as the NRM/A.

By the 1985 coup, Milton Obote was gradually setting a stage for the elimination of Acholi officers from the Uganda Army. The National Security Agency (NASA) was essentially an anti-Acholi intelligence organ whose reports had indicated secret contacts between them, the Democratic Party, the NRM/A and the late Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga (RIP). The Special Forces were in fact created as an alternative army aimed at by-passing or replacing the UNLA Acholi dominated officer corps. Between 1983/4, street battles between UNLA and Special Forces were very common in Kampala. By 1984, Obote had virtually handed over the responsibility for the Luwero Triangle to the NASA. The Acholi officers retreated to the north and challenged the activities being carried out by these Special Forces.

Hence the 1985 *coup d'etat* by the Acholi officers against Obote was a pre-emptive self-defence move by Brigadier Bazilio Olara Okello and Tito Okello Lutwa to prevent Obote's plans of eliminating them from the armed forces. These plans became evident when Brigadier Smith Opon Acak, seen as a junior officer and fellow Langi as Obote, was appointed Army Commander instead of more senior Acholi officers. Thus by the time NRA/M seized power from Tito Okello's military junta the level of suspicion between the Langi and Acholi officers in the UNLA had reached very high levels.

The NRA's abrogation of the Nairobi Peace Accord signed between the Tito Okello military junta and the NRM/A in 1985 did not help matters. To the Military Council chaired by Tito Okello, the NRM/A move was another attempt to marginalise and eliminate the Acholi component of the armed forces. After the NRM/A captured power in Kampala, the Acholi officers such as Bazilio Okello, Brig. Odong Latek, Eric Odwar, Stephen Ojukwu and Major Kilama retreated to Acholiland to defend themselves against a possible massacre similar to that carried out by Idi Amin. They saw the alliance between NRM/A and Major General Moses Ali, formerly in the Amin army, as intended to continue the Amin massacres of the Acholi officers. Former Prime Minister under Obote II administration, Otema Alimadi and former minister Akena p'Ojok (another Acholi) as well as many Acholi politicians embraced the logic of war rather than surrender to the NRA, which they viewed as trying to stab them in the back after NRA had gained from their coup against Obote.

So the threat of the Acholi officers in UNLA was overplayed once the Nairobi Peace Agreement aborted. These peace talks, which later became dubbed "peace jokes" were never a serious proposition to stop the NRM/A completing its "mission" of ethnic cleansing of the Acholi from the political scene. Bethuel Kipligat, then permanent secretary in the Kenya ministry of foreign affairs who played a key role in facilitating the negotiations described the four months of negotiations as a process of "haggling and cajoling" by the two parties:

"They began the talks by hurling insults at each other and continued to do so throughout the proceedings. Museveni denounced the previous regimes in Uganda as 'primitive' and 'backward.' He initially refused to negotiate with the Military Council delegation, dismissing them as 'criminals'. He in turn was accused by the Military Council of delaying the negotiation process unnecessarily. He then failed to show up for the consecutive four days, having left for Europe through Dar es Salaam. On his return, Museveni and his NRM/A raised new demands for the agenda. Once agreement was reached on an agenda item, Museveni

would change his position the following day; or put forward new demands on the same matter³⁹.”

It is clear that with this kind of manoeuvres, no serious agreement could have been reached or even contemplated. It is also clear that no such agreement was envisaged by the NRM/A. Participation in these “jokes” was part of the military strategy begun in Luwero to lure the enemy in a trap from which he could not escape. The four months were used by the NRM/A to arm themselves; awash with much cash it was getting from Tiny Rowland’s Lonro Company from the sale of coffee from the Masaka and Ankole areas to which the NRA now had access. Through this route, the NRM/A brought in Ronnie Mutebi, Buganda’s Kabaka-to-be in order to reinforce Baganda’s anti-northerner ethnic politics by playing up the issue of restoration of the Buganda monarchy to win support for the final push against “the Okellos” in Kampala.

In fact this hatred of the Acholi and the playing up of the “Luwero Triangle” hysteria led to many ordinary Acholi people being killed mercilessly in Buganda, with some being tied “three-piece-suits” of torture within Kampala after the fall of the Okello regime. The anti-northerner ticket had been played out long before in the NRA training camps in the bush, mainly by Prof. Lule’s UFM supporters. This had built up their enemy images of the “northerners” in general being enemies of the people of Uganda, although Museveni had profited directly from the Acholi rebellion against the Obote regime, which should have been held accountable for the Luwero tragedy. But because he wanted total power himself, he rejected any settlement where he would have shared political power with the “Acholis” yet without their rebellion against Obote, Museveni and his NRM/A could not have gained the strength to win power in Uganda.

5.3 The Real Significance of the ‘Luwero Triangle’ War

What Museveni therefore exploited was not the strength of the Acholi dominance in the army but their marginalisation by Obote that led to their revolt. Both Muwanga and Museveni had exploited these Acholi political weaknesses and not the Acholi political strength of dominance in the government of Uganda. The atrocities in the Luwero Triangle were the result of this strategy of ethnic cleansing embarked on by the NRM/A in the Triangle long before the skulls appeared. *Thus, it is not the atrocities that led to the Luwero war, but rather the NRM/A ethnic war that led to the atrocities.* What is also important in the appraisal of this angle to the Luwero war was the kind of considerations Museveni took into account in forming the political alliances in support of the war.

Prof. Yusuf Lule who joined his Uganda Freedom Movement/Army (UFM/A) to Museveni’s Popular Resistance

³⁹ Kipligat, B [2002]: “Reaching the 1985 Nairobi Agreement” in Lukima, O [2002]: Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace, ACCORD, Issue 11, 2002, p. 25.

Army (PRA) was a known staunch Muganda monarchist dedicated to restoring monarchism in Buganda which was abolished by Obote I. Up to this point, there was no talk in Buganda about “northern domination,” but instead there was sweet talk about how “wise” and “clever” Obote was. Even when Amin came to power, it was around Kampala that his military regime got its strongest support. This is what encouraged Amin to return Mutesa’s body from London for decent burial in Buganda. Upon this, Amin, another “northern” became a darling in Buganda, although he had played a big role in the ouster of Mutesa as President of the country. In a recent interview with the *Times* of London, Obote claimed that he never ordered Amin to attack the Kabaka’s palace (Lubiri), but that Amin undertook the attack on his own initiative, because his unit was allegedly under fire from the Kabaka’s “forces”⁴⁰.

Mutesa was ousted over a different matter concerning the Bunyoro “lost counties” that the British had given to Buganda for their collaboration in colonising Bunyoro, but which the Obote government wanted returned to Bunyoro. So this “anti-northernism” in Buganda was purely opportunistic since the Kabaka of Buganda had been quite happy serving as President of the republic with a northerner as Prime Minister who had been popularly elected. In fact at this time, his party, Kabaka Yekka (King’s Party) was in alliance with Obote’s Uganda Peoples’ Congress (UPC). So the alliance between Lule’s UFF/A that resulted in the formation of the NRM/A was calculated to bring the “Baganda” aboard to support the war initiated by Museveni in Luwero against the “northerners,” whom they equated with Obote’s administrations, when UPC was a national party supported by Ugandans in many parts of the country.

The other alliance that Museveni formed was with the former Amin soldiers and officers led by Moses Ali, then called The Uganda National Rescue Front (UNRF). This alliance was formed purely out of the fact that president Ghaddafi of Libya who was close to Amin was prepared to supply weapons to Museveni so long as he entered into alliance with the UNRF. The alliance was sealed in Tripoli and signed there. Moses Ali was interested in fighting the Langi and Acholi soldiers in the UNLA because they had worked together with the Tanzania Peoples Defence Forces (TPDF) to overthrow Amin’s government in 1979. So the UNRF was another proper match in the alliance to set up the Luwero Triangle as theatre for a show down with the “Acholis,” whom both groups hated and wanted to target for their war so they could jointly rule. In this case, Moses Ali, another “northerner” was not a threat to the southerners. The “Declaration of Unity” between NRM/A and UNRF signed between Museveni and Moses Ali in Tripoli, is also interesting in another respect -- their hatred of democracy. Their alliance agreement spelt out this hostility when they stated in the preamble as follows:

“Firmly believing that social order is a sacred right which serves as a basis for all other rights; Believing that the strongest man can never be

⁴⁰ The *Sunday Monitor*, Sunday August 10, 2003.

strong enough to be master all the time unless he transforms might into right and obedience into duty; Having concluded that recourse to armed struggle is the only means open to us to dislodge the Obote repressive and dictatorial regime and restore democratic and human rights of the people of Uganda. Now, therefore, we on our behalf and on behalf of our respective groups do solemnly and truly resolve and declare ... to dedicate our lives and those of the members of the respective groups to the service of Uganda.”

This combined hatred of democracy, the Obote regime and the northerners by Museveni comes out clearly in other documents as well. As part of this agreement, it was agreed in Tripoli that if the NRM/A won the war, Moses Ali would become the vice-president and if the UNRF did so first, then Museveni was to become vice-president.

The two movements therefore came together to reinforce each other to impose a dictatorship, which they were to share. This hostility to democracy was revealed in an interview, which Museveni gave in Nairobi during the Nairobi peace talks to *Drum Magazine*, when he stated:

“The problem in Uganda is that the leadership has mainly been from the north. The southerners who are mainly Bantu have played a peripheral role all these years since independence in 1962. A lot of blood has been shed. We want genuine elections and we are sure that if these were held the best candidates would win. We are not against the northerners as such and if a popular man from Acholi or Lango or even Madi wins, he will have our mandate. What we cannot stomach is a rigged election, such as the one we had in 1980. We are still prepared to talk to Okello as a military leader on the future of our country but we are not going to talk out of weakness. In fact our forces are already inside Kampala and soon we may surprise the world⁴¹.”

This statement reveals to some extent the real motivations of the NRM/A in embarking on war in the Luwero Triangle. The NRM/A was more concerned that the leadership in the country had up to this point been from the north, and not that during most of these years the UPC had manipulated ethnic and religious divisions in the country to maintain an undemocratic regime in power. This also revealed that the issue about the disputed 1980 general elections that Museveni used as justification for going to “the bush” to fight the UPC government, was not that it was rigged, but that the leader who won these elections was from the north.

Hence even if free elections had been held and the best candidate *from the north* had won, it was clear that “we” (the

⁴¹ *Drum* (East) October 1985, p. 9.

NRM under Museveni and others from the south who supported him) could not have allowed such a person to rule. The purpose of the war was therefore to oust the “northerners” from power so that the “southerners” could also have an opportunity to rule. The purpose of the Luwero war was therefore ethnic cleansing and not about democracy, as later events were to show. Thus, at this point, we can reframe the earlier hypothesis to state that: *the war in Acholiland was not the result of the atrocities committed in the Luwero Triangle, but rather the atrocities committed in the Luwero Triangle were the consequence of an ethnic-oriented war that was initiated by the NRM/A in Luwero Triangle against the northerners.* This also suggests that until that objective was achieved, the war in the north had to continue.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that Museveni himself had lost the 1980 elections in a straight fight against a Democratic Party (DP) candidate and there was no suggestion that in that constituency the UPC had rigged in favour of the DP candidate. In fact in that election, only one Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) candidate won a seat throughout the whole country and no complaint from the UPM was made to the effect that their candidates had lost because of rigging. In fact only the DP appeared to have a good case.

The above statement by Museveni also suggests that the NRM, in going to the bush, had in fact no intention of ever holding genuine free and fair elections after their victory. This is because both himself and Moses Ali believed that the strongest men (NRM and UNRF) could never be strong enough to be master all the time unless they were able to transform their might into right and obedience of Ugandans into duty to the mighty. This is *the mission* the NRM has over the last eighteen years been trying to implement through the “No Party Democracy,” which has been a one party dictatorship. This proves that so long as there was any likely threat to that “sacred right” any force that constituted a threat would have to be fought until it was eliminated. This partly explains the underlying causes of the war in Acholiland.

There is a lot of disagreement in the literature about what date and occasion can be regarded as constituting the beginnings of the war. This has a lot to do with explaining the causes of the war. While some explanations emphasize internal rebellion by Acholi youth, others, mainly associated with the NRM government, emphasize the external invasion by the Acholi soldiers who had gone to Sudan. The study by Robert Gersony of 1997 entitled: *The Anguish of Northern Uganda* reasoned that the war in the north was in fact a continuation of the war in the “Luwero Triangle.” In the study Gersony argues:

“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.”

While this can be taken as the beginnings of the conflict, yet it has to be explained why the conflict began in Luwero long before the skulls were there, as Gersony in this statement seems to agree. This is why we have tried to unearth the underlying factors that led to the NRM/A initiating the conflict in this particular corner of Uganda. The record shows that the conflict was about power, which the NRM argued had been held for too long by the “northerners,” as we have seen. But the twist that the war in Acholi began with the “skulls” in the “Luwero Triangle” has become a convenient catchword by the NRM to confuse the origins of the war for ethnic purposes in order to continuously confuse the people in Buganda to support the NRM. For instance, former Prime Minister Kintu Musoke was at one time quoted: “The Acholi have to pay for what they did in Luwero⁴².”

During the 1996 Presidential elections, the skulls were brought out and made part of the campaign against those candidates who supported reconciliation in Acholi. According to Ogen Kevin Aliro in this episode, the Baganda were used as “pawns” in creating and perpetuating the stereotype “of Acholis as venal and the bane of Uganda politics.” He added that this stereotyping had served the NRM well in the elections when the Museveni campaign “resurrected the southerners’ anti-Acholi (northerner) sentiments to secure Ganda votes and deny Paul Ssemogerere possible victory, had the Baganda chosen to vote for their own ‘son.’ The campaign went in full gear with the repetition of skull advertisements appearing in the press and television to remind the Baganda about the Acholi being “*abatemu*” (the killers) whom Paul Ssemogerere was condemned for trying to bring back to power⁴³.

This is why Gersony has wondered why the NRM began its war in Luwero. He notes that the NRA forces included Banyankole combatants from Museveni's ethnic group, as well as Baganda, Banyarwanda and other groups from the Luwero area, but adds:

“Most of this conflict was waged not in Museveni's home district of Mbarara in south-western Uganda, but instead in the Luwero District, 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.”⁴⁴

Gersony also wonders whether the attribution of events in the “Luwero Triangle” exclusively to the Acholi elements in the UNLA is justified. He admits that the Acholi were “only one of several ethnic groups prominently represented in the armed forces.” He also notes that the Acholi in the army “appear to have been generally subordinated to senior officers of President Obote's Lango tribe, a source

⁴² The Monitor, No. 129 of 1996.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ See section one of the report.

of continual friction within the military.” But he also admits that during part of this period, “the UNLA was rudderless, operating without a permanent Chief of Staff.” He notes: “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, he notes further, also relied upon North Korean technical advisors in its Luwero operations. “All of these factors had a bearing on the UNLA’s conduct in Luwero⁴⁵.” He concludes that:

“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 people⁴⁶.”

But, as we shall see in the next section, President Museveni still believes that all the Acholi people were part of the wrongs done by the Acholi soldiers in the south since independence. He appears to be fully convinced of the wrong doing of the entire Acholi community. But as we have indicated above, this was done and continues to be done for purposes of winning power and maintaining it by an ethnic minority. It is the playing out of these ethnic and religious politics that was at the base of the fragmentation and what Ogenga Otunnu refers to as the “fractured state.”⁴⁷ Otunnu’s paper lays out the background to how this form of politics were embedded in the formation of post-colonial Uganda, but does not follow up how they were concretely played out to produce the conflicts such as the one he was describing. Hence his analysis tended to be formalistic in its understanding of the crisis. What is required is to expose the actual promotion of conflict and war by a series of post-colonial leaders and their failure to unite the people of Uganda by resorting to the British colonial practice of ethnic ‘divide and rule.’ By accepting the structure of politics organised and crafted by the British colonialists under their ‘divide and rule’ policies, the Ugandan leaders have failed to avoid the ethnicisation of politics in the country, which has torn down the fabric of the Ugandan society, leading to conditions of genocide all round.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ Ogenga Otunnu [2002]: “Causes and Consequences of the War in Acholiland” in Okello Lucima (editor): *Protracted Conflict, Elusive Peace: Initiatives to End the Violence in Northern Uganda*

The civil war that raged in the “Luwero Triangle” between 1981 and 1985 was the result of this failure by all the political leaders since Uganda’s independence to rise above ethnic and religious divisions and organise the country along democratic lines. Instead, the Ugandan political elite continued the politics of ‘divide and rule’, especially the politics that increased the divide between the south and the north of the country. Obote’s undemocratic political manoeuvres, which exploited ethnic and religious differences, were part of the cause of the war and his political strength was based on playing both ethnic and religious differences to win support from the east, the west and parts of the north by manipulating these divisions. He used the same ethnic and religious manipulations in the army, which Museveni has continued to deploy.

The most trusted political followers of Obote were not Acholi or Langi, but “Bantu” and easterners. Prominent among these were Peter Otai, Chris Rwakasisi and Dr. Luwuliza Kirunda and many others from Buganda under Obote I and Obote II regimes. In fact, the way politics was manipulated along these lines by both sides to the war in the ‘Luwero Triangle’ reveals the mistrust of the Acholi soldiers and officers by Obote, which eventually led to his overthrow. This was not because the Acholi wanted to rule, but because they felt weak and wanted to build alliances to share power with other groups. There is also abundant evidence that the Acholi officers in the UNLA acting with the connivance of Paulo Muwanga, tried to stop the war by making overtures to Museveni’s NRA after December, 1984⁴⁸.

It is, therefore, very clear that the real significance of the war in the ‘Luwero Triangle’ has not been the skulls, which have been used as exhibition of Acholi atrocities, but the initiation of a conflict in Luwero based on ethnic and religious divisions, which produced those skulls. This is because the same strategy has been pursued in Acholiland to justify the war there by claiming that the war had its origins in the Luwero Triangle “because of the atrocities committed by the Acholi.” What is at issue is the ethnic orientation, which continues to bedevil this conflict and thus obscure the more serious regional conflict between Uganda and Sudan. This war has also fed on other ethnic divisions in Southern Sudan, which have widened the conflict into a full-blown regional war. Moreover, it has now gone beyond the regional dimension to become part of “international terrorism,” in which the sole superpower, the US, is getting entangled and the abducted children who fight for Kony are now categorised as “international terrorists!”

5.4 The Continuation of Enemy Images

There is no doubt that all these developments have poisoned the relations with the people in Acholi since the war has been used as an additional weapon to silence them. Therefore, going beyond mere declarations of intentions and government policies of the NRM government, we have to carry out archaeology of the actual actions of the regime to understand the fundamental causes to this conflict. Since it

⁴⁸ Nyeko, B & Lucima, O [2002]: “Profiles of the Parties to the Conflict” in Lucima, O (editor), op. cit. p. 20, who describe this “common position” as “paradoxical.”

is clear that the present power brokers were determined to remove the political “leadership” from the north to the south, it can be assumed that until that leadership had been taken and secured against any possible reversion, a war against the northerners was to be pursued to its logical end. This is why during the Nairobi discussions between the Tito Okello government and the NRM/A, the leadership of the NRM was determined to ensure the reversal of political leadership from the north to the south. He therefore did not place much significance to these talks, beyond using them as a delaying tactic until his military group had gained enough strength to strike at the Okello government.

These negative views by the present leader of the NRM and the head of state about the Acholi people are still reflected in his book,⁴⁹ which he wrote many years after the war in the Luwero Triangle. In this book, Museveni argues passionately how the Acholi people *as a whole* had participated in the looting of the south by the northern soldiers. He refers to Alice Lakwena’s military activity as “tribal opportunism that brought such (large) numbers to her side,” when in fact Lakwena’s rebellion drew support from other ethnic communities in the east of the country. The president argues in the book:

“You could not say that they were fighting to bring resources to the north, other than by way of looting and corruption, for social corruption had widely taken root in the region. Under previous regimes, the soldiers, most of whom came from the north, had been free to loot civilian property. Whenever they looted such things, for example corrugated roofing sheets, they would take them to their homes, and their parents would not ask where they obtained them, in spite of the fact that they could easily tell the difference between a new iron sheet and one that had been previously nailed to someone else’s roof. *In this way, the whole community in Acholi and Lango became involved in the plundering of Uganda for themselves.* In other words, the reason why those rebels in the north, organised on a tribal basis, were fighting for control of the national government, was that the NRM as a government had stopped them from looting⁵⁰.”

President Museveni then goes at length to refute any idea that Acholi had been prosperous at any time in the past. Writing under a sub-title “The Problem of Northern Uganda” in chapter 14, he argues that due to colonial marginalisation,

“the people in the area did not get in the habit of generating wealth through cash-crop production ... I always hear the cliché that the north was once prosperous and that it has declined in the last ten years. I have

⁴⁹ Museveni, Y. K [1997]: *Sowing the Mustard Seed: The Struggle for Democracy in Uganda*, Macmillan, London.

⁵⁰ Ibid: pp. 177-78. [Emphasis added].

never shared this opinion. I do not think that the north has ever been prosperous at any time. It is true that in the last ten years there has been more human suffering than before, but to say that the area has ever been prosperous is to tell a lie.”⁵¹

This statement of the president is not based on historical fact nor is it backed by economic data. It is known that Acholi was part of the “cotton belt” that provided Uganda with the much needed foreign exchange in this period.

The issue here is not to dwell on whether Acholi and Lango had at any time been “prosperous.” To do so would be the same as arguing whether a village in Buganda is today more prosperous than Kampala, for that is what is implied here. The issue is the attitude. It is this attitude, which has contributed to the ethnicisation of politics in the country. The ethnicisation of politics has also implied certain military responses, which attained a regional and international dimension. The reasoning here also magnifies the matter of the “backwardness” of the north, which is really relative to the backwardness of say, some areas of Buganda. Acholi is no worse off than the other parts of Uganda such as parts of Buganda, Karamoja, Bundibugyo, Kasese, Bunyoro and elsewhere. The reasoning in the case of Acholi is that this economic “backwardness” was responsible for the whole scale recruitment of the Acholi in the armed forces and their “looting” of the country. While it is true to say that economic hardships in many parts of Uganda, not Acholi alone, forced certain groups of people to join the army, there is no conclusive evidence to prove that the Acholi used their position in the army to loot other parts of Uganda. Nor can it be proved that this was the purpose of their recruitment into the armed forces, as the President implies.

More independent academic research in Acholi has actually revealed a very different picture. Pain’s research demonstrated how the Acholi were able to overcome some of the British colonial marginalisation by engaging in agricultural production so that by 1946-1953, Acholi “was one of economic boom”⁵². Indeed, even government records would reveal that up to the period when the NRM took power, Acholi district was one of the best producers of cotton, tobacco, and livestock, which were looted, by both the NRA and the Karimojong. Acholi in this period had more financial reserves from these crops than the receipts from other districts of Uganda. It was part of what was then called the “Cotton Belt” that made Uganda the biggest producer of cotton in the British Commonwealth. Atkinson has in addition shown that although Acholi was considered “backward” by the southern elite, its economic strengths lay in a form of agro-pastoralism that was well adapted to the ecological conditions of the region. This, in his view, was very real and substantial contribution to Uganda’s national economy⁵³.

⁵¹ Ibid: pp. 211-12.

⁵² Pain, [1987]: op. cit. pp. 47-50.

⁵³ Atkinson, R. R [1999]: *The Roots of Ethnicity: The Origins of the Acholi of Uganda Before 1800*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala.

In the deeper analysis of the real causes to the conflict in the north, it is necessary to refer to these underlying political misconceptions by leaders that have contributed to the intensification of conflict in the region based on ethnic considerations. This ethnicisation of politics in Uganda can be discerned from the recent proposal by a former head of state, Godfrey Binaisa in which he proposed what he called a three-pronged solution to the conflict in the north. He argued that the first would be to send a “high powered delegation” to Britain to “plead with the British government” that its role in Uganda during colonial days had created the belief that the soldiers from the north “were greater warriors” which had contributed to them assuming greater political power in the country⁵⁴. Pain has called this a myth of “martial races,” which the British has applied elsewhere such as India. It is the role of colonialism to divide and rule, but it is also the role of nationalists to combat that division by uniting the people. This is what nationalism is supposed to achieve. Museveni and Binaisa’s solutions do not unite the people, but rather accentuate their divisions along ethnic lines, which was the British colonial rule. This is why in this study we started from the proposition and hypothesis that *“the conflict in northern Uganda has persisted because of the determination by the NRM government to crush the political and military opposition in Acholi militarily.”*

A key informant interviewed in Kampala told the Principal Investigator that he believed that the war in Acholi had been planned long before its outbreak. He recounted an incident in March 1986, when he had a conversation with a leading member of the UPM (then led by Yoweri Museveni) from western Uganda (Ankole), who told him in confidence that a punitive war against the Acholi was going to be carried out in retaliation for the crimes the Acholi soldiers had committed in the Luwero Triangle. He adds that throughout this early period of NRM rule, the rallying war cry in Kampala was “we are tired of the northerners,” which meant “the Acholi.”

⁵⁴ The Monitor, July 7, 2003. “Binaisa’s 3-point solution to Kony war”.

VI. THE REBELLION IN ACHOLI

6.1 Transformations in the Conflict

The conflict in northern Uganda has been raging since 1986 with several rebel groups emerging to fight the government of Lt. Gen Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. The groups have included the Uganda People Democratic Army (UPDA) led by Brig. Odong Latek, the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF) led by a prophetess Alice Auma Lakwena, the Holy Spirit Movement II (HSM II) led by Alice's father Severino Lukoya Kiberu and Uganda Christian Democratic Army (UCDA) led by Joseph Kony, among others. Joseph Kony's UCDA changed names several times over the years 1988 to 1991 before it came to be known as the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), a name it has maintained since. These different armed interventions cannot be analysed together as rebellion initiated by the former UNLA soldiers. There have been transformations in the conflict and it is the intention of this analysis to distinguish between the earlier UNLA/UPDA rebellion and the later rebellions after the peace agreement between the UPDA and the NRM/A government.

The research has shown that it is neither realistic nor 'scientific' or even 'political' to generalise the war in Acholi as emanating from the remnants of the Amin and Obote regimes. Quite apart from the fact that this is not factually accurate, as we have demonstrated above, generalization does not take into account the political and spiritual transformations of the conflict. It is this lack of a nuanced understanding of the conflict in northern Uganda that may partly explain its persistence and prolongation. Our research and reinterpretation of earlier research shows that there have been three major transformations in the conflict. The first was the war by the UNLA/UPDA generals. The second was a spiritually inspired peasant rebellion led by Alice Auma; and the third was the transformation of both the UPDA and HSMF into the Joseph Kony LRA war. Each of these phases must be examined separately in order to understand their import and impact. Although there were continuities in these conflicts, there were also discontinuities, which have to be examined analytically. We therefore differ from the periodisations in Robert Gersony's report since we find them too formalistic. As a result they miss many important differences.⁵⁵

6.2 The War of the Generals

It is clear that as soon as the NRM took over the main urban areas of Acholi around March 1986, the regime launched a major witch-hunt for the Acholi UNLA soldiers who had fled from Kampala with their weapons. At this stage in the understanding of the NRA, the UNLA stood for Acholi soldiers. This constituted a threat, which

⁵⁵ Robert Gersony in his report entitled: *The Anguish of Northern Uganda* published in 1997 put the conflict in Northern Uganda in five phases: The UPDA; Alice Auma's HSMF; Severino Kiberu's "God the Father"; Kony's LRA-earlier period; and Kony's LRA-later period. (see pages 20-36).

had to be dealt with immediately if the new regime was to consolidate its power. Many people interviewed were emphatic that this witch-hunting combined with the looting of Acholi wealth by the NRA and Karamoja cattle -rustlers. To these interviewees, this was the real signal of an impending punitive war against the Acholi since these attacks were combined with ethnic abuse and provocations. It was also a signal to the Acholi soldiers and youth who were being harassed that the NRA wanted to kill them the same way the Amin regime had done in 1971-78. False or true, this became the real basis for action by both sides.

Many of the interviewees believe that the despatch of the FEDEMO armed groups as the 35th Battalion of NRA to Acholi was intended to give this force a chance to avenge the Luwero deaths and then leave it to the NRA to come in and “finish” the job. This brigade was composed mainly of Baganda fighters of FEDEMO and UFM/A. In mid-July 2003, one of the leading lights of the NRA and half-brother to President Yoweri Museveni, Salim Saleh, who was himself at one time a commander of the NRA in Acholi and currently a presidential adviser on political and military affairs in the north, admitted that in August 1986, the NRA 35th Battalion, “committed mistakes against the population after being attacked by UPDA in the area of Namukora.” He admits that “this act tarnished the otherwise unblemished discipline track record of the NRA⁵⁶.”

According to a key informant, it is not true that FEDEMO was in Namukora (Kitgum) district, where they could have “made mistakes.” FEDEMO was deployed in Moyo district in West Nile. It was Uganda Freedom Movement/Army (UFM/A) under Andrew Kayiira, who were deployed in Kitgum as the 35th Battalion. The informant added that it was the NRA that committed the atrocities, but blamed them on the 35th Battalion because Andrew Kayiira had decided to link up with Major Eric Odwar’s elite faction of the former UNLA to resist the NRA. He added that the UFM/A was assisting Odwar to obtain weapons in order to enable them to resist the NRA. The Battalion was therefore disarmed and sent under heavy escort to Lira. For this reason Kayiira and two other Baganda ministers were arrested and tried for treason⁵⁷. Kayiira was killed soon after being released from prison under very suspicious circumstances.

Therefore, despite their own internal disciplinary problems, it was not the 35th Battalion that were responsible for the Namukora atrocities, but the NRA itself. The record shows that the ‘discipline’ of the NRA broke down in Acholi because their objective was to carry out an ethnic revenge against the Acholi for their alleged dominance of Uganda armed forces. The attack on the UPDA became an attack on ordinary people who were caught in between the early spontaneous rebellions before UPDA appeared on the scene and the NRA. While the NRA may never have intended to target the civilian population, their behaviour generally tended to render the population to be sympathetic to the rebels and as a result the

⁵⁶ *New Vision*, Sunday 29 June 2003.

⁵⁷ The key informant here was Onyango-Odongo formerly employed in the NRM Secretariat from 1989-95.

attacks against the population spread. Rebellion has since never stopped until well over one million people are currently encamped into IDP camps for ‘protection.’

Various studies undertaken since 1997 have confirmed this scenario, and there is no need to recount the incidents. Suffice it to say that whereas sources within the Acholi community emphasize the internal causes to the war,⁵⁸ the NRA on the other hand locates the beginnings of the war to external incursions with the attack on Bibia by the UPDA from Sudan⁵⁹. The fact of the matter was that the external initiation of the war in Sudan began when the SPLM/A, acting in concert with the NRM/A government in Uganda, attacked the Ugandan Magwi camp of Acholi refugees inside Sudan. It was after this that the former UNLA soldiers moved the war inside Uganda by attacking the NRA contingent at Bibia on the Uganda-Sudan border and formed the UPDA, which was supposed to unite both UPC and DP political supporters.

Indeed, the government claims that the Kony rebellion was instigated by the government of Sudan from the “remnants of former dictators, Amin and Obote⁶⁰.” Both elements are present in the conflict, but in order to explain the rise of Alice Auma ‘Lakwena’ and the Lord’s Resistance Movement, the internal factors become significant in throwing light on a number of developments in Uganda. While the external factors are, therefore, not to be disregarded, it is necessary to note even that factor has internal elements within Sudan and Uganda, which have to be explored if the long-term consequences of this conflict are to be fully comprehended. This is what has resulted in this war becoming a regional conflict.

The dynamics of the conflict and the issues that keep cropping up in the continuation of the conflict need to be clearly understood to pave way for a long-term solution based on a well-founded human security strategy. What we do know, and this is not disputed, is that the conflict in Acholi has kept on spreading until it took on a traditional and modern religious tone in the person of Alice Lakwena and her Holy Spirit Movement as well as Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Movement. This reveals the deep frustration of the people of Acholi, arising out of the dynamics of the conflict. The early isolated internal rebellions, which were reactions to the NRA harassments and killings were abandoned, “smashed” or transformed into new ones.

However, it is the explanation of these transformations that gives credence to the internal causes of the conflict -- including the history of political development in Uganda since colonialism, the traditional structures of power and their decay and the impact of the new religions in the region. These issues are easily skipped over by those in power and they are superficially or jokingly treated, especially in references to Alice Lakwena’s use of shea-nut oil to protect bodies in war. Several comments made by President Museveni on this issue from time to time, show a lack of deep understanding of what is involved in these

⁵⁸ Onyango-Odongo [2002]: *The Rebel War in Northern Uganda*, Mimeo, Kampala,

⁵⁹ These explanations are contained in most government and UPDF documents.

⁶⁰ Uganda Government [2003]: “The Government of Uganda’s Northern Uganda Reconstruction and Counterterrorism Initiative,” April 30, 2003.

transformations and spiritual interventions, and therefore demonstrate a lack of appreciation of the different kinds of approaches, which could have been deployed from time to time to contain the conflict. These opportunities were missed and so a new understanding of the conflict is necessary.

As far as the Generals of the UNLA were concerned, the issue was to fight in order to regain recognition in the sharing of power in Kampala, which they had sought through the Nairobi Peace talks of 1985-6. Indeed, the fact that the former soldiers in the UNLA (now referred to as UPDA) regrouped in Sudan was intended to give them time to regain focus. Their attacks were intended to negotiate for readmission to the army and have a share in the government, just like the other fighting groups that had been admitted into the NRM structure. The Pece Stadium “peace deal” did not take sufficient cognisance of the internal factors within the Acholi society and Uganda at large. Indeed, these negotiations were between the government and a small group of UPDA officers, with the bulk rejecting the surrender.

This is what drew a line between them and the Alice Auma and Joseph Kony groups. Thus many of the young men who had joined the UPDA were taken over by both Alice Auma and Joseph Kony into their new armies because they differed with the “Generals” in their approach and objectives of the conflict. The Pece peace deal proved the point that while the remnants of the former armies were content with sharing power with the mainstream NRM/A, after they suffered defeat at Corner Kilak, some of the peasant forces were concerned about wider issues of human rights and governance. Such issues included the role of the armed forces in society, their behaviour towards civilians, the character of the political leadership in targeting ethnic groups not of their liking, etc. These concerns were not addressed in the “peace agreement” of the “Generals” with the NRM government. On the other hand, Joseph Kony wanted to continue fighting by taking on some of the UPDA soldiers, which he later, as we shall see below, built into his own army.

6.3 Lakwena and the Peasant Rebellion

Alice Auma ‘Lakwena’ brought out these concerns in a metaphysical and spiritual form. She proved that the NRM/A claim that the present rebellion in Acholi was “created by Sudan” from “remnants” of the old armies to be false and a self-serving myth. Indeed, it was these “remnants” that had done a deal and were admitted into the government. It is therefore wrong to see Lakwena and Kony’s rebellions as a continuation of the conflict begun by the soldiers in the UNLA/UPDA. While there is no doubt that Alice Auma fought for sometime in the UPDA, she broke ranks over fundamental issues of the objective of the struggle and the method of waging war. In fact Alice initiated an armed confrontation with the “Generals” even before the peace negotiations and took many of the soldiers whom she anointed and “baptised” before they could become part of her new force -- the Holy Spirit Mobile Force. In some quarters she is regarded as the force that destroyed the backbone of the UPDA more than the NRA. Thus Alice Auma’s rebellion brought

in new issues and problems that still have to be resolved if the conflict in the north is to be addressed comprehensively and the wounds and trauma created by the war healed properly.

A study carried out in 1996 by Charles Asowa of Makerere University and Bertha Amisi of Emergencies Response Information Centre (ERIC), Action Aid-Kenya on “The Impact of Peace in Northern Uganda: A Search for Solutions,” pointed to the emergence of a “reform movement” in the form of a peasant rebellion. The study pointed out that the objective of this new movement was to deal with the consequences of the Luwero war and the war that had started in Acholiland. The report indicated that this rebellion begun by Alice Auma ‘Lakwena’ was intended to “cleanse the Acholi society from within and possibly eradicate witchcraft and sorcery⁶¹.” But the rebellion had military implications, including the cleansing of the Acholi soldiers in the UPDA as well as embarking on a national agenda of moral rejuvenation.

In the research carried out by Willet Weeks on behalf of the UN-OCHA, the emergence of armed prophetic movements in Acholi in early 1986 coincided with a period of political uncertainty and upheaval within Acholi and between the Acholi the rest of Uganda -- including their relationship with their central government, in particular⁶². The actions of political players and their servants in the military had brought about a crisis, which Behrend in her research on the Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement, describes as lying in the political history “that provided the preconditions for the catastrophic situation in Acholi.” Behrend presents two discourses to try to explain the misfortunes of violence in northern Uganda “from local perspectives” by introducing “local crisis theories” to understand events. The first of the discourses is an attempt to understand the emergence of the widespread use of witchcraft to deal with complications in the social-political relations. The second discourse tries to understand the crisis in the traditional leadership and the enforcement of traditional moral order of purity and impurity that had emerged in society.

According to the Acholi philosophic discourse, a situation becomes *piny rac*, in the words of Okot p’Bitek, the Acholi poet and philosopher, when “the whole thing is out of hand, that the entire apparatus of the culture cannot cope with the menace any more⁶³.” The Swedish anthropologist, Sverker Finnström, who quotes this passage, interprets it as saying that at this stage, “the conflict is beyond immediate and local control.” He adds that this can be understood “as the expression of lived uncertainty and existential crisis,” hence he titles his research paper “living with bad surroundings,” which to him is an existential translation of

⁶¹ ACTIONAID [1997]: *Report of the To-Day Conference on the Challenge for Peace in Northern Uganda: A Search for Solutions*, Kampala.

⁶² Weeks, W [2002]: *Pushing the Envelope: Moving Beyond ‘Protected Villages’ in Northern Uganda*, OCHA, New York.

⁶³ Okot, p’Bitek [1986]: *Artist, the Ruler: Essays on Art, Culture, and Values*, Heinemann, Nairobi, p. 27.

*pin y rac*⁶⁴. In expressing the loss of understanding of what is really happening, *pin y rac* expressed the agony of the elders who, as custodians of Acholi culture, found themselves at a loss since the Acholi culture had become disoriented. This, according to Okot p'Bitek, was because “the entire apparatus of culture cannot cope with the menace any more.”

One can therefore understand why Alice Auma found herself perplexed as to what was really going on in Acholiland and Uganda at large. One also begins to understand why she found it necessary to accuse the Acholi elders of failing in their traditional task of disciplining the soldiers under Acholi culture. The spiritual world of the Acholi ancestors could not “counter the potent but violent spiritual powers of the rebel movements.” They could not respond because Acholi spirits could only confront other Acholi spirits, and therefore the Acholi ancestors could not respond to spirits like that of ‘Lakwena’ or those of Kony within their cosmology. But it was due to the creativity of a peasant Christian Acholi woman, to invoke both the Acholi traditional norms of spirit medium and Christian beliefs to understand the complexity in the land and try to cope with it. She accepted the intervention of the Italian ‘Lakwena’ spirit in order to solve some of the inadequacies of the Acholi traditional religious beliefs and to some extent of Christianity itself. In this respect, Alice Auma appeared to be more creative spiritually than the Christian “intercessors” (see below) who intervened to abolish these religious beliefs without synthesising them into a coherent message that Alice Lakwena managed to do in her Twenty Safety Precautions.

The study of the Holy Spirit Movement by Heike Behrend⁶⁵ is therefore useful in drawing attention to this phenomenon. Behrend explained that Alice Lakwena’s use of the prophetic medium to address the ills that faced Uganda had a correct characterisation of the UNLA weaknesses as a national army. A former Acholi minister of state in the NRM government, Owiny Dollo, described Alice Lakwena as a “magnetic and charismatic leader, (who) appeared as someone who could get rid of bad elements and cure illness in society.” A former British journalist for the BBC, Catherine Watson who interviewed Alice Lakwena’s followers, recognised the significance of Lakwena’s work as being non-ethnic. She observed: “the non-Acholi weren’t the only one’s to blame the Acholi for the Luwero atrocities. The Acholi (through her) blamed themselves, and felt that they were sinful. Following Alice was a way to purify yourself, and become free of that. Alice inspired hope and joy, and she had these wonderful millenarian promises⁶⁶.”

⁶⁴ Finnström, S [1999]: “Living With Bad Surroundings: War and Uncertainty in Northern Uganda,” *Working Papers in Cultural Anthropology*, No. 9, 1999, Department of Cultural Anthropology & Ethnology, Uppsala University, Sweden.

⁶⁵ Heike Behrend: *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement: War in Northern Uganda 1986-97*, Fountain, EAEP, James Curry, London, Kampala.

⁶⁶ Quoted in: *The Scars of Death: Children Abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda*, Human Rights Watch/Africa Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project, New York, London, Brussels - pp. 34-5.

Robert Gersony's short reference to Lakwena in his *Anguish* study is partial and one-sided. It is rather instrumentalist and shows little understanding of the deeper forces at work. He emphasizes the old story and myth of "the Acholi" seeking to regain "the Old Glory" and power and therefore does not comprehend the ramifications of Lakwena's attempt to cleanse the soldiers and the implications of this for the traditional and Christian belief systems, which were translated into metaphysical form. He argues that Lakwena's purification was merely aimed at "regaining power in Kampala" ostensibly for "the Acholi." This is not critical and nuanced enough. It gives credence to the government's ideological and political explanations of the war and has the implication of justifying the kind of militaristic solutions to the crisis we have seen in the US government response to the war. The explanations ignore the deep historical, ethnic, cultural and spiritual underpinnings of the conflict.

The research team was not able to interview Alice Auma, who now lives in exile in Kenya, but her story can be gleaned from a number of sources indicated here as well as from informants. According to a Key Informant,⁶⁷ the UPDA soldiers "had spoiled the age-long Acholi culture, which strictly forbade theft, adultery, spilling of sacred human blood (without cleansing), telling lies which led to the suffering of innocent persons and failure to respect elders." The other reasons for targeting the UPDA soldiers were that during the war in Luwero, they had killed and looted property, which they transported to Acholi. Secondly, the soldiers had raped many women and "blindly carried out Obote's orders" to harass civilians who were falsely accused of supporting the rebels. Thirdly, instead of admitting their mistakes and asking for cleansing, they embarked on another war and committed the same crimes in Acholi.⁶⁸

By November 1986 the UPDF was a highly demoralized force and Alice obtained from one of its commanders in Kitgum the services of 150 UPDA combatants and their weapons. She planned to demonstrate the effectiveness of her military approach by purifying them and putting them to battle in new ways. In November and December 1986 in her first attacks, Alice achieved two stunning victories: one at Kilak Corner and another in Pajule, both in southern Kitgum. Her new military methods took the NRA by surprise, of being defeated in these battles of sustained fighting. Alice was able to capture many weapons and supplies from them. It is this success, according to Gersony, that "reportedly electrified thousands of Acholi youth, who in the next months were eager to join her." Many people believed that, indeed, she had spiritual power and as a result she began to enjoy strong support among the Acholi population in general. 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. Her orders were based on the "Holy Spirit Safety Precautions," which included the following moral guidelines for her soldiers:

⁶⁷ Onyango-Odongo who at one time worked in the directorate of the government NRM Secretariat in a written note to the Principal Investigator.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

- Rubbing their chests with shea oil, to immunize themselves against the bullets of their enemies;
- Marching straight toward the enemy and never taking cover to avoid enemy fire;
- Transforming stones into exploding grenades by placing the stones in pails of water in which hot metal had also been immersed;
- Singing Christian hymns as the soldiers marched into battle;
- Injunction against eating food or shaking hands with non-Holy Spirit members;
- Killing no bees or snakes, which were regarded as the allies of the Holy Spirit Movement; and
- Requirement that her soldiers should have no more or no less than two testicles.

Alice also required her soldiers to attend Sunday Christian services and adhere to the Ten Commandments. She also insisted that they obey her teachings and the orders of the Holy Spirit commanders, although this religious ideology was rejected by the conventional mainstream Christian churches. Hers was in fact an attempt to synthesize these Christian principles with aspects of Acholi traditional religious beliefs, which was also not fully accepted by the elders.

Auma had blamed the traditional leaders and elders for not coming up to their expected responsibilities of disciplining the young soldiers. She blamed them and the church for failing to contain witchcraft, which had intensified and turned itself inwards to explain increasing deaths on the basis of increased witchcraft accusations. Her second most important task was to cleanse Acholi of witches and in this respect the Church approved her work, but rejected her interpretations of the doctrine. Lakwena's "Twenty Safety Precautions" were intended to create this synthesis and her mission was not restricted to the Acholi soldiers or Acholi society alone. That is why she was able to win supporters across the ethnic divide and to pursue her "war" to the Nile bridge very swiftly by picking up supporters along the ethnic divide.

What we learn from the Lakwena movement is that although they were given the military strength of the spirits of the various foreign fighters, the Lakwena Holy Spirit Army was not permitted to use any offensive weapons of killing against the Uganda army. They were restricted to using stones, which were not thrown at the attacking soldiers but on the ground as they approached them. These stones were supposed to explode like grenades once they touched the ground. This did not mean that Lakwena was not aware that bullets from guns do not kill as the NRM have gleefully continued to claim. The spiritual decree was based on a metaphysical moral principle, which needs to be explored.

Behrend interviewed one of Lakwena's followers, Michael Ocan, who was Lakwena's secretary. He survived the war and still believes that Lakwena's cause was right and that it could have solved Uganda's problems of undisciplined armies. Alice Lakwena killed very few NRM/A soldiers and therefore what the NRA did in shooting down people who were unarmed amounted to a massacre. President

Museveni also believes that Alice Auma did not commit crimes, but nevertheless was proud to say that the NRA was able to “mow down 1,000 of these unarmed young people (see Appendix I). But she killed those whom she believed were sinners and witches. It may even go down in history as proving that her fight was to destroy the basis of the much-feared Acholi possibility of “regaining power in Kampala” by creating a cleaner moral army. What Lakwena achieved in her brief spell, despite her own weaknesses in organisation and articulation of the real problems facing the country, was that she was able to discipline the soldiers and in many cases protect the population against their indiscipline.⁶⁹ She also raised the moral-ethical issues of political leadership that Uganda has suffered from since its independence.

If the NRA High Command had properly appraised and evaluated Alice Auma Lakwena’s rebellion and compared it to the brutal activities of the UNLA soldiers in the Luwero Triangle, and also reflected on the behaviour of its own army in Acholi, Teso and elsewhere in the country, they would have found that her arguments although formulated in metaphysics, had some validity. They could have with the support of traditional and religious leaders approached her and offered certain compromises and reforms. The Acholi people were highly mobilised by her moral approach and their support for reconciliation would have been utilised to bring the conflict to an end. This did not happen and at some point, the road to reconciliation has to be opened up so she can participate in bringing about a better Uganda. This is why it is necessary to point out that Lakwena’s role in the on-going war could still be explored and utilised. The government, religious leaders, elders, as well as civil society organisations should try to reach out to Lakwena to play a role in stopping the conflict in Acholiland on the basis of national reconciliation. Instead of doing this behind the scenes, she should be openly asked to contribute to finding peace.

6.4 The Joseph Kony War

It is not necessary to mention here the continuation of the Lakwena rebellion by her father, Severino Lukoya Kiberu, under the name Holy Spirit Movement II. This intervention was brief and uneventful because no spirit inspired it. He surrendered soon after a series of blunders and was released without a formal “peace agreement.” He now lives in Gulu in old age. This is different from the rebellion led by Joseph Kony’s Lords Resistance Movement/Army, which the NRM continues to regard as a “creation of the Sudan government from the remnants of the old armies of Amin and Obote.” This claim has been utilised by the NRM government to perpetuate the war and to blame Sudan for all the ills that are internal to Uganda, which has led to the alienation of the Acholi people from the regime, leading to the near genocide being committed in Acholiland.

⁶⁹ Heike Behrend [1998]: “War in Northern Uganda” in Clapham, C [1998]: *African Guerrillas*, Fountain, Indiana, Currey, Kampala, London.

Joseph Kony was a fighter in the UPDA. He was a simple preacher in the Catholic church and a teacher when he joined the UPDA at a young age. He must be regarded as one of the Acholi young men who spontaneously joined the fight because of the NRA abuse of power. When the “Generals” decided to sign a peace accord with the government, Joseph Kony split himself off from this leadership and, with other fighters who did not accept the peace accord, decided to continue the war against the government. According to Charles Alai,⁷⁰ whom the Principal Investigator interviewed, Kony had already left the UPDA by the time of the negotiation of the peace accord. Alai added that Kony took with him some of the more “illiterate” and “primitive” officers because of the atrocities they had committed in the bush. At this point, Joseph Kony also claimed to have inherited the spirit of Lakwena after Alice Auma’s Holy Spirit Movement was defeated. According to David Westbrook, “though Kony adopted many of the methods of his supposed cousin Lakwena, he never gleaned the popular support she had⁷¹.”

At first in 1988 Kony called his movement the Uganda Peoples’ Democratic Christian Army (UPDCA), perhaps to distinguish it from the now defunct UPDA with which he was associated. Later he changed the name and called it the Uganda Christian Democratic Army (UCDA). In 1991, he again renamed it the Lords Resistance Army (LRA), which it retains up to now. Despite the claims to have links with Lakwena’s HSM and Severino’s HSM II, the LRA has “had something of a schizophrenic or disjointed nature about it⁷².” Kony has vacillated from near full adoption of Lakwena’s beliefs, including the Christian components denouncing witch doctors and diviners, but he has also denied any links with Christian doctrine and even adopted and incorporated Muslim rituals and beliefs. There is very little Acholi tradition in his rituals and practices.

There was thus a real transformation in the LRA war from that pursued by the UPDA and Alice Auma’s HSM. He took over the worst remnants of the UPDA, many of whom were civilians. He also claims to have the spirit of Lakwena, although it is not clear whether Alice Auma agrees with this. There is therefore some doubt expressed by many informants about the genuineness of the claim by Kony that he inherited the ‘Lakwena’ spirit from Alice Auma. Because of this, the LRA has not enjoyed the same enthusiastic support among the Acholi peasants that they gave to Alice Auma Lakwena and her Holy Spirit Movement/Army. Because it did not receive this enthusiastic support, it became easier for the government to mobilise the youth in the “Arrow and Bow” groups to pursue Kony’s rebels.

⁷⁰ Charles Alai was one of the UPDA negotiators for the peace accord with the NRM government in 1988 and later was appointed minister of commerce in charge of Barter Trade and later state for Public Service after they signed the accord.

⁷¹ Westbrook, D [2000]: “The Torment of Northern Uganda: A Legacy of Missed Opportunities” in *The Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*, Issue 3.2/June 2000, p. 5.

⁷² *Ibid.*

According to various sources, the “Bow and Arrow” groups were recruited with the participation of local authorities and elders to assist the resistance against the LRA rebellion. This proved to be a positive sign by the people in supporting the government, but it also turned out to be a danger for the people because it indicated the lack of popular support the LRA enjoyed among the population. This loss of political support explains why Kony then resorted to committing atrocities against the people as well as abducting children into forced recruitments and forced “marriages.” These activities have brought great suffering to the people of Acholi, which they do not approve of. But their support to the government obtained them very little protection from the government troops against LRA attacks. The government has also shown reluctance in giving out guns to the Acholi people unlike in other areas, including Karamoja. The government still regards the Acholi with suspicion and mistrust in military terms. They are still regarded as a military threat, although the people have shown good will to the government.

According to some sources, Joseph Kony never received the *lappi* ceremonial clearance of his warfare from the Acholi elders, although he claims to have been blessed by elders in Awach area. According to these sources, the majority of the elders were opposed to the clearance, although some initially gave support to the UPDA. It is reported that it was only a certain Major Apia of the UPDA who was blessed initially by his mother’s brother, the then Rwot Jona Odida of Payira clan. It is also said that the blessing took place immediately after the Corner Kilak battle of 1987 in which the rebels lost to the NRA with several hundred casualties. Joseph Kony was not present when this traditional blessing and clearance was given, although Major Apia later joined the Kony rebel group. Joseph Kony might have claimed the blessing from this source too. This shows a lack of clarity of any blessing to Joseph Kony by Acholi elders and may explain his own ambivalent feelings towards the Acholi elders.⁷³

Willet Weeks in his foregoing report argues that one of the factors that has worsened the war in Acholi was the internal alienation as well as the Sudanese government support to the LRA. He argues that the internal alienation has been aggravated by two other factors, which are interrelated. The first is the actions of the UPDF, “which has at various times behaved with severity and often brutality in dealing with the civilian population.” The second is the support the government provides through the Acholi districts to the SPLA, “which is seen as the motivation for the Sudanese government’s support to the LRA.” According to him, without this indirect routing of armed support to the SPLA, the local people believe the LRA “would never have been able to find a safe haven in the Sudan or to continue its operations against the Acholi districts, as it has done since 1994⁷⁴.”

⁷³ See Finnström, S [1999]: “Living With Bad Surroundings: War and Uncertainty in Northern Uganda,” *Working Papers in Cultural Anthropology*, No. 9, 1999, Department of Cultural Anthropology & Ethnology, Uppsala University, Sweden, p. 38.

⁷⁴ Ibid: p. 7.

The combination between the human rights violations of the UPDF, which have included atrocities, killings, and rapes with the support given by Sudan to the LRA to fight its war against the SPLM/A have helped to transform the character of Kony's rebellion, in Acholi and Sudan, especially after 1994. From that year, it ceased being a purely Acholi rebellion against the Uganda government fought within Ugandan borders. Its spiritual basis was also transformed. The combination of the negative aspects from the UPDA and the imitations of Alice Lakwena's spirit was added to a new spiritual intervention of the Arab Islamic religious interpretations of conflict within Sudan. The combination of the Acholi practice of using Christian and Acholi spirit mediums produced a qualitatively different movement, with the new Islamic interpretations and practices of what is right.

According to those abductees who have managed to escape, Joseph Kony's military orders seem to be "external" to him. The orders are given while he is entranced and possessed by spirits "from very different places." He is reported to speak different tongues: German, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, etc. depending on the nationality of the particular spirit possessing him. His 'Holy Spirit,' according to one of his escaped abducted 'wives,' enters him at night during his sleep. In the morning he dictates his prophecy, which his secretary writes down, in which he gives military orders, including directions, giving accurate maps of the actual locations of the enemy to be attacked as well as future strategies. Many of his followers believe in his spiritual powers and those who do not do so are said to perish. Because of this, many people in Acholi question Kony's spiritual and military objectives, although they believe that he possesses a powerful spiritual power⁷⁵.

But some Acholi people believe that Kony's spirits are foreign and evil and are beyond Acholi comprehension. Some assert that these spirits are violent and cannot therefore be of Acholi origin because "there are no such violent and militant spirits or powers in *jogi* (plural of *jok*-spirit or god) according to Acholi cosmology"⁷⁶. Their argument is also based on the observation that Acholi spiritual powers in *jogi* are targeted by the Kony rebels, just as they were also targeted during the Alice Auma and Severino's rebellions but with a difference as already noted. This shows the dangerous nature of Kony's spiritual adventures to the Acholi society because, although he may be using them to transform the present Acholi society, the cost to Acholi society is too high because of the very destructive implications for the entire Uganda society.

This understanding of the transformation of the conflict under LRA would go to reveal that the handling of the political and military assistance to SPLM/A has been based on ethnic considerations by both the NRM and the SPLM/A. The SPLM/A was for a long time based on Dinka domination of both the political wing and the military of the movement. This domination alienated other ethnic groups,

⁷⁵ Finnström, S [1999]: "Living With Bad Surroundings: War and Uncertainty in Northern Uganda," *Working Papers in Cultural Anthropology*, No. 9, 1999, Department of Cultural Anthropology & Ethnology, Uppsala University, Sweden.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 20.

especially the Nuer, who had a significant military potential. It also alienated the Acholi and Madi elements from Equatoria province. It then became easier for the LRA to link with the Acholi elements in Sudan and through them to get the Sudan government support. Thus by giving support to SPLM/A, which was ethnically divided, the NRM committed a serious political error which could have been avoided and helped to avoid the Sudanese government using Ugandans to side with the government of Sudan against the SPLM/A.

Gersony in his report noted that the people of Acholi were actually supportive of Uganda's military assistance to SPLM because it was the "black man's struggle for emancipation" in Sudan. They felt however that the way they were going about it was wrong and making the price they were paying "unacceptably high." So the Uganda state and government must accept part of the blame for lack of proper political judgement that has plunged the country into darkness. It must also seek reconciliation and accept responsibility. This is in fact an indictment against the NRM government's inability to unite the people of Acholi behind the SPLM/A while at the same time using the SPLM/A to influence the Acholi/Madi ethnic groups in Southern Sudan not to support the LRA, and hence forcing it to negotiate for peace with the government in Uganda.

The NRM has been claiming that it was carrying out a Pan-Africanist duty to support the SPLM/A, but the Acholi people from a Pan-Africanist standpoint also supported SPLM/A. The NRM failed in leadership for it cannot claim to be Pan-Africanist by supporting the SPLM/A in Sudan and yet pursue ethnic divisionism at home in Acholi; nor can it claim to have been Pan-Africanist in Zaire in supporting Kabila against Mobutu while at the same time fuelling ethnic divisions by arming different ethnic groups against one another, as the Human Rights Watch has recently accused them of doing in Ituri region of eastern DRC⁷⁷.

The NRM government must follow the road the SPLM/A has recently taken of reconciling with some of the ethnic groups it had alienated by public apology. Two major peace conferences were organised by civil society and the SPLM/A, which brought together over 800 participants to attend from different ethnic communities of southern Sudan, with the exception of the Kechipo and Jie, who were delayed. We shall refer to these experiences in a later section. Therefore, instead of sticking to the holier than thou attitude of calling the LRA rebels "criminal elements" to be destroyed at any cost, the NRM government should also reflect on their own mistakes. At the conferences, Dr. Riek Machar, an SPLM/A official publicly apologised to the people of Upper Nile and those of Bor County in particular on behalf of himself and the political elite of the SPLM/A for the ethnic divisions he had created which resulted in a lot of in-fighting between the communities.

It is impossible for people to wage a protracted war for almost eighteen years for only "criminal" purposes without a political aim, after all the military

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch [2003]: *Covered In Blood: Ethnically Directed Violence in Ituri region*, Human Rights Watch, New York.

doctrine to which president Museveni contributes, holds that war is the extension of politics by other means. The question is what are these politics? The president should not evade this reality and blame the war on the “criminal elements,” while at the same time accusing “some” Acholi political leaders for giving support to the LRA. If the president is to be believed in saying that such support, if it exists at all, is support given by these leaders, is it for “criminal” reasons? It must be understood that many of these leaders that the president perpetually accuses of supporting Kony include Members of Parliament, former presidential candidates Paul Ssemogerere and Col. Kiiza Besigye and their respective political organisations. Are all these opposition organisations “criminal” in supporting a political settlement? Is the issue of a national conference not part of the solution to the conflict?

It can only be concluded that the president takes this rather illogical position because he does not wish to address the real grievances of the ordinary people of Acholi, which they have made from time to time, resulting in the widening of the conflict. Can the government argue that these grievances are not genuine democratic concerns and that they do not constitute ground for disaffection? Evidence available in the literature suggests that Kony and his LRA resorted to attacking civilian targets after the government poured cold water on the peace initiative promoted by Betty Bigombe. They also blamed the government for mobilising the “Bow and Arrow” groups in 1991 as part of the “Operation North” as an attempt to pit the population against them. The attacks on the LRA by these paramilitary groups led Kony to believe that the population which had originally blessed his going to the bush had turned against him, and hence his attacks against them⁷⁸.

Furthermore, Joseph Kony resorted to abductions because he wanted to increase the numbers of fighters in his army. Being situated in the Sudan, he increasingly found that abductions were the best means of increasing his forces. His army is therefore mainly composed of children who have nevertheless been converted into good fighters for his cause (however one may regard it). In this respect the government has also resorted to recruiting children to serve in Local Defence Units (LDUs), vigilantes and different government supported militias. These include the Kalangala Action Plan of Mutale Kakooza, which the president is linked and has personally gained from their supportive activities during the presidential election of 2001.

Thus no one can any longer argue that the war in Acholi is a war of the ‘remnants’ of the earlier Obote and Amin armies of the past, but an army of children, many of them under age, that have been forced into it, not by the ‘remnants,’ but Kony a product of both the internal rebellions against NRA in Acholi and Alice Lakwena. By calling these children ‘rebels’ we have now added to them another title of being called “international terrorists.” This name-calling does not help in resolving the war. Moreover, the fact that spiritual

⁷⁸ Ibid: chapter six-seven.

forces guide Kony does not mean that he does not know what he is fighting for. It is only that he is using these metaphysical means to express these political demands. This is why in this report we have included the understanding of the metaphysical elements of the conflict to be part of the understanding of the political and military conflict. Betty Bigombe, who extensively negotiated with Kony in 1994, has recently argued that even though Kony has resorted to the use of invisible forces, he nevertheless speaks sense about his intentions. She was quoted as saying:

“Of course Kony speaks sense. I remember one night while I was in the bush talking peace with the leader, I went with him one mile away from the crowd and he spoke perfect sense. The use of spiritual powers does not stop him from speaking sense⁷⁹.”

However one wrong cannot justify another wrong. Both sides to the conflict have committed grievous criminal acts against the people of Acholi. Both cannot be justified on the ground that they are ‘legitimate’ if indeed they are illegal acts. It also does not make much difference whether the rebels or the government- committed them or whether they are committed in the name of “law and order” or against it. In fact the fact that government forces continue to commit such illegal acts may justify rebellion. Crimes committed by the state and its security agencies against humanity are as illegal, if not worse, than those committed by a group of rebels, driven by desperation into rebellion. The German military philosopher, Clausewitz defined war as “the extension of politics by other means”. The real question is what kind of politics are both side to the conflict in Acholi “extending” into the population? This question has a bearing on why the conflict in Acholi has persisted and may provide an answer to how the conflict can be resolved.

6.5 The Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF)

The UPDF is born out of a former guerrilla force called National Resistance Army (NRA). It is an Army that was born of the political crisis of the post-colonial state after the fall of the Amin regime in 1979. It has its origins in a group of young students called Front for National Salvation-FRONASA, which was formed in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, by Yoweri Museveni when he was a student at the University of Dar es Salaam. FRONASA was composed mainly of students from the western part of Uganda and this characteristic came to influence the way NRA was formed.

The war against the regime of Field Marshall Id Amin created a situation of fragmentation of the former Uganda National Liberation Army-UNLA, which was formed in Moshi, as part of the Uganda National Liberation Front-UNLF. The fragmented forces around Yoweri Museveni and FRONASA came to be mainly from the west because of its political orientation as an anti-Obote, anti-northerner

⁷⁹ *Sunday Vision*, August 31, 2003.

force. Young Rwandan elements that had grown up in Uganda joined it, later to become the Popular Resistance Army-PRA in the initial phases of the war in Luwero Triangle. While in the “Triangle,” political negotiations took place between former president, Yusuf Lule’s Uganda Freedom Movement and Army-UFF/A and this resulted in the formation of the National Resistance Movement and Army, which was dominated on the field by the PRA. This alliance, as we have seen, was ethnic-based and its political education in the bush included a strong dose of anti-northernism.

From 1986 when the NRM came to power through a military onslaught on Kampala up to 1995, the NRA operated by its own rules of the game rather than the laws of the land. UPDF became a National Army with the coming into force of the 1995 constitution, but it has remained basically an army around the personality of Yoweri Museveni, who has manipulated it to his political needs. Since 1986, the NRA was expanded to incorporate some of the other rebel groups, which were increasingly brought under the NRM/A command and structures. These rebel groups include UNRF 1, UNRF II, UFF/A, FEDEMO, WNBF, FUNA and elements from UPDA and UPA. Increasingly, the NRM/A consolidated itself as the state of Uganda, assuming all the powers. It has used these powers and resources to define a political system, which it has constitutionalised as a monopolistic system of governance.

Another characteristic of the NRA/UPDF is that it was essentially an army of children (*‘kados’*) and it is these child soldiers who took Kampala against the former UNLA. This experience has never been lost to it for in the northern war, it has continued to recruit child soldiers in the “Bow and Arrow” groups as well as Home Guards and paramilitary groups to fight the LRA. The NRA/UPDF culture of relying on child-soldiers, right from the “bush” days, to fight its wars is currently reflected in the drive to recruit the “Bow and Arrow” groups in different parts of the country where the LRA rebels have appeared. The UPDF is currently recruiting thousands of young people into new units to fight the LRA in Katakwi, Soroti, Lira and Acholi districts. Those recruited are mainly young people who are unemployed in the villages and find joining the war as the only means of making some kind of living. This is a replication of what is going on in Acholiland, where children are the main flag bearers in the fight against the LRA.

As a response to the new LRA attacks in eastern Uganda, the government has begun to rely on “Bow and Arrow” groups, with the possible emergence of warlords in certain localities, which threatens the country breaking up into these localised ethnically based conflicts. The “Bow and Arrow” phenomenon, which reappeared in Soroti and Katakwi, has spread to Lango, where the local people are demanding to be armed in order to defend themselves since the government has failed to defend them. In mid-August, 2003 three ministers of government, including the minister of state for defence, Ruth Nankabirwa, who earlier called on the people to use spirits and witchcraft to fight the rebellion and then withdrew the statement, now called on the people of Acholi “to emulate the Iteso and Langi who have decided to actively participate in the war.” The ministers spoke to people in

displaced camps, local councils and non-governmental organisations to persuade people to join this crusade⁸⁰.

This clearly demonstrated that the government had failed in its responsibility of defending the population and instead was trying to mobilise the victims of the war to engage in war and thus generalising the conflict into a culture of warriorism. This is a worrying development, especially when some leading figures in the government hailing from Katakwi and Soroti have called on their people to “kill any LRA suspect above the age of 18.” They also called on the Iteso to attack the “Acholis.” Thus what begun as an ethnically inspired war in the “Luwero Triangle” would have become a generalised ethnic war in the whole country. From Sudan would have now enveloped the whole country, with no one to blame inside Sudan for the internal conflict.

In his article written specially to refute the *Monitor* newspaper for challenging the recruitment of young people into these groups, the president called the newspaper an “ally” of Kony and an “enemy” of the people of Uganda. He argued that the “Bow and Arrow” groups, together with the Home Guards and Vigilantes of different kinds, now number two million fighters. He called these and other *chaka muchaka* trained people, the “reserve army” of the UPDF. He claimed that the main UPDF forces guard the cities, urban areas, airports, etc. while the reserve army fights the rebels in rural areas⁸¹. This is precisely what the LRA are also doing. Abduct and recruit the children into their fighting forces while the older soldiers are given command positions.

In Acholi, the local defence units (LDUs) or Home Guards have become the main fighting forces against the rebels and therefore they act as shields against attacks on the UPDF. Moreover they help close the gap created by “ghost soldiers” within the UPDF and give cover to the stealing of monies meant for these “ghost soldiers.” This means that the objective of the UPDF in the northern war theatre is self-preservation rather than defeating the rebels. This proves that despite its claims of invincibility, the UPDF is in actual fact a decaying force. It is riddled by corruption, junk equipment, ghost soldiers, lack of accommodation for the soldiers, poor pay and as well as lack of food for the fighters. This has made the UPDF a mockery compared to armies in the region. Lack of morale is an issue that is secretly guarded from the public.

This has created the need to create an elite force within the UPDF called the “Presidential Protection Brigade” (PPB) led by Major Muhozi, the president’s son. This is a repeat of former president Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. The PPB is now becoming the Presidential Guard, which has ballooned from a battalion into a Brigade. This elite army is being facilitated better than the mainstream army. This has created problems of low morale in the armed forces. Lack of arms and ammunition is a constant complaint yet budgets are slashed with the excuse of getting money to fund military operations. The slogan about the need to modernise

⁸⁰ The Monitor, August 14, 2003.

⁸¹ *The Monitor*, September 3, 2003.

the army has become an empty slogan. There is confusion in the army as command structures and systems of administration are not used and followed. The president has taken over all the functions and major decisions concerning the army in total disregard of the law and the institution.

Although originally, it was said that NRA was to be a productive army, the evidence available shows that it has become a parasite on scarce national resources instead of being productive and contributing to economic growth and development. The attempts made to get the army to do business and to engage in farming and commercial activities have all become the means through which corruption is being promoted.

VII. CAUSES, GOVERNANCE, AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE CONFLICT

7.1 Causes of the Conflict

The issue of the root or fundamental causes of the conflict in the north of Uganda continues to be debated as the conflict becomes more and more complicated. A conflict always has a trigger point. The root causes have a bearing on the understanding of the dynamics, variables and constants in any conflict. This gives a picture of the driving force of the conflict. Sustenance of enemy images is what keeps the conflict going while at the same time creating new causes of conflict, building on top of old ones. That is why it becomes complex because the earlier causes continue to be unresolved while new ones are created.

The issue of the fundamental causes of the conflict has itself become a political issue. This is reflected in a number of ways. Firstly, there is a group of people who have felt constrained to enquire into these causes of the conflict because of the prevalence of an atmosphere of intimidation and fear. For instance, the Acholi community in Botswana in their presentation to Kacoke Madit in 1997 were constrained to go into the causes of the conflict on the ground that “anyone attempting to analyse the underlying causes of the war would sooner or later get entangled into politics and all its consequences including finger pointing and apportioning of blame.⁸²” This forced the group to go into “finding solutions” and their way forward. They wanted Acholi to turn inwards and “take a leaf from the Jews since history repeats itself with consistent notoriety.”

By avoiding to get entangled in ‘ordinary’ politics of ‘finger-pointing and apportioning blame’ they decided to opt out of it in order to get on with another model of politics. According to their memorandum, the NRM was “gaining by portraying the Acholi as being a threat to the rest of Uganda” because they argue that Uganda “is synonymous with Obote ... so that the rest of Uganda gangs (up) against us.” The ‘solution’ they adopted was to find solace in the Jewish experience, which can never be replicated since, although history repeats itself, it never does so “with consistent notoriety” in exactly the same way. This demonstrates the danger of avoiding facing the fundamental causes to the conflict and hence trying to find answers outside the political system, which must be avoided unless the attempt at national reconciliation are totally avoided. In that case the people of Acholi would be entitled to the right to self-determination. But that would require a consistent pursuance of the root causes to the conflict and not avoiding ‘finger pointing and apportioning of blame.’

⁸² Dr. Wilson J. Oloya: “Perspective on the Acholi Conflict and Suggestions on the Way Forward,” Kacoke Madit, 4-5th April 1997.

In 1997, the Human Rights Watch in their report: *The Scars of Death*, argued that the intensity of the conflict lent “ a certain urgency to the problem of understanding the roots and sources of the conflict.” It added that during their investigations, the research team had “heard many tentative theories about why the conflict continues, but few people were willing to hazard a definitive explanation, and the rebels themselves are a black box.” They had listened to “stories” and “counter-stories,” “some more persuasive than others, but none ultimately satisfying.” The team, perhaps mystified by this situation, nevertheless wanted to make sense of some kind by concluding that:

“This, however does not mean that there is no reason for the violence; it instead suggests that the reasons are many and deep, and fully disentangling them may not be possible in the end⁸³.”

With this pessimism, the research team attempted to investigate the “roots” and “sources” of the conflict but stopped at appearances and quotations of views from disparate groups of people with no attempt to analyse and synthesize them. In the end the report ended with a number of “calls” to both sides, which have never been heeded.

The issue of the root and underlying causes has therefore not run away. It has continued to engage even the on-the-spot organisations that are actively engaged in helping the communities face the consequences and effects of the conflict. In 2000, 50 Civil Society organisations (CSOs) in Uganda formed a loose coalition called the Civil Society Organisation for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) to promote peace in northern Uganda. They came to the correct conclusion that it was necessary to create conditions for debate on the underlying causes of the conflict “to promote the idea that to resolve the conflict and thus make peace, the root causes of the conflict needs to be identified and dealt with.” According to the group, this “would mean looking beyond the surface and addressing the substantive and emotional issues, the interests and needs of the parties that are at the root of the conflict⁸⁴.” In order to contribute to this debate and understanding the group debated and produced an analysis document on the root causes of the war, which has informed much of their advocacy and lobby activities aimed at finding peace in the region.

Those in the government have tended to argue that the causes to the conflict have been over-explored and that in their view the real issue is to find a solution by concentrating on how the rebellion can be brought to an end. Those who keep on raising the issue of causes are then either labelled “academic” or, where their explanation of the conflict points to the

⁸³ Human Rights Watch [1997]: *The Scars of Death*, op. cit. pp. 31-2.

⁸⁴ CSOPNU [2003]: *The Role of Civil Society Organisations in Northern Uganda Conflict: Experiences of the Civil Society Organisation for Peace in Northern Uganda-CSOPNU*; Paper presented at the One-Day Dialogue on Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution in Northern Uganda, 22nd July 2003.

government side, are accused of being collaborators, which has now become worse than being categorised as a “terrorist.” Yet others have argued that the causes have to be explored on the ground that these “causes” are being created and recreated in a dynamic manner as the conflict becomes ever more complex. This creates a situation whereby complications to the fundamental causes get defined as new causes with the result that the underlying and root causes are forgotten or brushed aside as “no longer relevant to the dynamics of the conflict.” Yet in the official documents of the government and those of the UPDF, they continue to give their own rather one-sided explanations about the causes and factors contributing to the perpetuation of the conflict.

Nevertheless, the demand that the fundamental causes must be explored even further has persisted. Recently some attention to this issue emerged at higher levels. It is now being argued that the root causes of the conflict have to be seen as part and parcel of the process of resolving the conflict. For instance, the US delegation to Uganda in April 2003 issued a statement in which it urged the Uganda government and civil society “to work together to address the underlying causes of the conflict in the north⁸⁵.”

Secondly, perhaps baffled by the failure of the many peace initiatives that have been undertaken to find a peaceful resolution to the ever-deepening conflict, the Uganda Parliament also found itself reverting to the issue of causes. In a spirited debate on the ministry of defence statement on the security situation in the country that took place on 29th April 2003, a motion was moved by Hon. Omara Atubo, on “Peace and Security in the Country”. It was to the effect that government “should address the root causes of the persistent rebellion and cattle rustling” in the country. The resolution passed instructed the Sessional Committee on Defence and Internal Affairs to regularly “monitor the implementation of these resolutions” and report back to the whole house every three months on the state of affairs as well as on the steps that are taken by government to implement the resolutions⁸⁶.

All these concerns go along way to suggest that although the causes of the conflict in northern Uganda have been investigated, researched and documented, there is still a lagging feeling that they have not been fully explored and that further investigation of these fundamental and root causes should be undertaken if the conflicts in the country are to be tackled. These demands go back to the beginnings of the conflict. For instance, the participants of the first conference on the northern Uganda conflict organised by a group of peacemakers in Makerere in 1987, which has been referred to above, in their conclusions pointed to the following factors as contributing to the war:

First, the authoritarian character of governance in the country perpetuated by British colonial rule, which had not been overcome by the post-independence governments; secondly, militarism which

⁸⁵ US Delegation: Statement of the United States Delegation, Kampala, June 2003.

⁸⁶ Uganda Parliament: Resolution of Parliament on Peace and Security in the country, Office of the Clerk of Parliament, Reference AB 493/263/01 dated 11th June 2003.

reinforced authoritarian rule; thirdly, the prevalence of economic injustices which arose out of government failure to redress economic imbalances between the north and the south; fourthly, the adoption of a free market economy that favoured foreign and local exploiters of the poor; fifthly, the lack of resolve to fight corruption; and finally, the social and cultural oppression that was characterised by nepotism, ethnic chauvinism, sectarianism and discrimination against the Acholi in particular. These conclusions have in fact been borne out by the experience Uganda has gone through under all regimes, including the NRM and constitutes the basis of the causes to conflicts in Uganda.

The research team found these concerns present within the general population during the research. Indeed, there was a section among the NGO stakeholders who are part of the coalition of this project who felt the same. The responses from the general public were varied on this issue since many of the respondents were from the villages with very little knowledge of what went on at the national level amongst the leaders in Kampala and exiles. Nevertheless, the responses give a glimpse of the general feelings amongst ordinary people. The tendency has been to expound on the compounding causes in attempts to highlight the severity of the situation they are entangled in. Pointers to the fundamental causes of the conflict could be gleaned from the following reasons given by the people in the camps:

- i) The lack of fundamental unity amongst Uganda's various ethnic diversities is a recipe for conflict.
- ii) Many Acholi UNLA soldiers feared reprisals after the Tito Okello *coup d'etat*, and possible atrocities allegedly committed in Buganda and refused to respond to government calls to report. For instance, in August 1986, an order was given on radio by the new NRM government to the effect that all former soldiers must report to the army headquarters within ten days without fail. This was reminiscent of the Idi Amin regime when a similar order was issued over radio, and all those who heeded it were slaughtered in cold blood. The former soldiers then decided not to be led to the slaughterhouse like chicken and opted to defend themselves like men.
- iii) The killings of key Acholis of the former army by government troops instilled a lot of fear in the others. For example, the whereabouts of Kilama II are still asked by the rebels to date, producing him would be a green light for them to come out safely.
- iv) Museveni did not like the Acholi people right from the beginning. Some believe that he himself participated in targeting the Acholi soldiers even in the earlier phase of the 1979 Tanzania-Ugandan war.
- v) There was massive looting of people's wealth in Acholi by the NRA who were masquerading as liberators after overthrowing the Okello regime. They masochistically plundered live cattle, removed iron sheets from permanent houses, extracted steel doors and windows, machinery like

grinding mills, vehicles, tractors and implements, and other valued property. They did this with measured arrogance that the “backward” people of Acholi must have plundered those items and thus don’t deserve them.

- vi) Rampant incidences of rape by the NRA soldiers of young Acholi girls, wives, and mothers; and the indisputable acts of sodomy on some hapless Acholi young men in full view of their wives and children, sowed a relentless quest for rebellion. These acts, in whatever time and age, are the ultimate test of manhood to an Acholi. To add salt to injury, these ‘highly disciplined’ NRA soldiers went ahead to defecate in people’s water and food pots, in millet, posho, and other preserved dry foodstuffs. At this stage, another passionate Acholi idiom was invoked: “*Acholi deg anywar*”, meaning, “the Acholi do not condone treachery.”
- vii) There is an endemic fear by Museveni for any leadership challenge, which drives him to eliminate opposition proponents. This prompted the rebels to protect themselves and to protect others in their home areas.
- viii) The emergence of Alice Lakwena’s spiritual approach that led to the Paibona split between the Kony faction and the Kilama group that joined government, was a reflection of the feeling that the Acholi people had been let down by not only the NRM/A, but also by the Acholi UNLA soldiers who also behaved badly towards the people.

Other respondents had several views as to the root causes of the Northern Uganda conflict. They asserted that this was a political war being fought to ensure that the political and economic leadership of this country should be taken away from the Nilotic people in the north and vested permanently in Bantu people to the south of Uganda. The plan to oust northerners in their view began in 1981 and has continued since. The people of Acholi were and still are being perceived by the designers of the conflict as the main stumbling block to their plan of dominating the country. They continued that the British popularised the myth that the people of Acholi were great fighters. It is known that they are straightforward, stubborn and touchy. Hence the new rulers of Uganda think that one way of ensuring their hegemony in this country is to eliminate Acholi military capability forever.

Some people have no idea as to what could have caused the war. They woke up one morning to find that the war was on their doors. To others the war came from Kampala and hence the elders tried to come up with answers but they failed. A woman noted that the argument between government, the rebels and the civilians could have triggered the war. Respondents expressed concern about the lack of national unity in Uganda as a probable cause of the conflict. Ethnic differences, tribalism are said to have caused or fuelled the conflict. Bad governance was also pointed out as a fundamental factor to the conflict. They pointed out that the war started with Tito Okello and Milton Obote. One respondent said: “the war is like someone who fights with a friend and comes back home to harass his wife. We are

being forced and killed to fight the war. This is a serious war and it is being fought over serious matters.”

Many respondents argued that at first, the Acholi received the NRA/FEDEMO soldiers well but cautiously. After a short while, the government soldiers started harassing the people by stealing and robbing their animals, chickens and building materials. They could not understand why this was happening. There was also intense hostile propaganda against the Acholi over radio broadcasts and newspapers, all of which were owned and dominated by people to the south of Uganda. The Acholi were called backward, primitive, and murderers. They were accused of having been responsible for atrocities against Bantu people during the war in the “Luwero Triangle.” They had to defend the dignity of their people.

The rest has become history. The old suspicions still persist. One rebellion has led to another, usually with increased brutality. Different rebel leaders and factions adopted different techniques to wage the war of resistance. Some attacked government troops positions, others carried out ambushes on troop movements, business, and even private transportation. The war in Acholi was caused by bad government actions against the Acholi population. The government sent soldiers to destroy the lives of the people without giving any good reasons. The conflict in northern Uganda was caused by mistrust and antagonism between the NRA and ex-UNLA soldiers from Acholi. There were several rebel groups that emerged in the early years of the Northern Conflict. Those who were present then can remember the names and leaders of these groups as they used to hear about them and in some cases the sequence of their existence. They also talk of how the conflict was then, thereby throwing some light on its evolution.

7.2 Governance

The other way in which the ordinary people tried to bring out their feelings on the fundamental causes of the conflict was their feelings about Museveni as a person and leader. This is in fact the issue of governance. As already indicated above, there was a strong feeling of distrust towards the president, which seems to be reflected in the rejection of his candidature whenever he has put himself as a presidential candidate. This mistrust seems to be deeply embedded in their experiences in the camps due to his policies. Hence the president’s position is contested, which in turn makes him to react negatively towards the Acholi people in what emerges as a vicious circle. Because of his perceived bad leadership he is regarded as “deceiving us-*Gweno ni Ogwang ob ino-*” meaning “lulling and rendering him ineffective.”

For this reason, many Acholi people are beginning to reason that if peace is to be realised, President Museveni has to get out of power and that there will be no more war. “So long as Museveni is in power the UPDF will continue killing the people of Acholi.” Another respondent answered in anguish: “We want to be helped, we are worried, our children are dead, there is no education, there is no transport, and how do we survive is our lamentation and cry.” Thus the issue of governance is clearly linked to the causes and complicating of the conflict.

The loss of property, especially cattle, in the early days of the war, is also linked to the issue of governance. “We had animals and all our animals have been taken by the Karimojong and the NRA. It was by raiding, and the use of force and sometimes killings-” one respondent argued. According to others, the NRM/UPDA never took serious steps to follow up and recover the animals.” It was the LCs who recruited them in consultation with the LC5 who brought the guns to fight but they were not trained to fight the Karimojong and the government has left the duty of protecting the people to the untrained Acholi units. They believe the government should disarm the Karimojong so that they are not able to harass the neighbours, but this was not done.

The people also perceive the behaviour of the NRA/UPDF to be an aspect of bad governance or lack of it, which goes to compound the conflict. The following observations about the behaviour of the UPDF were made:

- The NRA committed a lot of atrocities and this made many people prefer to remain in the bush due to the armies’ brutality;
- Even to date a number of women are raped by the UPDF. Due to the people’s fears some of these cases are not even taken to court or if they are, no action is taken;
- The common people have lost power of governance. It is with the army;
- The UPDF soldiers sometimes pretend to be rebels in order to carry out massive looting and blame it on the rebels;
- What the UPDF is doing is not clear for sometimes they are killing people and saying it is the rebels who are killing;
- The rebels come and abduct children but the soldiers take their own time to follow them up. There is a hidden agenda in this conflict and the behaviour of the government

The local committees (LCs) were also perceived in different ways. They were seen as having been of some use in handling cases in the preliminary stages, otherwise they did not have power to dispose of the cases and they instead merely gave letters to refer such cases to higher authorities where they disappeared. They were also seen as being less corrupt than the government and the army. However many people feel that LCs are not funded. The committees don’t receive feedback when they forward problems to the higher authority. Religious divisions between the LCs tend to affect decision-making in the system.

Fear and raids from the Karimojong cattle rustlers, wars and other difficulties, had replaced peace, which existed in Acholiland before colonialism. The present leadership was regarded as bad leadership because of not controlling killings, which was a daily occurrence in Acholi. On the contrary, political parties in the 1960s did not have these problems, which are seen as associated with the movement system. The NRM Government was failing to govern democratically, hence this conflict. It appeared that the distrust of the president was seen from the angle of governance and the way the people viewed the political system. This was repeated in the demand that Museveni should leave power to another person so that

they can get an alternative government to end the war. If he does not leave then there will only be death, may argued.

The “political systems” is also viewed as an aspect complicating the conflict. For instance, “movement” and “party” issues are considered to have done much to widen this conflict. They argue that it is obvious that the NRM does not want parties to exist. That is why president Museveni wants to stand again in 2006. .” One respondent said:

“We have nowhere to turn to now. This crisis is now coming to 20 years and this camp is the only place we shall be killed in. Our cries should be sent to the whole world. Talking will not solve anything now except leadership change. There is no need of over staying in power.”

All these reactions and explanations reflect one single point: the people of Acholi have been brought down by the impact of the rebellion and the government’s response to it. The people are caught in between the government and its claims to the mystique of state sovereignty and monopoly of violence, on the one hand, and the other mystique of resistance by the LRA caught up in the metaphysical world of Acholi Jogi and Christian dogma, on the other. To “disentangle” this complexity of power and powerlessness on all sides, requires a comprehensive response that addresses each of the complexities at the same time. But before we attempt such a way forward, it is important to examine the complicating and compounding factors to the conflict and one of these is political and lack of democracy in the country.

Human Rights Watch described the kind of conditions that could not have led to such a genuine democratic system⁸⁷. It observed that instead of addressing the democratic concerns that led to the declaration of war against the government, the NRM had instead put in place a movement system that excluded all political organisations threatening to turn itself into a one-party state, fusing its political organs with those of the state. By so doing it had exempted itself from state regulation of its activities since they were seen as activities of the state instead of a political organisation. In its recommendations, the Human Rights Watch suggested:

“The NRM and the ‘movement’ structures should be considered a political organisation and regulated in the same fashion as all other political organisations or parties: they should not be exempted from regulations governing political activity. The government should not fund the NRM, its secretariat, the aligned ‘movement’ structures, or political campaigns of NRM candidates unless equivalent funding is provided to other political organisations. A strict division should be made between the functioning of the government and the NRM” [p.9].

⁸⁷ Human Rights Watch [1999]: *Hostile to Democracy: The Movement System and Political Repression in Uganda*, Human Rights Watch, New York, London, Brussels.

These recommendations were not heeded so that even the referendum held under the 1995 constitution could never have been fair to reflect the views of ordinary Ugandans on the way they should be governed. Indeed, as the HRW pointed out in this report, the “virtual silence” of the international community and the “pouring” of millions of dollars of aid to Uganda, had served as an endorsement of restrictive movement political system. These countries, especially the UK and other countries, had expressed support for the referendum when they should have known that such a referendum would merely be a vote on the continued violation of the basic human rights of Ugandans. Such a referendum, it added, was unlikely to take place in a free and fair environment. This is what actually happened come referendum 2000⁸⁸. With this endorsement, the movement system was assured of victory and their monopoly of power was assured. This was because, according to the same HRW report:

“In the view of some western leaders, President Yoweri Museveni is a crucial leader in the Great Lakes Region and a power broker in regional conflicts, including helping ending the 1994 Rwandan genocide and supporting Zairian rebels in their struggle to topple the Mobutu government in 1997. His role in containing the Islamist government of Sudan through support to the Sudanese Peoples’ Liberation Army (SPLA) is also in line with the policy objectives of some western leaders” [p.8]

Thus it can be seen here that the UK, USA and other similar countries, were still pursuing their ‘divide and rule’ ideology in Uganda by backing particular individuals for their objectives. They poured aid into Uganda to propel such leaders and reinforce their ethnic-oriented politics across borders within Uganda and the Sudan for their own ends. In so doing, they also endorsed the conflicts underway in the region, preferring to support some openly while they supported others indirectly. A total constitutional dictatorship had been imposed on the country with the result that the constitution instead of being the guardian of the interests of ordinary people was turned into an instrument of dictatorship over them by the state acting as a political agency.

Only recently, on the petition of Paul Ssemogerere, the leader of the Democratic Party, did one of the judges of the Constitutional Court feel constrained to declare the NRM to be a one-party structure, which was prohibited by the same constitution. Even then this opinion of the court has been challenged and the government has appealed to the Supreme Court. Although the NRM had proposed “opening up the political space” to allow parties to function freely, it still holds on to power until 2005 when it says another referendum will be held to legitimise the

⁸⁸ Nabudere, D.W [2000]: Referendum 2000: Winners and Losers, Monitor Publishers, Kampala

parties. Such a referendum could instead come with other requests to turn the movement political system into something akin to a one-man dictatorship.

VIII. FACTORS COMPOUNDING AND COMPLICATING THE CONFLICT

Apart from the jumble of opinions relating to the fundamental causes of the conflict, the ordinary people living in the camps expressed an array of suggestions as to the compounding factors complicating the hydra-headed war. Some of these factors are viewed from an economic angle, others from a political angle and yet others from the social, cultural and religious angles. The complications also have other dimensions such as persistence of the camps and the linkage of the conflict to external factors as well as the continuing abduction of young people for training by the LRA. These are also related to the problems of law enforcement, the judicial system and the understanding of the issues both at national, regional and international levels.

8.1 The Economic Factors

From the economic angle, the conflict is compounded by the increasing impoverishment of the Acholi community. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics estimates that almost 67 per cent of the population in northern Uganda in general live below the "poverty line." The main cause of poverty in this region is said to be the persistent insecurity prevailing in the region, especially Acholi and Karamoja. This poverty is not due to the uneven development of the country that colonial policy promoted and which has been cited by some people as forming the underlying causes to the conflict. The current poverty is the result of concerted looting that took place immediately after the NRM/A came to power in 1986, which resulted in extensive theft of domestic animals such as cattle, goats, chickens, food granaries, and in some instances, the destruction of whole households by the government forces, the Karamoja cattle-rustlers as well as the recurring insurgencies in Acholi.

Gersony refers to data provided by veterinary officers which indicate that the cattle population of Gulu and Kitgum in 1985 was about 285,000. The cattle raids and looting removed almost the entire herd. In 1997 -- ten years after the raids and the looting -- the combined herd for both districts was estimated at 5,000 heads, less than 2% the earlier numbers. The replacement cost of the plundered cattle herd alone was estimated to be close to US\$25 million. He notes that

“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 times, sickness and old age.”

The self-respect, which attached to cattle ownership and the cultural functions upon which the exchange of cattle had relied were disrupted. “It was one of the greatest

economic and morale blows of the war.” These happenings have led to the impoverishment of the entire area with no possibility of the rural economy being reactivated because of the continued conflict.

In terms of the human cost, the impoverishment of the people has led to extensive malnutrition of both children and the adults resulting in high mortality rates, especially of the children. Thus, apart from the abductions by the LRA rebels and the enhanced recruitment of children in government-controlled armies and different kinds of paramilitary groups, the children of Acholi can be said to be the main bearers of the suffering in Acholi. As for the babies born under these conditions, their growth has resulted in high levels of stunting in the country with figures of up to 52 percent of stunted children compared to the national average of 38 per cent. Poverty is also said by the respondents to contribute to some of the children joining the rebellion or the armed forces. The people who were interviewed alleged that the recruitment of young children as home guards, who are ill-trained and taken to fight the rebels, is a cynical ploy to finish off the Acholi people, since they end up fighting their abducted brothers. Yet abject poverty leads these young men to join the home guards with the hope of earning a living, they said.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has estimated that in the Anaka and Pabbo camps in Gulu district, malnutrition of the encamped population is at the levels of 31 and 18 per cent of the population in terms of global acute malnutrition. The continued conflict has had the consequence of worsening the food supply situation. According to the 2001 report of the International Red Cross (ICRC), out of the five IDP camps in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts, there had been a drastic fall in food cultivation of cereals such as maize and rice due to the displacement of the population in these areas. This has resulted in over 800,000 of the population confined in the IDP camps becoming dependent on food aid provided by WFP. Whilst only 110,000 to 240, 000 people were being provided with 30 per cent of their food requirements in 1996, the WFP estimates that by the year 2003 something like one million people needed such support for 100 per cent of their food requirement. In May 2003 Action Against Hunger (ACF-USA) completed a nutritional survey of 21 IDP camps in Gulu district, which revealed that 88 per cent of the camp population depended entirely on food aid. All this was the result of the fact that the people were not allowed to have access to their land to grow the crops.

Apart from the people living in camps, there are those who live in abject poverty in the areas surrounding the towns. Some of them flock around the missions and churches to seek refuge there because of the deplorable conditions in the camps. Since the churches are unable to feed them, they become a permanent sore in these areas where they cannot even be provided with food aid. When the congestion and health conditions become unmanageable, the church authorities turn to evicting them just to keep the churches to function. Those evicted end up becoming squatters in squalid locations around the Municipality and small towns, constructing any kind of shelter in any available space, ranging from sacks, reeds and grass thatched huts to accommodate themselves. Since they are allowed to do so at the mercy of the incumbent landowners and authorities, there is no formal structure of assistance

given to them either from government or the NGOs. The situation is made worse by the fact that those assembled in these kinds of areas are not recognised by the government for food assistance. As already pointed out above, this situation has been worsened by the new phenomenon of “night commuters” of children living camps in the evenings to seek security in the nearby towns at night.

The effect of these developments on the people of Acholi is some times indescribable. For instance:

- The number of mentally disturbed people has greatly increased in the town area due to all forms of stress, and others are forced to live like mad people in order to scavenge the dustbins;
- In case of death, there is nowhere to bury the corpses. The relatives face a hard task in finding burial space. Although considerations are normally made for dead children because their graves are shallow and occupy little space, yet even these have been reported to become prey to pigs and dogs, which somehow exhume the bodies;
- Prostitution, previously an abomination in Acholiland, has taken on new heights amongst the young girls in order for them to survive. The soldiers are the ones who perpetuate this trade, especially around pay days, and this has caused many marriages to break up and HIV infections to increase. Statistics from Lacor Hospital show that 38% of the pregnant women are HIV positive. Rape and defilement have contributed to these high rates of infection;
- Children are not pursuing proper education. This is because the schools lack qualified teachers and scholastic materials. The only attraction of the children to school is the WFP school-feeding programme. The children go school at lunch time to have meals and then depart;
- Patience is running out for those who allowed the squatters on their land; and
- There is a strong suggestion that, instead of food assistance distributed by WFP and others to the IDPs, this food should instead be given to soldiers who should then be positioned after every five miles in the villages, so that people are allowed to go back to their homes and revive their economy.

The donors have recently acknowledged the poverty factor to be one of the elements compounding war, yet their responses to this problem have been inadequate. The World Bank funds provided for Acholi are siphoned off to other districts, giving the people of Acholi the impression that the war is aimed at denying them any development. Even where genuine attempts are made to address the poverty issue, such attempts cannot succeed in a region caught up in conflicts. On the other hand, there is a common view that the war has been privatised by the army leadership and is being handled as business on the part of both the government and some rebels.

A former MP from Acholi who was interviewed in Kampala asked the investigator whether he had seen any budget anywhere for the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The implication was that the official budget of the war in the north was the budget for pursuing the war in the DRC, whose benefits went into private pockets of the top military officers and some businessmen and politicians.

The war was secretly handled as a booming business for these army officers who were building big mansions in Kampala and their home areas. An example was given of the former Army Commander building a one billion shilling hotel in Kasese. The looting of resources in addition to the theft of funds in the army was cited as an example of the privatisation of the war before the Porter Commission on the plundering of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This was seen as part of the complicating factors to the war in the north of Uganda. Indeed, Lt. Gen. Salim Saleh, Presidential adviser on the north has agreed that the frustration to peace efforts also comes from the military: *“They think they can end this conflict militarily”*⁸⁹.” Indeed, the soldiers are not alone. Addressing the nation on this issue on 22nd May 2003, President Museveni himself made a strong case for defeating Kony militarily (see appendix I), which goes to back the hypothesis of this research.

The UPDF High Command recently acknowledge the presence of large numbers of “ghost soldiers” who have been on the UPDF pay register for a long time. The issue of “ghost soldiers,” like that of “ghost teachers,” has surfaced from time to time, but nothing has happened despite attempts being made to investigate and remove them from the registers. They have persisted and become a matter of national security and concern. This has become a political culture of late post-colonial Uganda. In the field of governance, the strategy of creating “ghosts” in voting registers has been one of the ways through which the NRM has remained in power during recent elections under the “No Party” democracy. With this culture, wars have not become politics by other means, but the means of livelihood and political survival by those holding weapons and state power. Billions of shillings are drawn to pay soldiers who do not exist, just as some candidates are elected with vast “majorities” which do not exist.

This may also explain why the rebellion has persisted the lack of an effective and dedicated fighting force to pursue the rebels and protect the people in the IDP camps. Perhaps this is the reason why the ministry of defence has recently shown some concern on the issue of “ghosts” soldiers. On 27th July 2003, it was announced that the President had, at the army High Command meeting held at the army headquarters, ordered an inquiry into “ghost soldiers” on the army payroll. According to the newspaper report, the directive arose out of the “charged meeting” chaired by the President in which “senior officers accused each other of “creating” ‘ghosts’ in the army. They cited this as “one of the factors frustrating the efforts to defeat Mr Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army rebels in northern Uganda”⁹⁰.” In the press release that accompanied the announcement of this inquiry, it was announced that the High Command had “received credible reports about the existence of ghost soldiers on the payroll.”⁹¹

But it is important to observe here that one of the factors that has made this war to become invincible in the recruitment of children by the UPDF into Home

⁸⁹ Quoted by IRIN in *The New Vision*, May 12, 2003, p.21.

⁹⁰ *The Sunday Monitor*, July 20, 2003.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Guards to fill this gap of the “ghost soldiers.” These young men are not paid a salary, but are given a gun to fight the rebels, thereby justifying the salaries of the ghost soldiers that are stolen in this way. This is tantamount to using these young men as a shield between the LRA and the UPDF official army. The strategy also works to pit the Acholi people against one another in that it is basically the Home Guards that engage in fighting the LRA fighters who are composed mainly of abducted children. This has effectively turned the war in Acholiland into a war of Acholi children fought in the name of the UPDF and the LRA. Thus the issue of “ghost soldiers” is part of the strategy of perpetuating the war and at the same time gaining financially and materially from it by the UPDF top commanders.

Yet this is not the first time that “credible reports” had been received. There had been earlier reports going as far back as 1999 in which the army had not just received reports, but had itself unearthed a syndicate of UPDF top officers in eastern DRC where more than shs 400 million had been lost through “ghost soldiers” payments. Indeed, the former army commander of the UPDF, Maj. Gen. James Kazini, had himself acknowledged that when the former Rwandan soldiers in the NRA left the NRA to return home and fight the army of president Juvenile Habyarimana of Rwanda in 1990, their names were not removed from the army payroll. But that was not big news because the fact that their names were not removed from the register did not explain why the money put against their names should have necessarily disappeared. The crucial issue was that someone was taking their money and signing for it. In addition, there were thousands of soldiers who had died in action in the different theatres of war. Their names have continued to be on the payroll because those responsible for removing them have used them to draw the money for themselves. These officers have a real economic interest in prolonging the war. According to the above report, “informed sources” told the Sunday Monitor, “some top officers continued to sign for the money of about 4000 deserters⁹².” The report continued that apart from the ghost soldiers “the army has lost billions of shillings through purchases of junk military hardware, rotten foodstuffs, undersize uniforms and outright embezzlement by paymasters.”

This issue has assumed scandal proportions and has infected the moral of the ordinary soldiers who fight and die for a war in which the senior officers make money on their names on the payroll after their death with no gratuity or pension paid to their relatives. Over ten army paymasters have “disappeared” with billions of shillings and dollars and no attempt has ever been made to find them, which raises the question of whether indeed they have ever “disappeared.” In mid-May 1999, one Captain Dan Byakutaga who was paymaster for the “Operation Safe Haven” in eastern DRC “disappeared with a payroll of shs 1.6 billion for the soldiers fighting in the DRC. The reporter who was given this information by the “informed sources” also confirmed that the case of Dan Byakutaga was one of the profile cases that drew attention, but there were “more than thirty paymasters (who) have disappeared

⁹² *Ibid.*

with cash for soldiers⁹³.” This matter is of great importance to national security and it is one of the compelling factors why President Museveni runs up and down to the war front to raise the morale of soldiers otherwise under moral pressure to fight a very unjust and profitable war to the UPDF top officers.

At the same time, it is alleged that the LRA is equally interested in prolonging the conflict in order to benefit from the military, financial and diplomatic assistance it receives from the Sudanese government and some Arab countries as well as a number of Islamic fundamentalist organisations that bankroll them. They are also accused of having looted communities and abducted children who were sold as slaves to the Arabs in Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, as well as using them as sex slaves for their top commanders. These officers are placed in a privileged position which they do not want to abandon. The Public Relations Officer of the UPDF in Gulu also argued that there were many Acholi individuals and businessmen in Gulu who were moving about in slippers, while at the same time benefiting from the collaboration with the LRA rebels. He argued that these people had built bungalows on the economic advantages they gained out of their support to the LRA. The UPDF Spokesman, Major Shaban Bantariza also asserted that Joseph Kony owns shops in Gulu as well as property in Southern Sudan⁹⁴.

It therefore appears that the conflict in Acholi has become a self-sustaining and self-propelling one in which several people and countries have a vested interest. Most civil servants and other people in leadership positions in Acholi have shifted their family bases outside the region of conflict, so they do not feel the real pinch of the situation and often merely gloat over the issues. The media propaganda by government operatives, both on radio and other electronic news media, which perpetually announce the number of rebels killed and the rescue of abducted children seems to invite even more attacks and abductions. Such claims have become rituals and not fact. There is real fear among the population for reporting or expressing useful opinions on the conflict lest they be labelled rebel collaborators and face the wrath of the military intelligence operatives. They enjoy surrounding up unsuspecting innocent people in order to portray themselves as performing very serious work fighting the rebels. They survive on this false image of themselves.

Thus the IDPs live in perpetual fear of both the rebels and the military operatives who are supposed to protect them. The people fear more the army operatives because if they go out of the camps, they are likely to be victimised and accused of being “collaborators.” There seems to be an endemic deliberate culture of inaction on the side of the military. At times mock pursuits are carried out long after the rebels have had a field day. Those who claim to co-ordinate the peace efforts and link Kony to the government side are regarded as being corrupt and doing it for monetary gains only. There is apparent lack of sincerity in handling the situation by the government side, because both sides in the conflict commit atrocities against the population.

⁹³ *The Sunday Monitor*, July 20, 2003.

⁹⁴ *The Monitor*, September 17th, 2003.

The continuation of the war has had a devastating impact not only in Acholi region, but also on the entire Ugandan economy. Various studies have been undertaken which have demonstrated this negative impact. At the level of the district, the impact has been shown above. At a national level, CSOPNU study referred to above, estimated that the cost of the LRA conflict to Uganda as a whole was about 3% of the GDP (\$ 1.3 billion) since the war with the LRA began. This is more than one-half of the annual economic growth rates of the country.

This has increasingly had a negative impact on the whole economy generally. This cost has added up to a total expenditure of some \$ 100 million per year. The study also found that major investment projects in Acholi were being held up until the conflict was resolved. This means that those who are not interested in the economic revival of the Acholi economy are also the ones dragging on the war since they benefit from the resources that would have gone to the projects in Acholiland, which are converted in war budgets. This was amply demonstrated when the government instead, ordered Parliament to cut 23 per cent of the national budget allocated to line ministries for addition to the defence budget because of "Operation Iron Fist."

8.2 Social and Cultural Factors

Some social scientists have located the factors causing or complicating the war in the north within the Acholi culture itself. Although this is not the main thesis of his monograph, Professor Gingyera-Pinywa has called on the Acholi people to engage in "soul searching," especially in regard to the practice of the custom of *Culo kwor*, which according to him, explains the "wanton inter-village and inter-family killings" in Acholi. In his view these activities of *kaculo kwor* are "still a living element of the culture, ... where it engenders so much atrocity among kindred people." It is not clear to which killings Professor Gingyera-Pinywa is referring, but in a footnote to the above statement, he adds that "*Culo Kwor*" among the Acholi is retribution or the wreaking of vengeance on people, whether relatives or not, who may have committed acts of serious offence or aggression against other people, who must then take action against them. He indirectly attributes "the killing, maiming, and burning of the villages" to this practice. He cautions that in his view this practice will continue, "unless the local people and the LCs take it up as a serious source for continued insecurity among them"⁹⁵.

Professor Gingyera-Pinywa does not relate all this to any particular incidents in the 17-year old conflict but implies that much of the destruction in Acholiland might be accountable to this practice. Even then, his view is purely tentative and therefore highly speculative since he does not cite any specific incidents connected with the cultural practice. But it would also appear that he does not also understand properly the cultural meaning of the concept *kaculo kwor* itself.

⁹⁵ Gingyera-Pinywa, A. G. G [1992]: *Northern Uganda in National Politics*, Fountain Publishers Ltd, Kampala.

The Swedish cultural anthropologist, Sverker Finnström⁹⁶, who interviewed Acholi elders on the concept, points out that *Culo* literally means “to pay” or “to give” (or blood compensation), while *kwor* means “killed life or person.” In fact it means any wrongdoing, including killing. But that is all as far as the oral literacy goes. In a cultural context, it meant compensating a killed life. Traditionally, it was part of the patrilineal institution of clan feuds whereby the offending clan was bound by that tradition to compensate in some measure the clan of the person who had been killed⁹⁷.

As Finnström observes, the practice is in fact not just “revenge” in which the concept is sometimes translated. It is part of a larger context where requests for apology, reunion and reconciliation are central to the practice. It is not revenge for the sake of it. It is ‘revenge’ because it seeks to compensate the bereaved clan where death has occurred and that death is attributable to another clan. Since Prof. Gingyera-Pincywa does not cite a single incident of inter-or intra-clan feuds and revenge practices and give reasons why the revenges took place, his statement here can only be interpreted as purely theoretical. It does not give credence to the allegation, nor does it throw light on the complex issues involved in the Acholi conflicts, including the deployment of spiritual and invisible forces, as we have seen above.

The social and cultural factors compounding the conflict ought to be looked at in both negative and positive terms. For one thing, it has become clear that while the conflict has had a tremendous impact on the social and cultural lives of the people of Acholi, this has both undermined elements of the old social life and cultures as well as bringing new challenges to the Acholi people. On this question, one key informant who was interviewed in Kampala said that the conflict had, among other things, brought a new cohesion to the Acholi people and a new sense of “Acholiness.” New forms of organisation of the Acholi people that are uniting the peasants, intellectuals and religious leaders and elders have been emerging. These included the Kacoke Madit, the Acholi Council of Chiefs as well as the coalition of the religious leaders. The conflict had also raised the profile of the women in the cultural life of the Acholi people as well as the youth who had become the main recruiting ground for both the rebels and the government forces. Acholi could never be the same again in its social and cultural setting.

But it was noted that there were new roles being defined for the old institutions as well. For instance, the institution of traditional leaders was being defined in terms of its Acholi-wide role. The elders were increasingly being challenged to look at Acholi as a unity in place of the old clan-based structures of local lineages and kinship relations. This also went for the youth -both girls and boys, who in their new plight found themselves mixed not only in terms of gender but also in terms of their social-political functions as bearers of arms. Their social relations in the rebel camps and in the IDP camps had radically altered not only their

⁹⁶ Finnström, S [2000]: “Living in bad Surroundings: War and Uncertainty in Northern Uganda,” op. cit.

⁹⁷ Girling, F. K [1960]: *The Acholi of Uganda*, HMSO, London, p. 66.

gender roles but also their definition of youth. The social class status for both the youth and the elders was also altered due to the weakening and disruption of the Acholiland economy, which has in turn undermined their role in the economy. The 'camp economy' has altered their relations to women, youth and the elders. This also affected their political roles, a question that has to be investigated further.

Many respondents said that the young generation do not know the Acholi culture anymore. The parents sleep together with their children in small huts. There is high level of moral degeneration, especially among the children. There are no longer any fireplace conversations and socialisations of Acholi culture. This used to be the time in the past where the parents would tell stories to their children that transmitted certain moral values and norms. The culture of keeping domestic animals has been destroyed, together with all social and cultural ramifications. Marriage life has been affected with this development. These new realities were revealed in the responses to questions put by the researchers to the people living in the camps. For instance, it was revealed that the cultural setting of keeping the animals in relation to funerals and marriages has been undermined. Courtship and its cultural import have been destroyed by camp life. The non-existence of cattle has meant that no proper rituals for the dead can be carried out. It has also meant that marriage cannot be carried out so that people in love find they have to go without proper marriages. This has also irrevocably altered the social roles and social relations between women and men, a problem that also calls for further research.

The weakening of the traditional roles in the village community through the encampment of the community has also led to new cultural forms and institutions in the form of "camp leaders" and "traditional" judicial and reconciliation institutions. New "post-traditional" processes leading to new institutions were beginning to appear and define their roles in new ways. For instance, the failure of the official local courts had led to the emergence of new systems of "traditional" legal intervention.

The traditional way of organising the economy by pooling and sharing labour as well as food has been destroyed. Formal education in the villages has also been destroyed for the children of the poor. Only the rich can afford to send their children to schools outside Acholiland, where the normal formal system of education is still in place. The Acholi people love dancing and cultural festivals. These have been undermined by camp life where there is nothing to celebrate but agonise about. Traditional religious life of the Acholi has been interfered with and traditional religious shrines have been destroyed. The conciliatory role of the elders has been undermined with the destruction of shrines. In the words of the CSOs working in the Acholi region:

“[T]he conflict situation has drastically undermined elements of the social and cultural lives of the Acholi people as well as bringing new challenges. The active roles of the traditional leaders and chiefs have been eroded. The young generation being brought up in the camps do not know the Acholi culture any more. This phenomenon of internal

displacement has further exacerbated the problem resulting in the breakdown of the whole traditional social systems, marital breakdown and family separation, moral degeneration and all that is characterised in the Acholi culture. ... Acholi well cherished and very rich African culture will never be the same again in its social and cultural centre⁹⁸.”

This statement speaks for itself. Even if the NRM/A did not intend it, they have gone a long way in putting the people of Acholi on their feet.

Asked how these problems could be overcome, many respondents advised that these aspects of cultural degeneration could only be addressed in a proper home setting but not in the existing IDP camps. Some argued for the need for foreign intervention to stop this war in order for the Acholi culture to be rejuvenated. They reasoned that the Uganda soldiers had failed the country. Some argued that there seemed to be no way of addressing the cultural degeneration unless President Museveni got out of power.

8.3 Political Factors

As pointed out above, the conflict is seen as basically a political war. Some people attribute it to tribalism between the Bantu and the Nilotics because the Acholi were in power and the Bantu took over the power. Therefore they want to rule and keep out the northerners. This has become a stereotype, which at the same time fuels the conflict along ethnic lines. Some argue that the NRM government wants to rule the Acholi forever and to control their wealth, especially land. Others see both sides of the conflict as having their own agendas and the people as the victims caught in between these agendas. Other respondents said that the U.S. instead of being neutral was in fact fuelling the war by supporting one side politically. They said that the international community could not have influence if they took sides the way they have done. They have also sided with the government without properly understanding the conflict.

The political factor also comes out in terms of the issue of bad governance, as we have seen above. They feel there should be a democratic change of government, which could enable the conflict to end. Other respondents argued that sticking to power for too long leads to the overthrow of governments by force in which sections of different ethnic communities are identified as the enemy. Instead there should be a peaceful transfer of power. This removes the problem of some sections of the population removing and overpowering others. Other respondents felt that the issue, which perpetuates conflict in the north, is that the government of Uganda has involved itself in too many conflicts with neighbouring countries with

⁹⁸ NGO Forum Gulu [2003]: A Brief Paper on the Situation in the North, presented by James Otto, Chairperson, Gulu District NGO Forum to Dr. Francis M. Deng, Representative of the UN Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons on Behalf of the CSOs Operating in Gulu District, Northern Uganda.

claims and counter accusations of the neighbours supporting dissidents. This only worsens our own conflict at home.

The issue of bad governance was brought out sharply by the Member of Parliament for Aswa, Ronald Reagan Okumu, who reflected the views of his constituents. Okumu was interviewed by the Principal Investigator in Kampala and was able to provide documentation to supplement his views. According to him, the NRM has been reluctant to bring the war to an end because it has solid political support in central, western and partly eastern Uganda:

“Through the policy of divide and rule, the rebellion in the north has been used to sustain and justify the Movement government hold on power. This position has changed since the 2001 Presidential elections when the Movement suffered from its internal crack and got very stiff opposition from western Uganda once regarded as (a Movement) ‘safe zone.’ The policy today however is not that of dialogue but (of) brutally suppressing the rebellion. Thus ‘Operation Iron Fist’ came in force. This together with the slogan of terrorism is to smear all political opposition in Uganda-suppress them once and for all together with the LRA rebels and subdue the Acholi to support the Movement⁹⁹.”

This understanding of the situation is widespread amongst the people of Acholi. This proves that the main political sentiment in Acholi is for reconciliation and full integration in the political society of the country as a whole. They feel that the attempt to isolate them and hide the real situation from the international community is part of the strategy of misgoverning and marginalizing them from the rest of Uganda and the world at large. They feel other parts of Uganda have been used to isolate them for annihilation through the politics based on ethnicity. Yet as we noted in the Foreword, when the LRA attacks began to spread eastwards, there was a realisation on the part of other Ugandans that the war in Acholiland is not solely an Acholi affair, but a national one. It is a Ugandan national affair and this realisation could be used to ignite a spirit of reconciliation in the country as a whole. This feeling of solidarity was reflected in the journey the religious leaders of Acholi made to the east of the country, after ending sleeping in the streets of Gulu in solidarity with the “night commuters.” In solidarity with the people of Teso, the Catholic Archbishop of Gulu, Baptist Odama said:

“We the people of Acholi are partners in suffering with you the people of Teso. That is why we have come, because in our African culture when there is death in your brother’s home you should go and stay with him¹⁰⁰.”

⁹⁹ Okumu, R. R [2003]: *Analytical Proposal for Peace in Northern Uganda*, Kampala.

¹⁰⁰ *The Monitor*, 16th July, 2003.

The religious leaders of Acholi have for long felt they were talking too much and not acting on issues that affect their people. In going to the streets and expressing their solidarity with the “night commuters,” they wanted their actions to speak louder than their words and leave the talking to other people.

The religious leaders in Koboko district also appealed to the President to end the war in Acholiland. They referred to the peace efforts the government had pursued in relation to the conflicts in West Nile, especially with the rebel West Nile Bank Front (WNBF) of Juma Oris and the disbanded UNRF II of Maj. Gen. Ali Bamuze. These groups were encouraged to end the conflict and join the government. They appealed that the same policy should be pursued to end the war in Acholiland. They pointed out that these rebellions had adversely affected development in their district, but that since peace had now been restored, West Nile was now embarking on productive activities. According to a reporter: “They asked the Government to continue its efforts in finding a lasting solution to the rebellion in Acholi so that peace and security could be restored in the area for development¹⁰¹.”

8.4 Religion, Myth, Witchcraft and Metaphysics

A further complicating factor to the war in Acholi is the resort to invisible spiritual forces to explain the politics in the conflict. As pointed out above, the entry of prophetic actors such as Alice Auma in the form of the Holy Spirit Movement had a political objective. The use of spirits and invisible forces was the “extension of politics by other means” since “normal” politics did not provide an avenue and mechanisms for dealing with the increasingly complex problems in Acholi and Uganda in general. Since the real political leaders and traditional actors did not seem to be able to solve the crisis, spiritual actors were brought into play through metaphysical means to explain events and provide a moral basis for new forms of action to bring back a semblance of moral order.

Metaphysics is defined as a branch of philosophy concerned with the most fundamental questions of existence, essence, space and time, the nature of universals, cause and effect, etc. It is a philosophical means, through which people seek explanations to certain happenings, which they feel cannot be explained by normal ‘rational’ means. This is because peoples’ perceptions of reality are influenced not only by their expectations, beliefs, and emotions but also by different conceptual frames, histories, and social circumstances as well as the languages they speak, which differ from culture to culture¹⁰². In fact it is the complication of the “normal” and ‘rational’ world that leads to the appearance of a prophetic intervention to bring some order to it. Acholi is no exception to this universally observed phenomenon¹⁰³.

¹⁰¹ The *New Vision*, July, 18, 2003.

¹⁰² Sparkes, A. W [1991]: *Talking Philosophy: A Workbook*, Routledge, London.

¹⁰³ Behrend, H [1999]: Alice Lakwena; *The Holy Spirit: War in Northern Uganda 1986-97*, James Curry, Fountain Publishers, London/Kampala. She refers to the use of spirit mediums in the

Despite their embracing of Islam and Christianity, the Acholi people are deeply rooted in their philosophical beliefs. Myths are also useful ways in which people understand and sustain themselves. Sometimes myths are deliberately created in order to promote cohesion of communities. Some of the conditions on which these myths were based no longer exist but they are easily reproduced and attached to modern religious consciousness in form of metaphysics to satisfy certain spiritual needs. Modern religion has changed people and the concept of salvation has also changed drastically.

In the course of implanting new religions, there has been immense destruction of the traditional religious shrines and the cultural practices of the Acholi. But this development has also caused new problems. When Alice Auma entered the war, she did this out of a desperation arising out of what she regarded as a generalised breakdown of traditional Acholi norms and values as well as Christian norms. She regarded the activities of the Acholi soldiers in UPDA and of the NRA as vitiated by the evil spirit called *Cen*. Her task was to cleanse these soldiers of this evil spirit. In the war Alice Lakwena introduced new practices, which had never been applied in Acholi before. She invented new religious and metaphysical practices based on the combination of the Acholi traditional religious principles and those of Christianity. It was a new phenomenon that began from Odek. At Odek, Alice used symbols, which the controllers applied and used in the war. The Twenty Safety Precautions that were applied to the soldiers were drawn from these combined principles.

On the other hand, some of the Acholi elders felt incapacitated in their interventions because they said that Alice Auma had been tricked into using foreign witchcraft from those who practised it in the Luwero Triangle. This source said that some witchcraft experts from the shores of Lake Victoria on the Tanzania side from the Bahaya community and from Ghana had intervened in confusing Alice Auma. They felt that those foreign witchcraft elements had complicated their possible intervention in the process.

According to some sources¹⁰⁴, Alice Auma believed herself to be possessed by the Holy Spirit with a command from God to raise an army against the new regime based on evil. In the prevailing context of suspicion and disillusionment, she was able to address people who lacked education and were deeply religious. In this, she succeeded in rallying an army of about 6000 people in 1986. She also received the blessing of religious leaders, particularly in her war against the witches. Unlike Joseph Kony, she did not abduct children. She convinced her followers that after ritual smearing with shea-nut butter oil, they were invincible to bullets.

Zimbabwe war of liberation: Chimurwenga War of the Zimbabwe National Union-ZANU and the use of similar forces in Mozambique's RENAMO war against FELIMO.

¹⁰⁴ Søren Pedersen, Elizabeth Jareg and Richard Young [2001]: *UGANDA: The Long Road Home*, Save the Children Norway, Save the Children Denmark, Kampala/Gulu.

The spirit of “Lakwena” was a new phenomenon. For a start, Auma exercised her power along with other spirits, which were never known among the Acholi. Some of the Alice Lakwena practices were taken over by Joseph Kony and added to other spiritual forces. Traditional and religious institutions have lacked a proper response to these new forces. There is no doubt that these metaphysical applications to the war are of a tremendous power in the way they are interpreted and understood by those practising them. They cannot be ignored and fought against using weapons of war or religious doctrinal responses. What is required is a comprehensive response that takes into account the sociological, political, spiritual as well as the material conditions that have given rise to the phenomenon. Elements of restorative justice must be applied here, and in this respect both the traditional institutions and the religious leaders need to work together instead of avoiding the problem by sweeping it under the carpet.

The problem needs to be studied and understood properly before responses to it are attempted. Such responses should be part of a wider attempt to bring about peace in Acholiland. Without such a comprehensive response, Acholi will continue to be consumed in conflict, which will spread to other parts of Uganda, and indeed, parts of Africa. The new combined spirits will destroy Acholiland and affect other African societies. This problem is particularly important because many people who were asked about this phenomenon were very ambivalent, even confused on the interpretation of what was happening. Many observed that the LRA fighters were composed of all religions. Among them were Protestants, Roman Catholics, Moslems and African traditional believers. One priest commented that when he was in charge of the Church of Uganda Chapel at Lacekocot, LRA soldiers came to his house to pray very intensely. According to him, they pray sincerely, ardently, that God should save them from harm and let them succeed in their war. They seemed to draw their strength from their strong belief in God and in the military genius of the Acholi. They seem to believe that government forces will not defeat them militarily.

Although some of those interviewed said that before Western religion came, the Acholi had their own African traditional religion that would help them in case of sickness and hunting, they found it very difficult to explain today’s happenings and changes. They believed that the new religions had now eroded the Acholi tradition belief systems. Since they did not understand Lakwena and Kony’s use of myths and metaphysics, they thought that these had no implication in the conflict in northern Uganda. Some believed that myths and metaphysics were at work because Kony himself uses a spirit medium.

However, they thought it was difficult to understand these spirits because they were related to the warrior spirit. They agreed that there was a need to stop the use of spirits. They wanted people to come together in thoughts and talks and work to crush these spirits. Others believed that in order to tackle the problem, there was a need to use spirit media of ‘Ajwaka’ to intervene. But the problem was they no longer knew how this spirit works. It is the ambivalence reflected in these responses, which suggests the need for further research and education on this matter in the communities.

The point of departure for Alice Lakwena was an attempt to constitute a moral order based on traditional elements involving the Acholi understanding of *Jok* as a force or power within the Acholi traditional discourse. However, because of its limitations and failings, she supplemented it with Catholic Christian principles and practices. What emerged was a *post-traditional* discourse, achieved in her trip to Paraa National Park. At the waterfalls at Paraa Lakwena (a non-Acholi messenger spirit) took control of Alice Auma, and ordered her to fight the widespread witchcraft which the traditional elders had failed to stop. Secondly, the spirit instructed her to purify the Acholi soldiers of the UPDA who had committed crimes in Luwero Triangle as well as at home in Acholi. It is these happenings that had set Acholi and Uganda in turmoil. Behrend in her study summarised this post-colonial condition as characterised by violence and counter-violence. In her words:

“With the militarization of politics that had already begun under Obote in the 1960s, the state, ... has increasingly itself become an instrument of violent retaliation. Who ever took over state power was not only able to gain wealth, but also to revenge against members of other ethnic groups or religions at in times before the existence of the state. The war of the Holy Spirits Movement must also be seen in this context¹⁰⁵.”

This indictment applied to all the regimes since Uganda’s political independence, including the NRM, and Behrend is correct in trying to explain Alice Lakwena’s Holy Spirit Movement as an expression of this militarization of politics. This is what gave rise to Alice Auma being summoned by the spirit Lakwena: “to bring down the government, purify the world of sin, and build up a new world in which humans and nature would be reconciled¹⁰⁶.” This appeal to the spiritual world was part of the process of reconciliation between Acholi traditional religion through which people explained their existence and modern religions such as Christianity and Islam. Okot p’Bitek writing on *Religion of the Central Luo* notes that one outstanding feature of the Acholi traditional religious activity was the annual feast at the chiefdom shrines, where many of these problems were addressed.

Thus, it can be said that although Alice Auma Lakwena in the end failed to achieve her objective of defeating the existing armed forces with spirit power (which is an indictment of the use of metaphysics at this level), she still raises issues of concern about the type of society that had been produced at the end of the colonial period and which continues to exist up to now. She interrogated the traditional elders and found them wanting in their responses to the crisis facing Acholi and Uganda in general. She looked at the Church and found it also wanting in its ability to fight witchcraft. This is why the Church was supportive of her campaign against witchcraft, which the elders also supported. She interrogated the role of the State

¹⁰⁵ Ibid: p. 23.

¹⁰⁶ Weeks, W [2002]: *Pushing the Envelope: Moving Beyond ‘Protected Villages’ in Northern Uganda*, OCHA, New York.

and the basis of its legitimacy and wanted to install a new moral and political order. This failed but the following problems still remain and must still be addresses:

- Can the state seek revenge against its opponents and can it be legitimate while carrying out such illegitimate and immoral acts?
- To what extent was the traditional system of moral order adequate to deal with the malaise in Acholi society, especially after 1988, after which date, according to Behrend, the correlation of death and charges of witchcraft (*aroga*) in Acholi, were explained in terms of more accusations of witchcraft, creating a vicious circle that could not be cured within the system of Acholi tradition?
- To what extent were the religious leaders up to their task as moral leaders in failing to find ways of combating witchcraft and other moral problems;
- To what extent did the state fulfil its obligations to the Acholi society and Uganda as a whole when it failed to prosecute cases of witch-hunts that the traditional leaders and chiefs themselves up to a certain point encouraged?
- What was the role of the Acholi society at large in dealing with this malaise in their society when they instead became victims of their own culture? What social and political efforts did they take to overcome these failings within their society?
- What role did the Uganda society at large play in addressing the consequences of the militarization and ethnicisation of politics? Could they not be blamed for abetting the dictators by supporting them because they came from their particular ethnic groups?

All these questions are important and need to be addressed in a spirit of criticism and self-criticism. This could lead to a process of reconciliation and the establishment of a moral order that draws lessons from what has happened in the country since independence. In this process Alice Lakwena is still relevant political actor in bringing about reconciliation, along side the traditional leaders, the religious leaders, the Uganda State and the wider Ugandan society. Although the concerns she raised have been swept under the carpet by other developments on the ground, these issues of morality, governance, tradition versus modernity are still relevant and need to be addressed by all Ugandans at some point as part of the process of reconciliation.

8.5 Witchcraft by the State

There is increasing use of invisible forces (in the form of witchcraft) in African politics and economics as part of modern capitalist competition. It is also known that the leaders of the NRM consulted witch doctors in the pursuit of their own struggle for power in the Luwero Triangle. One such witchdoctor is known to still exist in Luwero Triangle who was used in this way. One NRA commander, Chef Ali (RIP),

openly practiced African religion and the use of witchcraft in the war in Teso district. He had a shrine where he practised his religious beliefs. Many leaders in the government are known to practice the traditional art of witchcraft in the pursuance of power and wealth. So what is happening in Acholi therefore should be seen as part of the general malaise of Ugandan society at large.

It was therefore not surprising when the minister of state for defence, Ruth Nankabirwa, reportedly admitted that the government was “considering adopting spiritual warfare in addition to the military and dialogue strategies.” Speaking at the weekly cabinet press briefing she was also reported to have said; “this spirit factor cannot be ignored,” adding “the people believe in it and we cannot ignore it.” She called on “everybody, including spiritual leaders” to come forward: “Anybody who thinks he can be helpful to end this rebellion is welcome¹⁰⁷.” The minister later denied making the statement but many journalists who attended the briefing reported the statement in full. The denial is nevertheless understandable since the political elite who engages in witchcraft in their daily lives get “embarrassed by their involvement in it because they want to be “modern,” while at the same time they incorporate witchcraft as a modern post-colonial reality.

But some people took the minister’s call seriously and it was reported that some traditional healers contacted the minister and offered to deploy bees as invisible forces to attack Kony and his forces¹⁰⁸. Yet others condemned the minister’s call. In a “Weekly Forum” programme on a Gulu-based FM Radio station, the people charged the minister for not being serious about peoples’ suffering brought about by Kony’s war. The callers told the minister to take seriously the initiative by the Acholi religious leaders to bring about peace in Acholiland instead of diverting attention from the governments’ responsibilities to stop the war. Another caller said: “We appeal to the Government not to joke around with the problems of northern Uganda. Thousands of our people have been killed. Many others are being abducted, maimed, raped and tortured¹⁰⁹.”

But the minister’s reference to witchcraft was not without foundation. It is a discourse with global dimensions. In its modernized form, witchcraft practices invoke images and objects of the modern world. In Cameroon, for instance, witchdoctors have used books on ‘Eastern Magic’ and Christian symbolism to advance their practice of the witchcraft. In Doula, for example, witches are known to work closely with the Mafia in Italy “And everywhere in Africa, there is a close conceptual connection between the new objects of wealth and witchcraft¹¹⁰.”

There is therefore no need for the minister to run away from the fact that the practice of witchcraft is well placed in the African mind and not that of the Acholi

¹⁰⁷ *New Vision*, July 18th, 2003.

¹⁰⁸ *New Vision*, July 29, 2003.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Fisiy, C & Geschiere, P [1996]: “Witchcraft, violence and identity: Different Trajectories in postcolonial Cameroun” in Werbner, R & Ranger, R [1996]: *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, Zed Press, London.

alone. Witchcraft offers an idiom through which people try to understand and control complex modern changes. While in some cases the practice of witchcraft is said to obstruct modern development and change, it is nevertheless also acknowledged to intertwine very easily with new forms of development. These include the penetration of money in the communities, the emergence of wage labour, the spread of new consumer goods, as well as new forms of individualism and violence. It is also argued that witchcraft is able to cope with 'modernity' whatever form it takes in Africa. For instance, the practice is used for both "levelling" accesses to resources and at the same time the rich use it for purposes of accumulation of wealth. The practice leads to reconciliation and redistribution, but it also leads to violence and retribution¹¹¹.

So the problem being discussed is not an outdated practice. It is real and many of those leaders that are caught up in its use should be open and transparent about it. They should do this by creating conditions that can enable society to deal with its effects and consequences by openly discussing the problems that surround its use. This is a reconciliation process in which the traditional leaders and the religious leaders must be open and create an atmosphere for addressing the problem and reconciling society.

8.6 Witchcraft and the Church

The state is not alone in its responses to witchcraft practices and its deployment. Religion has its own agenda of using other spiritual forces to combat it. Its persistence in fact demonstrates its usefulness for those who deploy it. Between 1st and 4th March 2003, a group of 75 Christian "intercessors" made a "prayer journey" to Acholiland from Kampala "to engage spiritual warfare" against pagan Acholi beliefs, which have been part of the long standing war in northern Uganda. According to James Magara who reported on this "journey," the group was "spearheaded" by Life Ministries, Trumpet Mission, the Military and Christian Fellowship and others from Lira and Gulu¹¹².

The group was divided into "teams," which went in different locations in pursuit of the evil spirits. On each of the days a team was left in Gulu town, the prayer base, to be involved in prayer until all the other teams going out to pray, returned to the base. Because of the security situation in these locations, the journeys out of Gulu town were conducted under UPDF military escort. The teams visited different locations of traditional religious shrines and at each of these sites they carried out prayers to "cleanse" them of satanic sacrifices, which had been performed there. These cleansing activities of the intercessors were recreating the historical struggle between African religions and the early Christian missionaries. It was as if the war by Lakwena and Kony had recreated the conditions for the historical battles to resume.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Sunday Vision*, June 1, 2003.

Two sites of the shrines visited were of great interest both in historical and current political terms. The first was the Keyo traditional shrine and altar in Kilak County in Gulu district a few miles out of Gulu town. In 1904, Chief Awich, then traditional leader of the Acholi, invited the Christian missionaries to preach to the Acholi people. The CMS missionaries, unlike the Catholics, refused to accommodate the cultural gods and traditional practices of the people they found. Because of their refusal to cooperate, some “incidents”, occurred and resulted in them leaving the place. It was reported that snakes attacked them and their base was struck by lightning, and as a result they were forced to abandon the place. According to the story as told by the Church, an Acholi traditional “satanic priest” covenanted a monument the missionaries had raised to the “demonic spirits” known by the pagan names of Kilak and Bakka who guarded the altar. This shrine was of some significance to the rebels because, according to story, they “keep on coming to the place every now and then for ritualistic sacrifices.”¹¹³

Although the place was covered by bush because of the devastation caused by the war, the 20 intercessors that journeyed to the altar were able to clear the altar and managed to hold prayers at the site. They asked God’s forgiveness for idolatry and for the way the missionaries were treated. They resumed the contestation with the traditional religion by renouncing the covenants that had been made by the “satanic priest” after the CMS were rejected in the area in 1904. The spiritual gates, which had been opened by the satanic priest, were closed and “the land was reconciled back to God and His original purposes.” This looked more like a reconquest of Acholiland by the CMS, this time through the intercessors. After that a “prophetic action” was carried out on the land. This attitude might explain why the Church may have become a target for attacks by the LRA, but the question is why the Catholic Church, which was more tolerant to the Acholi religious practices, was being attacked instead.

The second site was at Bungatira, where the family of Severino Lukoya Kiberu with his wife Everia Aya Lukoya, Alice Auma’s mother, still lived. This is the home of the two Holy Spirit war movements-that of Alice Auma and that of Joseph Kony both related to Severino. It is believed that Severino Lukoya Kiberu was “commissioned” by demonic spirits in 1948 to construct altars and protect the shrine. According to James Magara: “After almost being beaten to death, he was commanded by these spirits to build their altars all over Uganda. In his home he built Bungatira altars, with the signs of the cross, the crescent moon and star.” The intercessor prayer team found a group of people preparing to conduct funeral rites for relatives who had died a few days before. Prayers were said in which Alice Lakwena’s mother and sister were reported to have converted and begun to believe.

But while the prayers were being said, a cow, “which the evil spirit must have possessed, started charging towards them.” One of the prayer leaders pointed a finger at it and “commanded the spirit in it to come out.” On this command, the cow “went into reverse gear and fell to the ground.” That incident, according to the

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

reporter, “had no small impact” on the people who were gathered! These “cleansing” prayers and activities went on at many locations, including the one conducted at the Agwee altar built on the river Agwee in Kilak hills. It is three miles from Mount Kilak where Severino had erected another altar on top of the mountain. The place could only be accessed by air. Kilak county is the place where the Luo people settled after they left Sudan. Here Akullo, one of the Luo ancestors, was said to have disappeared for forty days and when she reappeared she was pregnant “claiming to have been impregnated by the spirits and gave birth to “Labongo” a son meaning “without father.” It is said that Severino, Alice and Joseph have all visited the altar “to draw the satanic powers and water for rituals.” This site was of great significance and a lot of prayers were said here by the intercessors.

On the 4th March, the whole team was flown by an army helicopter in two trips to the mountain site which has a military detachment around it. There was a river, from which the people could not drink because of their ‘satanic’ beliefs. Christian rituals were carried out in this water to cleanse the water spring according to 2 Kings 2: 19-22 and the curse was reversed. In addition, prophetic proclamations and actions were carried out alongside prayers of repentance, renunciation and redemption. The team leader then proceeded to wash his face with the water and to drink it as the soldiers watched. The other members of the intercessor team followed suit: “By the time the mission was over, four soldiers (of the UPDF) had been baptised in the water and 15 others had accepted Jesus as their personal saviour!” Honey was also extracted from the beehive and eaten! This signalled victory of good over evil and it seemed that the war in Acholi was being fought in order to “cleanse” them Acholi of “witchcraft” in which they were deeply “steeped.” It should be noted, however, that this was exactly what Alice Auma Lakwena had tried to do in her war, except that this one was not being done with the support of the state. Here the state and the intercessors were working together.

But the matter was not as simple as the intercessors thought. If it had been so, the work of the CMS missionaries in 1904, would have eliminated these spirits and ‘evil’ gods at the time. The Christian churches cannot assume that the Acholi people, through their belief systems, had lived ‘evil’ lives since their creation by God. They must have had something valuable in their beliefs and not evil things alone. Indeed, according to the Acholi poet and philosopher, Okot p’Bitek, the Christian missionaries might have confused the Acholi even more with the introduction of their new religion. According to him:

“In 1911, Italian Catholic priests put before a group of Acholi elders the question: ‘Who created you;’ and because the Luo language does not have an independent concept of *create or creation*, the question was rendered to mean (in the Luo language) ‘who moulded you’? But this was still meaningless (to the Acholi), because human beings are born of their mothers (and not created). The elders told the visitors that they did not know. But we are told that this reply was unsatisfactory, and the missionaries insisted that a satisfactory answer must be given. One of

the elders remembered that, although a person may be born normally, when he is afflicted with tuberculosis of the spine, then he loses his normal figure, he gets 'moulded'. So he said 'Rubanga is the one who moulds people.' This is the name of the hostile spirit, which the Acholi believe causes the hunch or hump back. And instead of exorcising the hostile spirits and sending them among pigs, the representatives of Jesus Christ began to preach that Rubanga was the Holy Father who created the Acholi¹¹⁴."

Thus we have here a picture of two cosmologies and world-views: one of the Acholi and the other of the western conception of God. The Acholi, just like westerners, still see their reality through their understanding of themselves. Those Acholi who believe otherwise contest the conception of God as Rubanga not only conceptually but also existentially. That is why despite the conversion of the Acholi to Christianity, the world of the cosmology of the Acholi people continues to engage the minds of some of them that are spiritually inclined in that direction. The simplistic religious activities of the intercessors, which does not come to terms with the worldview and framework of self-understanding of the Acholi people, will not end the violence in Acholiland.

On the contrary, such actions may actually intensify and complicate the conflicts, given other spiritual interventions, including Islam, which is reflected in the spiritual interpretations of Alice, Severino, and that of Joseph Kony. After all the spirit of Lakwena was not an Acholi spirit, but an Italian one, which was intermixed with African beliefs. So the issue is not that simple, and the church must engage the Acholi traditional beliefs in an ecumenical manner for a cross-cultural and cross-religious understanding through dialogue and reconciliation instead of engaging in self-righteous impositions in a complex spiritual world. This is particularly necessary since it has recently become apparent that the practice of witchcraft is also a factor in the internal disputes in sections of the church, especially among the New Born Christians, as witnessed by the accusations and counter-accusations that surrounded Pastor Kayiwa around Kampala. This means that witchcraft is a factor that all sections of the African population ought to deal with transparently.

8.7 External Factors

8.7.1 The Sudan factor

The external element to the conflict in northern Uganda was of immediate relevance right from August 1986, when some of the leading UNLA officers who had lost the power struggle in Kampala withdrew to southern Sudan and sought refugee there. General Bazilio Okello was taken to Khartoum where he died. The rest of the followers were detained at Magwi where they were granted refugee status. A Col.

¹¹⁴ Okot, p'Bitek [1971]: *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, p. 62

Ogeno of the Sudanese army disarmed them and placed them in the camp. The attack on their refugee camp by the forces of the SPLM/A thus initiated the conflict on the external side in addition to the internal rebellions. This group in response later launched an attack on the NRA contingent in Bibia, and then proceeded to take the war inside Uganda. This led to the group later seeking support from Sudan to launch their first resistance against the NRM government.

It is true that the LRA has received both political and military support from the Sudan government. But the Sudan government has allegedly supported the LRA in retaliation for the Uganda government political and military support to the Sudanese SPLM/A. Although Uganda has admitted only giving political support to the SPLM/A, it is also a well known fact that in 1997, the government of Uganda rendered military assistance to the SPLM/A, including the deployment of the UPDF inside Sudan, which enabled both forces to clear hostile forces from the Uganda border right through Equatoria and Bahr El Ghazal, capturing many garrisons of the Sudan army from Yei to Tonj towns in Southern Sudan. Many prisoners of war, including the Acholi component of the Sudan-the Equatoria Defence Forces-which Sudan government won over against the SPLM/A were detained. It is also known that the SPLA and the UPDF share certain facilities inside Uganda, especially in the northern part of the country¹¹⁵.

In many ways, the Sudanese government seized the opportunity provided by the failure of the 1994 Bigombe peace initiative by rendering the LRA greater military support since it had an interest in using the LRA to weaken the military activities of the SPLM/A and Uganda government's support to them. This military assistance by the government of Sudan to LRA and Uganda's support to the SPLM/A have meant that the two conflicts in southern Sudan and that in northern Uganda have increasingly become combined into one complex conflict cross border. This is why the US government, which is a key player in this area, must link the peace process between the SPLM/A and the government of Sudan to that in northern Uganda.

In 1999, the Carter Centre embarked on an effort to bring the Uganda and Sudanese governments to negotiate peace agreement and to end aiding rebels on each side of the border. The Nairobi Peace Agreement of 8th December 1999 also sought to normalise relations between Uganda and Sudan through agreed steps to create mutual confidence and to promote regional peace. The issue of the children abducted by the LRA was the central concern, which was inextricably linked to the resolution of the conflicts taking place between the north and south of Sudan, and the north and south of Uganda. Nevertheless, the SPLM/A and the LRA were not included in these negotiations and the result was that the government of Sudan used this window of opportunity to continue to support the LRA while claiming to be fulfilling the agreement. Brought under pressure by the US government to negotiate peace with the SPLM/A, the US government also pressured Khartoum to allow the

¹¹⁵ Human Rights Watch [2003]: *Abducted and Abused*, loc. Cit.

Uganda government to enter Sudan and “flush out” the LRA in what came to be known as “Operation Iron Fist.” From what appears to have been the result, instead of flushing out the LRA from Sudan the operation pushed them deep inside Uganda where they have now established permanent bases, while retaining the flexibility to re-enter the Sudan at will.

The result has been that the Uganda government has continued to ask the Khartoum regime to allow it more time to carry out operations inside the Sudan against the rebels, and the recent such request granted by the government of Sudan was in the month of June 2003. This new operation was necessitated by the recent renewed LRA attacks on the population, the church and the spread of the LRA operations to eastern Uganda and West Nile (Adjumani). In these attacks, hundreds of abductees were taken by the LRA in what seems to be an enlarged operation. These renewed operations of the LRA have convinced Ugandans-including the religious leaders in Acholi and the government of Uganda-that the government of Sudan and possibly other third actors within the Sudan have renewed their support to the LRA on a much larger scale than before. This has created the feeling that the government of Sudan still wants to use the Uganda rebellion in order to weaken the SPLM/A gains, which they have made through the Machakos peace talks. This would go to confirm that the conflict in southern Sudan and that in northern Uganda have become interlocked, requiring a new perspective to find a longer lasting solution at the international level since the regional approach seems to have hit a snag.

The government in Uganda missed a chance of utilising the SPLM/A to influence the Acholi elements in southern Sudan to prevail over the LRA to stop the fighting. But this would have implied that the NRM was pursuing a real Pan-African approach to its support to the SPLM/A as well as to the conflict inside Uganda. Such a Pan-African approach would have reflected its attitude to the Acholi population inside Uganda. Having failed to mobilise the Acholi people on a democratic national basis, they also reinforced SPLM/A’s own ethnic oriented approach to the mobilisation of the people of southern Sudan, which had split the southern resistance to the Arab dominated government in Khartoum. Thus, even if the Sudan government were to end its military and political support to the LRA, there is no way it could have ended the support given to the LRA by the Acholi component of the southern Sudan struggle. The Member of Parliament for Aswa County, himself an Acholi, Reagan Okumu, whom the Principal Investigator interviewed, put this dilemma in these stark terms:

“The situation in southern Sudan is even more confusing. Even if Sudan stops supporting LRA, if SPLA continues to fail to offer charismatic leadership in southern Sudan, especially in the Equatoria province; the Equatoria Defence Forces and South Sudan Defence Forces, who control huge territories in southern Sudan and are supported and supplied by Khartoum government as its militias will continue to link with the LRA whether the Sudan government disapproves of it or not.

The LRA will always find soft landing in the EDF Territories since EDF is hostile to SPLM/A and hates Uganda for supporting SPLM/A instead of the southern Sudanese cause. President Museveni can avoid this by recognising all southern Sudanese military groups not SPLM/A alone, as has been the practice¹¹⁶.”

This sums up the dilemma the NRM government is facing in dealing with the LRA conflict. The conflict has become a regional one and despite attempts by the government to continue to adopt a two-pronged explanation to the conflict, which are contradictory, it will not be able to end the war. The NRM has for long argued that the war in Acholi was caused by “backward forces” in Acholi who sought to regain power in Kampala. This was exposed when in 1988 they worked out a peace agreement with a small faction of the UPDA in which some UPDA officers were allocated ministries and positions in the government and the UPDF. This incorporated the soldiers who fought in “Luwero Triangle” but did not stop the war because new elements of conflict had surfaced. Since 1994, the government has argued that the LRA was “created” by the Sudanese government, but it has never referred to the factional military support it renders to the SPLM/A as a problem to peace initiatives. The result is that it cannot even with the “Operation Iron Fist” end the rebellion by eliminating the LRA. At this point, it must be clear that only an international involvement can end the conflict by extending the U.S. peace initiative in Sudan to the Uganda war in Acholiland.

8.7.2 The U. S. Support and September 11

It is well known that the U. S. has waged its war against the Islamic Fundamentalists in the Sudan by using Uganda and the SPLM as their main force. In this the SPLM has also played a divisive role in its internal politics by playing on ethnic differences between the Dinka and Nuer communities. The U. S. and Uganda have reinforced these ethnic differences by giving one-sided support to Dr. Garang. The U.S. political and military support has encouraged the Uganda government to adopt “unbalanced approach ... towards military solutions to the conflict” in Uganda, which is threatening sustainable peace. The Liu Institute in January 2003 noted the “strong backing” given to the Uganda government by the USA in the “highly publicised \$ 3 billion contribution to Uganda’s defence budget” and the across-the-board budget cuts of 23% from other sectors for defence purposes for waging the “Operation Iron Fist” military activity in southern Sudan.¹¹⁷

Another external factor that has complicated and worsened the conflict in Acholi is the manner in which the US has tried to win support for its global anti-terrorism crusade since the events of September 2001. The post-9/11 strategy has encouraged infringements of human rights not only in the U.S. itself, but also in other countries. One of the consequences of this US strategy has been to encourage

¹¹⁶ Okumu, R, R [2003]: *Analytical Proposal for Peace in Northern Uganda*, Kampala, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ Liu Institute [2003]: Update on the Human Security Situation in Northern Uganda: Report of the Liu Institute Mission to Northern Uganda, 7-27 January 2003.

countries such as Uganda to cash in on this “anti-terrorism” strategy to designate the conflict in the north as part of international terrorism. The Uganda government was quick to exploit this and appealed to the U.S. government to assist it by listing the LRA of Joseph Kony and the Allied Democratic Front (ADF) as terrorist organisations under US law.

Using this new opportunity to win support for an on-going war inside Uganda, the UPDF argued that the term “terrorism” must now include activities such as those of the LRA. In a statement issued by the Special Operations-Northern “Operation Iron Fist” in Gulu, the UPDF argued that:

“The bombing of (the) World Trade Centre on September 11, 2001 in New York by Al Qaeda terrorists had far reaching consequences for world security. Several organisations including the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) led by Joseph Kony, that use massive indiscriminate lethal military force, and crude barbaric force against defenceless and innocent civilians in any civilisation with no respect to humanity were thus targeted and condemned as opponents of peace. This time round, we joined our neighbour, the Government of Sudan in condemning Kony and his LRA as terrorist. Kony was no longer a threat to only defenceless Ugandans but also to the Sudanese people¹¹⁸.”

In its 2002 report on terrorism, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, praised Uganda as one of the countries that had taken a “firm stand” against local and international terrorism. The report also praised the Suppression of Terrorism Act passed in 2002 in Uganda, which imposes a mandatory death penalty for terrorism and a potential death penalty for their sponsors and supporters, as one such “firm stance” against terrorism. The Act had reciprocally designated the Osama Bin Laden al-Qaeda network alongside the LRA and the ADF in western Uganda as such terrorist organisations. The US government also reported that Uganda was one of the several countries that were party to four of the twelve international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism and was working to complete the process of becoming party to the rest. But the joint condemnation of the LRA as a terrorist organisation did not stop the Sudanese government, as we shall see below, from giving more military assistance to Kony and the LRA; nor did it stop the US from referring to Sudan as still acting as a terrorist support base. All this proved that matters were not as simple as they were being made out to be by the UPDF and the US government.

Such manoeuvres, while making Uganda a favourite country of the new Bush administration did nothing to enhance peace in Uganda. It may have contributed to President Bush putting Uganda on his African trip itinerary, which took place in July 2003. This has increased fears that the U.S. will increase its military aid to Uganda to fight the rebellion in the north instead of the US

¹¹⁸ UPDF [2002]: Brief to the Press on the On-Going UPDF Military Operations in Southern Sudan “Operation Iron Fist, May 2002.

contributing to finding a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The U.S. could do this through its encouraging the international community to sponsor peace talks, just as it has done in Liberia and the Sudan. Indeed, on the celebration of the US 227th independence anniversary on July 4, 2003 in Kampala, the US Ambassador to Uganda, Jimmy Kolker, declared in the presence of diplomats, ministers, parliamentarians, senior army officers, religious leaders and other dignitaries that the US would “reciprocate” Uganda’s support to the US during the war against Iraq by “re-starting a modest military training programme and assistance to improve the UPDF’s capacity to protect and defend the civilian population¹¹⁹.” He revealed that this programme, which had been suspended earlier, would amount to about \$ 200 million for military education and training of the UPDF.

This assistance has since been confirmed by the US State Department. According to a report in the *Washington Times* of 24th October, 2003, an agreement was reached when General Charles Wald, deputy chief of the US European Command visited Uganda in August 2003. According to the *Times*, “instead of using American soldiers, we are using American dollar and American technology,” one unnamed US official was quoted as having said. Under the agreement, US assistance was to take the form of equipment, satellite photography and other electronic surveillance. Although some quarters have denied that the US assistance involves the supply of weapons, the agreement in fact provides for “direct military assistance” programme, which includes equipment.

The plan is aimed at increasing the government’s capacity “to fight the LRA,” considered by the US government to be “the only option” to deal with the rebels as well as to “win hearts and minds of the Acholi people.” The military component has two sub-components: provision of equipment and provision of training in the use of equipment as well as training in counter insurgency strategy and tactics. Two officials from the State Department and USAID had already undertaken a “fact finding mission to prepare the ground work, but by mid-September 2003, it was announced that the training had already started.

The civilian component, which is aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the Acholi people, is intended to improve public opinion about the government and the UPDF as well as improving civilian-military relations through prosecution of soldiers implicated in atrocities and to improve on the human rights record of the UPDF. The US government must have realised this would be a difficult job, so they decided not push the human rights issue too hard because they first wanted to “soften Museveni first.”

Other measure intended to improving the UPDF image will include reorganising the command structure and eliminating corruption. That would be a tall order for the US to accomplish in two years! As far as the winning of hearts and minds in other directions, the plan would include:

- Increased protection of IDPs;

¹¹⁹ *New Vision*, Monday, July 7, 2003.

- Increasing the provision of relief, which would require the provision of more protection to relief convoys;
- Improvement of the amnesty package and the demobilisation programme.

Was this policy to be implemented in its present form, especially the civilian component of the programme, the activity would have the implication that the US knew the current war effort in Uganda to be unpopular with the people of Acholi and that the best it can do to “reciprocate” for whatever Museveni did for the US in Iraq, is prepared to ignore the basis of this unpopularity of the war purely for short-term favours between states not based on any solid principle of international law.

Furthermore, it would appear that despite this policy of the Bush administration, a number of members of the US Congress have been urging the administration to pursue a peaceful settlement with the rebels. The EU has also apparently been advancing demands for a peaceful settlement while the US is trying to mobilise the donor community into the American government scheme. Indeed, it is clear from the evidence produced in this report, that allocating funds to intensify the war while at the same time funding activities aimed at winning the hearts and minds of the people would be like trying to bribe the people of Acholi to accept the existence of war as a basis of their existence. The US ought to be reminded that this kind of duplicity will not work and it is both a waste of money and human lives in Acholiland. The US administration ought to rethink this approach.

This assistance is in addition to the military aid of \$ 15 million, which the US is extending to the other East African countries to fight terrorism. This may explain why the US is determined to go ahead with the military assistance to the Uganda government because it appears that this amount had been earmarked since 1997/98 when the US decided to respond to the attacks against US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The \$ 15 million had been earmarked in that year for Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia “as frontline states to fight Sudan” at the time, which was believed to be a safe haven for Osama Bin Laden’s al Qaeda. The fund was however scrapped by the US because of Uganda’s involvement in the DRC debacle. But September 11th 2001 seems to have changed all that.

Indeed, four days before his long-anticipated trip to sub-Saharan Africa, President George W. Bush had announced a \$100m aid package for Uganda and the other three eastern Africa countries to fight terrorism over a 15-month period. Bush was speaking at the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) Business Summit in Washington, attended by several African leaders including Uganda's Prime Minister Prof. Apolo Nsibambi of Uganda. The *Washington File*, observed that Uganda was included as a stopover in this presidential trip, in part, because of president Museveni’s forthright support to the United States in their anti-terrorism drive as well as its innovative HIV/AIDS education and prevention programmes.

This warm and close relationship between Uganda and the US has also created an atmosphere, which could intensify the conflict instead of minimising it. With US pressure, the Sudanese government in 2002 agreed to allow Uganda troops

to enter Sudan and flush out the LRA in what was called the “Operation Iron Fist.” Instead of reducing the support-base of the LRA, the rebels were able to take advantage of this to increase its attacks on the population and further enhance their abductions of children. The result is that over 800,000 people have been displaced and have increased the pressure on the over-crowded internally displaced persons camps inside Uganda.

While this military assistance under normal circumstances could have been welcomed as helping Uganda to strengthen her defence capabilities, this particular offer will worsen the political and military situation of the people in Acholi. In the first place, the US is misplaced in equating the conflict in Acholi and that in Iraq as of the same magnitude as the war it fought in Iraq. The war in Acholi is based on ethnicisation of the political situation in Uganda, as we have already seen. The US as now the sole super-power cannot afford to drag itself into ethnic conflict instead of trying to find a peaceful solution to such conflicts on a global scale. Indeed, as the US president was beginning his visit to Africa in July 2003, the Sudanese government is reported to have declared that the LRA was a “terrorist and outlaw ” organisation.” According to the Uganda independent newspaper, the *Monitor*, the Sudan deputy Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Muhammad Bashir Sulayaman, made this statement to the Sudan News Agency on Friday 4th July 2003¹²⁰.

According to the report, the statement followed three days of talks between the Sudan and Uganda military officials in Khartoum. Similar talks were held simultaneously in Uganda between the Uganda president and the Sudan Ambassador to Uganda, Mr Surajudin Ahamed Yusuf at Mweya Lodge in Kasese. Such acknowledgement on the part of the Sudan government should reinforce the drive to convince the LRA leadership to pursue peace instead of protracting the conflict and the US should be seen as encouraging such peaceful settlement instead of fuelling regional conflicts.

During his visit to the US in June 2003, president Museveni took along with him a 12-point programme for “Northern Uganda Reconstruction and Counter terrorism Initiative.” In this “reconstruction” programme, the Counter terrorism aspect was highlighted while the reconstruction aspect was made an aspect of Counter terrorism! In a paragraph intended to hoodwink the American president, the Uganda government declared:

“Uganda, a steadfast friend and ally of the United States in its war against terrorism, has been facing and continues to face a serious terrorist threat of its own in the north. Uganda is successfully countering the LRA, which the U. S. Department of State has officially designated a Foreign Terrorist Organization. The group was created by Sudan out of the remnants of former Ugandan dictators, Amin and Obote. Sudan has been supporting the LRA until recently when the United States put the LRA on its list of international terrorist organizations. The US military

¹²⁰ The Monitor, July 6th, 2003.

in Baghdad has found documents linking the former President Saddam Hussein's intelligence apparatus to some terrorists that have been trying to destabilize Uganda ¹²¹."

This appealing passage to the US president was intended to win his support to see the northern conflict in Uganda as a terrorist phenomenon, without regard to its background and its origin. To regard the LRA as an "international terrorist organization" and yet call it a "creation of Sudan" out of the remnants of Ugandan dictators, would suggest that the LRA was "created" to engage in "international terrorism" on behalf of Sudan against the US, which does not accord with the facts! The fact that the US Department of State had designated the LRA as a "Foreign Terrorist Organization" did not make it one merely by designation. It had in fact to be proved to be an "international terrorist organization" against US strategic interests. But the LRA has a clear history that links it to the struggles in Acholi against crimes committed there against the population and which continue to be committed by the UPDF and the LRA has compounded these crimes.

While this appealing language may have hoodwinked the US in recruiting Uganda to its anti-terrorism" band of countries, it has not contributed to the lessening of regional conflicts, which it is in the interest of the US as a superpower to resolve. The US has used these inducements requiring countries to support the US refusal to abide by its international obligations under the International Criminal Court and threatening to withdraw military assistance to the countries that do not support it. By so doing, the US is encouraging militarism and disrespect for international obligations already entered into. At the same time, it is shutting its eyes to other, equally binding obligations, under international agreements and conventions aimed at protecting children in war zones.

8.7.3 "Operation Iron Fist"

The "Operation Iron Fist" undertaken by the Uganda government from March 2002 when the Uganda and Sudanese governments signed a protocol allowing Uganda to mount limited military operations into Sudan in order to destroy the LRA camps and rescue the 6000 odd children abducted by the LRA, has produced negative results.

According to the UPDF, on the 15th March 2002, its forces crossed into southern Sudan and from March 27th begun to engage groups of LRA rebels whom it attacked. The objective of the operation was to locate and destroy LRA camps at Rubanga, Tek, Bin Rwot, Kem Paco and Odek in order to "dismantle their terrorist bases" and "rescue the abducted children in their captivity," as well as capturing their equipment. But the UPDF admits that the task "involved changes as the battle situation became fluid."

According to the UPDF, Kony knew the impending operations against him. He had several options, one of which was to "try the desperate move" of "crossing

¹²¹ Uganda Government [2003]: The Government of Uganda's Northern Ugandan Reconstruction and Counterterrorism Initiative, Kampala, p. 1.

back into Uganda” or adopting a combination of one or more options of relocating inside Sudan to areas north of Juba-Torit parallel or “abandon his camps and fight a guerrilla battle in the Savannah areas bounded by Juba-Magwe-Palutaka-Ngom Oromo line. It appears that Kony adopted the “desperate” option of moving back into Uganda and begun to target the population from inside the country. Although the UPDF attacked and destroyed the LRA bases inside Sudan, the rebels were able to construct two new ones inside southern Sudan and also establish new bases inside Uganda. The UPDF rescued few children in these operations, but continue to claim to have rescued the children as the war rages inside the country. The LRA has intensified abducting in new areas.

The UPDF was forced to do the task in three phases, given the changing tactics, which the LRA adopted. In the first phase, the UPDF James Kony and his top commander, Otti Vincent each led a group of the LRA fighters in order to divert the government forces a way from attacking their camps, but the UPDF was able to over run them undeterred. In the second phase, the LRA attempted to wage guerrilla warfare by trying to block UPDF supply lines. This too was “smashed and defeated.” Kony then tried to go back to his former camps “to retrieve some of his hastily hidden arms.” But this attempt was also, according to the UPDF, blocked and Kony’s forces “pounded” by the UPDF field artillery. Hence Kony and Otti “fled and run east into Acholi Mountains where they “sneaked through” their families into the mountains.

In the third phase, the UPDF pursued Kony who had this time “fled deep inside the Acholi mountains trying to outrange” the UPDF artillery and attempting to use terrain as his weapon and defence. But UPDF was fully prepared for this option as well because once Kony was in the mountains, he was immediately attacked and two of Kony’s “hastily defensive positions” were over run. But the UPDF has also explanation for the actions of the LRA following these successful attacks by the UPDF. According to an official statement issued soon after the battles it explained:

“When our forces located his positions and attacked it using mortar fire, the escaping LRA fighters ran amok and started accusing the local Acholi tribes of siding with the UPDF. LRA then started attacking the innocent local population. The Governor of Juba (then) called on all the local population of the mountain areas to run for safety to Torit, Magwe, Palutaka or Lobone or into Uganda¹²².”

There upon, the UPDF continued with its operations in the Acholi Mountains, but the LRA was successfully sent packing to new bases inside Uganda, where they continued with their attacks against the population inside Uganda. The UPDF has continued to renew protocol with the Sudanese government to continue

¹²² UPDF [2002]: Brief to the Press on the On-Going UPDF Military Operations in Southern Sudan- “Operation Iron Fist,” May 2002.

its operations inside southern Sudan, while the LRA resumed its activities inside Uganda. In this way, southern Sudan became a permanent area of fighting of Ugandan opposed forces and thereby effectively eliminating the border between the two countries as far as the war was concerned. By the end of the year, the LRA had intensified its attacks inside Uganda, and by July and August 2003, the LRA had secure bases in eastern Uganda, which became a new theatre of war.

Operating from near quarters, its activities proved more devastating than when it was located inside Sudan. The Uganda Human Rights Commission estimated in its 2002 Annual Report that close to 1000 people, including rebels, the UPDF and civilians had been killed since the LRA was pushed inside Uganda. It concluded that: "Since Operation Iron Fist started, the people of Kitgum, Pader and Gulu have suffered more terror than they experienced in the whole of 2001." It added that the death toll of the civilian population was "unacceptably high and an extreme violation of the right to life." The operation had led, "at least in the short-term, to increased human rights violations and atrocities against the people of northern Uganda."¹²³

Indeed, "Operation Iron Fist" may have added new momentum to the Sudanese government to give more support to the LRA rebels. According to the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, the information received based on a number of interviews with some of the returned abductees, indicated that at the beginning of "Operation Iron Fist," the LRA had found itself in difficult positions because it was being attacked on three fronts-the UPDF, SPLA and the Sudanese Armed Forces-SAF. In order to ward off some of the attacks and reduce the opponents, it concentrated on attacking the SAF and ambushing their vehicles. During the second half of 2002, after the capture of Torit by the SPLM/A under the cover of the "Operation Iron Fist," some of the officers of the SAF sent emissaries to Joseph Kony to restore the old links when it discovered that the UPDF was aiding the SPLM/A under the cover of the operation. They decided to work together in order to reverse the situation in Torit. The interviewee involved in this story was identified as LRA operative by the pseudonym "Boggy's Father," an Acholi from Atiak who lives in Juba and the father of a senior LRA officer.

According to these stories, senior members of the SAF begun delivering truckloads of military equipment to the LRA in Nisitu from early October 2002, where the LRA have set up a base called '*wat Odwogo*' (the relation is back). The LRA officers in charge of this operation have been named as Col. Caesar Acellan and Lt. Col. Livingstone Opiro. It is said that part of this weaponry and ammunition was being buried in secret locations in southern Sudan and northern Uganda for use in their final push to capture power in Uganda. The religious leaders believe that in mid-March 2003, a group of LRA rebels received instructions by radio-call from Col. Acellan informing them to wait for a bigger delivery of supplies in a place located on the banks of the River Pager near Goma hills in Pader district. Soon after,

¹²³ Uganda Human Rights Commission [2002]: Annual Report, January 2001-September 2002, Kampala, p.58.

a group of commanded by Brig. Vincent Otti and Brig. Raska Lukwiya came from Sudan to conduct new operations inside the country. Acellan remained inside Sudan to continue coordination with the SAF. Some of the weapons received included B10 bombs, RPG shells, SPG shells, MGL shells, 20 boxes of bullets for each LRA commander, each box containing 720 bullets in addition to new uniforms, groundnut paste in tins with Arabic inscriptions.

According to the six informants that provided this information to the religious leaders, had the LRA commanders not received these supplies, they would have come forward for negotiations with the government. The initial "Operation Iron Fist" seems to have had some success in weakening the rebels. But with this continuous supply from the SAF, LRA feels strong enough to continue the war. This information provided by the religious leaders publicly has made some people feel that the religious leaders were not playing their role with sufficient tact and circumspection. Some key informants interviewed in Kampala believed that this role might explain why the rebels have subjected the Church to attacks, since some of the information provided has security implication for the rebels. This compromises the Church's role as peace promoters.

When presented with this information, the UPDF spokesman, Maj. Shaban Bantariza, said that the army and the government already knew this information. The Uganda government protested to the Sudanese government about these new developments, giving dates and quantitative of weapons delivered to the LRA, but the Sudanese government denied this accusation. The protest came only two weeks after both governments had renewed the protocol that allowed Uganda to continue their operations inside the Sudan. So there appeared to be a kind of cat and mouse game going on between the two governments, and it may have been this fact that led the religious leaders calling for an international intervention in the conflict.

When the government and military leaders in Acholi were interviewed at the beginning of this research about the prospects of peace in Acholi, almost all of them answered that they did not see any light at the end of the tunnel "unless" the government of Sudan stops arming the LRA. When told that the Khartoum government had demonstrated the opposite tendency and that they were also on their part arguing the same in regard to Uganda's support to the SPLM/A, they seemed to be at a loss. This clearly indicated that the government of Uganda and that of the Sudan had lost vision and their mutual support to rebels in each of their countries was leading to the annihilation of the people in these regions unless a new approach to the conflict was found. This may also have influenced the kinds of responses from the grassroots communities in the camps, which argued that unless president Museveni leaves power, the conflict in their region would continue indefinitely. This is the point at which a new dynamic approach by the international community is most required.

Thus instead of reducing the attacks and the pain the people of Acholi have continued to suffer, without any hope that things will get better even with the personal command of the armed forces by the president himself, who for a good part of 2002 was encamped in Gulu directing the war effort. He promised that the war

would be over by the dry season, but when the rainy season began in March 2003, the rebels scaled the rebellion up with no adequate response by the UPDF. Perhaps disappointed by claims of “victory” that were being put out by the government, Father Carlos Rodriguez of the Catholic mission in Gulu, felt frustrated when he remarked: “The army tells us that they have killed rebels. But when you look at the so-called rebels, most of them are women and children. You don’t use helicopter gunships to kill guerrillas. You end up killing many innocent people¹²⁴.”

As if this was a prediction, on June 22nd, it was reported that 10 members of a family who were at a funeral service were bombed and killed by the helicopter gunship that was engaged in chasing the rebels who had ambushed two vehicles in Otuboi near Kaberamaido, Katakwi district. The rebels had apparently also burnt Toyota Dyna truck in which five people were feared to have died. The president had a few days before questioned the intentions of those Ugandans who were making criticisms about the use of the helicopter gunships (see Appendix I). But according to the army, the attack on the civilians was “a mistake.” The purpose was to attack the rebels who were in flight. The problem is that in such hot pursuits there is no way a helicopter captain can tell the civilians from the rebels, who in most cases are also dressed in civilian clothes.

In his own brief, president Museveni argued that the recent “infiltrations” by the LRA in the east of the country was just out of the “pressure” the army had placed on them in Acholiland: “Now it is a matter of mere survival for the those rebels,” he was quoted as saying. “They are just roaming bandits trying to infiltrate but not to ‘attack’. They cannot sustain it.” He promised to go back to the north to “resume supervision of the war campaign¹²⁵.” This approach is not working and some people have become exasperated and some are calling for the “privatisation¹²⁶” of the war! The Managing Editor, David Ouma Balikowa, in a weekly column entitled: “Hello Mr President”, called the current efforts to defeat Kony unsustainable itself. He pointed out that since the army generals had already privatised the war through large scale corruption and other malpractices, there was no reason why the tax-payers and the donors should continue pumping in billions of dollars into a conflict that benefits just a few, including Kony¹²⁷. This growing cynicism revealed a growing distrust of government explanations about their capacity to defeat Kony, which the government cannot afford to ignore; given the fact that president Museveni is due to hand over power under the constitution’s term limit in the next three years.

Therefore, it is clear that the government does not have any new ideas about ending the conflict. Its 17-year military campaign has failed to subdue the rebels and the idea that the president would stop it by merely going to the north to “resume supervision” of the war campaign could not give any new reassurance that it would end. This would go to confirm the hypothesis of this research that the whole strategy

¹²⁴ *The New Vision*, May 12, 2003.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Gilbert Morri: “Let’s privatise the Kony War” in *The Monitor*, June 16th, 2003.

¹²⁷ Balikowa, D O “What if we ‘privatised’ the Kony War” in *Monitor*, 25th June, 2003.

of the government is to fight the political and military opposition in Acholi until it is subdued and crushed. This may also explain its perpetuation. If this hypothesis is in fact wrong, then concerted efforts must be found to stop the war otherwise every one, including the government, would perish in it. That is why the US government is making a big mistake by undertaking to supply new weapons and give training to the UPDF to continue to fight the LRA.

8.7.4 Arms Trafficking

Arms trafficking is a factor that has compounded the conflict in northern Uganda. While this factor has no direct relationship to the rise of the rebellion in northern Uganda, it is indeed one of the fundamental actors fuelling it. It has not only escalated the conflicts in pastoralist communities in these areas, it has led to escalation of what otherwise would have been small-scale rebellion.

The long-running civil war in the Sudan has been the chief source of arms for many of the pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities in east bank Equatoria. Those areas are in part used as channels for trafficking weapons across borders. The break down in the law and order resulting from the conflict in the Sudan has transformed into a lucrative business what otherwise is an illicit trade in firearms in which elements of the SPLA, the Government of Sudan Army and its militia, local arms dealers and Uganda traders equally participate. This source adds great amounts of weaponry, which rebel groups exploit.

The involvement of the government of Sudan in small arms trafficking is manifested of its policy of fighting the SPLM/A in southern Sudan. This supply of huge quantities of small arms, mainly AK 47 and land mines to its militia in area and the Ugandan rebels, the Lord Resistance Army (LRA), was enough for the time being in the early period. The SPLA mal-administration in the east bank Equatoria led to contradictions with the local communities, which were themselves militaristic. This made it necessary for these communities (the Toposa, Didinga, etc) to arm themselves even more. Some of these communities were won over by the Sudanese government and organised into militia forces. The split within the ranks and file of the SPLA in 1991 and the subsequent in-fighting led to the formation of Madi-Acholi militia dubbed the Equatoria Defence Forces (EDF), which operates in close collaboration with the LRA and hence facilitating them additional supplies, as we have noted.

The National Islamic Front (NIF) regime supplies or encourages the trafficking in arms for many reasons. These include the general destabilisation in the area, which allows the local communities to fight among themselves causing insecurity and hence prevents the SPLA from getting recruits into its ranks. The Arab dominated regime is interested in decimating the local population by provoking internal war with sophisticated weapons. Destabilisation of Uganda and Kenya is part of the NIF political/ideological agenda.

The NIF does not possess enough economic and financial resources for maintaining a string of garrisons or delaying elements. Land transportation is hazardous and replenishing the units is sometime difficult. It therefore relies more

on bartering the weapons it receives from Arab countries as donations and contributions to its war effort, with food staff from the adjacent localities using firearms and ammunitions in exchange. This is another channel for small arms and light weapons to get into the hands of the civil population in Southern Sudan. The SPLA as an institution, on the other hand, is not involved in the trafficking of firearms. But it has failed from time to time to control the activities of some of its senior officers, deserters and the large numbers of the internally displaced persons (IDPs mostly Dinka Bor) that engage in this illicit trade. It is known that some senior officers acting on their own are involved in arms trafficking as a means of raising financial resources for maintenance of their families and education of their children in east African towns and cities. They control some of the arms routes through an array of their subordinates (intelligence and signal officers).

The spread of small arms in the region has compromised the security inside Uganda. This prompted the SPLM administration in southern Sudan to suggest a regional solution to this problem. In a letter to support an application to USAID to fund a regional conference on small arms trafficking the Governor of Equatoria had this to say:

“[The] SPLM/SPLA is deeply concerned that the spill-over effects of its deserters and sale of small arms by them is destabilizing northern Uganda and North-eastern Congo ...In fact, it has been established that sale of arms by SPLA deserters to the Karimojong tribesmen in Uganda has led to cattle rusting and raids among the Karimojong as well as the neighbouring Teso tribe ...” [Communication from Commander, Samuel Abu-John Kabashi, SPLM Regional Secretary (Governor) for Equatoria Region, 17th October 2000].

The flow of weapons is maintained on both sides by a demand sustained by war in south Sudan and the traditional practices of cattle rustling among the pastoral communities on both sides of the common borders, as well as Kony's war. Conservative estimates put the number of firearms in south Sudan at more than five hundred thousand pieces. About a third of these are to be found in east bank Equatoria, where trafficking in illicit arms dates back fifty to seventy years. It is not unusual that an individual possesses more than three AK47 rifles.

The large-scale conflicts among the pastoralists, especially across international borders, carry high potential for inter-state tensions and diplomatic hiccoughs. The need to manage and resolve them goes without saying. This is because the endemic poverty among the pastoralists is attributable to this perpetual state of war and insecurity. The problem has been compounded by the failure of the state to manage and resolve ethnic conflicts in a manner that reduces damages. The state intervention has been a contributor to these conflicts by pursuing ethnic responses to conflicts and lack of democratic culture for handling differences. The result is that the state engages itself in revenge killings and human rights violations, which harm both the innocents and the perpetrators and these sometimes includes

children and pregnant women. At times the security forces confiscate and appropriate the animals they retrieve making themselves rustlers on behalf of the state.

According to one research, the sources of guns are varied and have international dimensions. Guns originate mainly from the former Soviet Union countries of eastern and central Europe, China, North Korea, UK, Israel and USA. This has given rise to the commercialisation of weapons of mass destabilisation in the region. Many of those benefiting are part of the international weapons industry from the U. S. and South Africa. They are playing in the hands of the government by fuelling the conflict on a low conflict intensity basis.

Small arms from these countries pass through a number of countries before “winding up” in the Horn of Africa-Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda and Kenya. According to ADOL: “Internally, the gun and ammunition dealers source their merchandise from local representatives of the SPLA, renegade members of the officer corps and men of the UPDF and local defence units (LDUs).¹²⁸” Similarly the insecurity which was caused by the Uganda rebel groups such as UNRF II, LRA, renegade UPDF and SPLMA resulted in the trafficking of small arms in the areas between Sudan and Uganda. The ADOL report concludes:

“Gun trafficking has intensified internal strife, escalated cattle raids and caused massive displacements of people internally hence perpetuating underdevelopment of north and north-eastern parts of Uganda. The insecurity, human rights abuses together with atrocities arising from illegal gun trafficking has raised the concerns of the affected people and the international community. There is a growing outcry by national governments, NGOs, and donors for regional co-operation in the Horn of Africa to contain and eliminate small arms business that has been growing unabated¹²⁹.”

The call for regional co-operation is fine and the concern of national governments also sounds fine and “legally correct.” The problem is that the same national governments have themselves become part of the “illegal” transfer of weapons between the borders. In the case of Sudan and Uganda, they have been engaged in supplying opposing factions of the rebel groups. In fact the governments on each side seem to be competing with one another to ensure the other side is weakened and overthrown. In such a case, the call for regional cooperation is a call to the deaf. Indeed, one might even go as far as saying that the governments are themselves part of the problem and not part of the solution. In such a case, it becomes necessary for the involvement of the international community at the highest level of political decision through the United Nations system to bring about

¹²⁸ Action for Development of Local Communities (ADOL) [2001]: Report on the arms Trafficking in the Border Regions of Sudan, Uganda and Kenya (A Case Study of Uganda: North, Northeast and Eastern Uganda), Kampala, April-June 2001, p.43.

¹²⁹ Ibid: p. 8.

an arrangement that can bring about dialogue between the governments and their citizens, since the states themselves have become part of the conflict.

8.7.5 The Land Issue

Although not linked to the original causes of the conflict, the threat to Acholi lands has become a major point of contention in the on-going war in Acholiland. The Acholi people have generally become convinced that the government's reluctance to end the rebellion by peaceful means, and hence the keeping of the people in the "protected camps," are part of the strategies intended to remove the people from their farmland. It is believed that this would create room for commercial farmers from abroad to come and exploit it under the U S African Growth and Opportunity Act.

One key informant pointed out that on the 8th October, 1995 when he was launching the new constitution, president Museveni had protested to the joint meeting of the National Resistance Council (then the country's parliament) and the Constituent Assembly for the failure by the Assembly to grant the government rights to own land for "development." But in March 1996 he expressed satisfaction that there was plenty of unoccupied land in Acholi, which could be put to use. His half brother Lt. General Salim Saleh and Geoffrey Obel, a presidential adviser on AGOA have plans to utilise this land for production of cotton for clothing for US markets.

Salim Saleh, through his enterprise called the Divinity Union has engaged in a series of projects under his personal control to exploit Acholi land. These projects have not succeeded but new attempts are being made under different guises. This is why there is a lot of suspicions about the new project called the "Security and Production Programme" which has come under the personal control of Salim Saleh himself, although it is supposed to be a UPDF/government project.

There has also been suspicion created about the extension of a new district called Adjumani on the east bank of the river Nile (located on the Acholi side of the river Nile). This demarcation has encroached on parts of Acholi land, and its inclusion in West Nile by government administrative measures has heightened these suspicions of grabbing Acholi land while the Acholi people are disempowered and encamped against their will in IDP camps. The people of Acholi are not being consulted in all these big decisions and the issue of land has begun to emerge as a major issue of contention in the war in the region.

In a letter written by the Jonam Palango Farmers Group, Pakwach, to the president, the group asked the president to grant more land to them on the eastern side of the river bank because the western bank was now overpopulated with very limited space in between homesteads to do any useful cattle or agricultural farming. Whereas this kind of need could under normal circumstances been conceded on individual or group basis by the Acholi community itself, the request was being made when the Acholi people themselves were disempowered and put a way in IDP camps.

The matter became sensitive and one that was seen as part of a plan to dispossess the Acholi while 'rewarding' those communities that were seen as able to

cooperate with the government in the fight against the rebels, especially when the people involved are the constituency of one of the nation's leaders in the NRM government, Lt. General and deputy prime minister, Moses Ali, as well as the president's half-brother Salim Saleh. It appeared that this group was asking for the land grant, which the president has no power to make, as part of a wider global financial arrangement involving his half-brother who had been promoting these private schemes under the name "Divinity Union," which was awash with cash but was later declared bankrupt. In their letter to the president, the group had this to say:

"We are aware that the international financial bodies are keen to see the Jonam and the Acholi to utilise the land in between the river their borders for mass food production, game and cattle ranching and ecotourism. The Maj. General Salim Saleh is also geared towards realising the same objective. However, because of low profile of the Jonam in national politics, we have not featured much in these initiatives¹³⁰."

The farmers asked the government to reopen the now unutilised access roads, which were opened in the 1970s for the Goyo Afoyo Beef and Ranching Scheme from Paakwach-Lolim road down up to Rhino-Camp bordering Adjumani and to cause the Needs Assessment Survey to be executed on the "east bank of Jonam" with a view to determining the requirements for reintroducing cattle rearing as well as reviving the Goyo Afoyo Ranching Scheme for their benefit. The group was quick to remind the president that they were the "Gatekeepers of the West Nile" who had managed to "voluntarily policed" the length and breadth of the Albert Nile and the bridge at Pakwach and had "kept the peace in a region (of) foreign inspired instability." This suggested that they wanted to be rewarded for this role, while their neighbours, the Acholi, were well kept a way in the IDP camps.

In these circumstances, the fear that the Acholi land might be rented off to white farmers from Zimbabwe was reignited when the government forcibly threw out 17, 400 rioting Sudanese refugees from the Kiryandongo refugees camp in Masindi district. As soon as the refugees were thrown out, it was announced that the government had removed these refugees so that they can "make room" for the Zimbabwe farmers to enable them to "start a new life." The minister of state for planning, who claims to have talked to 20 such farmers confirmed that there was a plan to settle these farmers "somewhere in Bunyoro" and definitely in Masindi¹³¹. They were doing this when under current law, the government has no authority to take-over land and lease it out for "development." Such highhanded approach creates real fear in the minds of the Acholi people that the war in their region is part of a wider plan to dispossess them as punishment for alleged "crimes" committed in the "Luwero Triangle."

¹³⁰ Letter from the Jonam Palango Farmers Group to president Y. K. Museveni dated 22nd December, 1997.

¹³¹ *The Monitor*, September 10, 2003.

8.7. 6 Abductions of children

Abduction of children by the LRA rebels began in haste with the failure of the Bigombe peace efforts in 1994. The abductions are also connected with the government attempt to involve the civilian population in the Bow and Arrow groups against the LRA, as well as refusing to accept the LRA request for a six-month period for disarming and their resort to the Sudanese government to give support to their war against the government. Since then the abductions have become simplified for the rebels since with the people being encamped in IDP camps, these centres have become “one stop centres” for the LRA to abduct more children from these centres, instead of roaming the whole Acholi countryside to abduct them. In September 2001 UNICEF estimated that 10,000 children had been abducted since the war began and that a registered 5,500 children had not been accounted for. Since the “Operation Iron Fist” begun in April 2002, up to 6,800 children were abducted and 50 per cent of them have not accounted for. This means that the unaccounted for children were killed in action or that they lost their lives by other means.

It is clear that these abductions of children will continue in these circumstances. The latest attacks by the LRA in Acholi, Lira, Adjumani and Teso have resulted in yet large number of children being abducted. In Lwala Secondary School, Kaberamaido, it was reported that as many as 100 girls were abducted in one swoop. In February 2003, the Human Rights Watch paid a visit to Gulu and interviewed former abducted children as well as government and civil society organisations involved in the handling of the return of abducted children. Their immediate call in their report: *Stolen Children*¹³², to the LRA and the government of Uganda to immediately stop the abductions and the recruitment of children in the LDUs and UPDF is unlikely to yield any results unless this call is followed up by other interventions on the part of the international community. “Operation Iron Fist” has not reduced the incidence of child abductions, nor is it likely given the persistence of the conflict.

The significance of the abducted children has become less concerned with the numbers of children abducted, although this is a continuing concern and worry, but more with the impact the abductions are having on the entire population. There is increasing worry about the traumatic impact this on-going tragedy is having on Ugandan society in general. Of course the most important concern is that nearly 80 per cent of the LRA ‘rebel’ soldiers are composed of these abducted children, with the consequence that the UPDF is fighting the children whom it should have protected from being abducted in the first place. How can the government and the president in particular justify personally directing a war that is against its own unprotected population, worst of all children?

Moreover, it is clear that the traumatic impact is in many cases beyond repair.. Many of those who are trained and intoxicated into becoming soldiers are

¹³² Human Rights Watch [2003]: UGANDA: Stolen Children: Abduction and Recruitment in Northern Uganda, March 2003, Volume 15 No. 7(A).

used as human shields for detecting the presence of anti-personnel landmines and detonating them with their bodies. They are also placed on the frontline against the well-trained UPDF soldiers equipped with the latest sophisticated weapons and helicopter gunships to protect the older officer core of the LRA. The government prides itself of having acquired these new sophisticated helicopter gunships that “can see at night.” But these weapons are targeting children and as recent experience has shown, they are also used against the civilian population by “mistake.” Most of the children fighting on the LRA side find themselves on a frontline in which the effective army on the UPDF side are also children recruited as Home Guards or from returned abducted children who are recruited into the UPDF.

Recent studies about the whole idea of psychological counselling of traumatised children advocated by some Western experts have been shown to be more harmful than helpful. Western aid agencies during the 1990s flown out psychologists to Uganda to provide trauma counselling to traumatised children. But now British NGOs and other experts say this sort of counselling often does more harm than good. One of these experts working with the London-based Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture has declared the counselling activities to be “a nonsense.” He has pointed out that the donors like to run these programmes because “it is currently a very sexy concept” and because they are easily funded. “But there is little evidence that those affected see mental health as a priority to be addressed as a separate issue, and still less that they want this done by programmes conceived and delivered by outsiders¹³³. What is crucially important therefore is the process of reconciliation to begin so that these children can be rehabilitated as part of the process of ending the war. Here the community will be the proper organ for re-socialising the children back into their extended families.

8.7.7 Internally displaced persons’ camps

The problem of displaced persons is the problem of the “protected camps,” which has been compounded with each escalation of the conflict. The phenomenon of IDPs has been growing since the government resorted to ordering the population into “protected villages” in 1996. Even before September 1996 when the President announced the decision before a parliamentary committee, some camps had already been formed several months before in places like Pabo, Ajulu and Lalogi, where the NRA had already begun to force the people to move into these centres¹³⁴. In time, the camps became near-barracks from which the population could not be allowed to depart without authorisation. To do so required military permission.

Although the government took initiative in asking the UN to help it prepare a national policy on internal displacement giving the rights of the people in the camps and the government’s responsibilities on the basis of the UN Guiding Principles, these principles have never been approved and implemented. The UN Guiding

¹³³ IPS [1998]: “CHILDREN: Doubtful Value of Counselling for Child Victims of War”, World News, Interpress Agency, London, February 25, 1998.

¹³⁴ Human Rights Focus [2002]: “Between Two Fires”: Human Rights Situation in ‘Protected Camps’ in Gulu District, Gulu.

Principle 6, for instance, stipulates that every human being shall have a right to be protected against being arbitrarily displaced from his or her home or place of habitual residence, unless the security of the civilians involved or “imperative military reasons so demanded” it. In such a situation, the Guidelines provide that the displacement so occasioned “shall last no longer than required by circumstances.” Although the term “circumstances” could be interpreted in an elastic manner, there was a clear requirement to limit the displacement of civilians from their homesteads and their normal life. This of course imposes a duty on the government to defend the areas affected so that normal life could be restored speedily to the civilians. The government has not fulfilled these international responsibilities.

The experience of the last seven years since the first camps were created has shown that the government has not the political will to carry out its responsibilities since the army has no capacity to protect the communities. By the time the attacks by the LRA spread to the east of the country in mid-2003, creating new encampments in those areas, it had become clear that the government was nowhere near to comprehending the problem faced by the civilian population. The government also seemed to have no answer to the rebellion, which was spreading and posing new theatres.

When the “Operation Iron Fist” failed to eliminate the LRA and instead increased their attacks against the civilian population, the government retorted by again ordering those people who had managed to hang on in their villages come to out “within forty eight hours” failure of which they were threatened with military action. By June 2003, it was being estimated that over one million civilians were now in IDP camps in the affected areas. This proved that the problem was becoming irreversible unless a new approach to the conflict was found.

Almost all the people interviewed in the camps wanted a return to their home areas where they could look after themselves since they had not received any protection from the government. As we pointed out above, far from being protection centres, the camps had become “one stop centres” for the LRA abductors. The LRA rebels have demonstrated their capability to attack these camps and abduct more children with impunity. Far worse, the encampment of the population has resulted in the destruction of the productive base of the people, which has led them to become ever dependent on food aid. Below are some of the responses of the people in the camps:

- The food we get is not enough though we get something anyway. Government brought us into this camp and we were given orders to vacate our homes in only 48 hours without anything in our hands. They told us to come to the camps for protection. But we have no protection;
- We accept the food we are given because we have no option. Now we have become pigs fighting for food. We receive the food with tots and tits of anguish unlike in our homes;
- We were initially received by the director of Unyama NTC and settled in Holy Rosary parish but when the numbers grew bigger we were chased in the face of poor sanitation. The people then begged to be settled around. But the

official order was for them to go back home. We are just squatters at the mercy of the local authorities. No organized assistance from the Government or NGOs whatsoever has come to us;

- The numbers of mentally disturbed people have increased in the towns since many people have been forced to live that way in order to access rubbish bins;
- In case of the demises there is nowhere to bury our dead. We face hard task finding burial space and this is normally only found for children. Adults burial space is not easy to get and if secured the grave is shallowly dug with the risk of marauding pigs and dogs exhuming the bodies. It's a critical health hazard;
- We now find it secure to encourage our children to seek refuge in towns at night to avoid danger here in the camps.

Asked what were the solutions to the problems they had raised, the following were some of the answers:

- Instead of food assistance to us in kind it should be channelled to the soldiers who should be positioned every 5 kms within Acholi land and let them be fed properly. The IDPs will then go back home and cultivate their own food;
- The World Food Programme should embark on relief distribution to the IDPs;
- The communities have always received displaced persons well. Lacor Hospital has assisted a lot in that it offers treatment to the IDPs for free. Good Samaritan a local NGO, has always supported the IDPs in Lacor Hospital. It has also helped a lot in paying school fees for their children;
- The United Nations should expand their programmes and respond to people's real needs beyond food assistance only.

The above reactions from the civilian population reveal that their situation is getting desperate and unbearable. Yet the challenges posed to the government of Uganda and the international community are clear. First, it is becoming morally unacceptable to ignore the human rights infringements that are occurring with this large-scale displacement of the population. For how long can these infringements be tolerated? Secondly, the maintenance and care for the increasing numbers of IDPs in camps is becoming unmanageable since it has exceeded the capacities of both the local NGOs and international ones currently operating in the region. This situation cannot and must not be sustained. Thirdly, displacements are increasing with no light appearing at the end of the tunnel. This is creating to the Acholi people a sense of desperation, idleness and hopelessness, as well as feelings of alienation and marginalisation, compounding all the original fears that this conflict was intended to finish off the people of Acholi. It has also contributed to a feeling of loss of identity, self-dignity, pride, and self-esteem of the people. This has provided ground for resentment against the government and opposition that is in turn leading to more instability. Finally, given this situation, the issue of resettlement in their

indigenous homesteads and rehabilitation has become an urgent matter in order to deal with the above negatives.

But the government is no nearer to looking at the matter in those terms. Resettlement of the population into normal village environments is still out of the question. On the contrary, their policy is moving in the opposite direction because the government is planning, as we shall see below, a semi-permanent resettlement and rehabilitation programme to turn the IDP camps into security and production units. Moreover, there is no evidence that the government is keen to put in place and implement a national policy on displaced persons. This became apparent when the Representative of the UN Secretary General for Internally Displaced Persons, Dr. Francis M. Deng visited Uganda on a fact-finding mission in August 2003. The Gulu District NGO Forum on behalf of the CSOs in Gulu district presented a background paper to Dr. Deng in which they demanded that the government implement its policy on IDPs¹³⁵. But there was no evidence that the government was addressing this concern.

In an editorial headed: “Why is there no Policy on IDPs,” the independent newspaper, *The Monitor*, lamented:

“After nearly twenty years of conflict, with almost one million of our people on the run from war at any one time, this government does not have set guidelines on how to respond to the calamity. The fact of this unsettling reality was released to the public by the Acting Commissioner for Disaster Preparedness in the Office of the Prime Minister, Michael Owor. ... How could a whole ministry for all these years fail to draft a policy on a matter that is central to its very relevance? How has the concerned minister been coordinating relief efforts for the suffering multitudes in the IDP camps¹³⁶?”

The fact of the matter was that the government had failed to implement the international commitments on internally displaced persons and this also raises the serious question as to whether the government is really concerned about the suffering of its own population or whether it did not care in the first place.

The UN is also unable to act because it does not want to encroach on the responsibilities of the member-states in this respect. When Dr. Deng was asked about the UN responsibilities in pressuring the Uganda government to carry out its obligations, he answered that people should be tolerant and give time to the government to carry out its obligations. He pointed out that the UN does not have the capacity, even if it wanted, to resolve conflicts within member states. The solution must be found among the people within the states. But there is clearly an area for

¹³⁵ NGO Forum Gulu [2003]: A Brief Paper on the Situation in the North, presented by James Otto, Chairperson, Gulu District NGO Forum to Dr. Francis M. Deng, Representative of the UN Secretary General on Internally Displaced Persons on Behalf of the CSOs Operating in Gulu District, Northern Uganda.

¹³⁶ *The Monitor*, August 14th, 2003.

moral persuasion on the part of the UN in reminding states of their obligations to their people, especially when the states themselves become the problem rather than the solution to the conflicts.

8 7. 8 Law e nforcement agencies

The intensification of the war, especially after “Operation Iron Fist,” has brought a lot of pressure on law enforcement agencies. During our investigation, the official police response to the researchers during this exercise was at times hostile. The researchers tried their best to obtain information from the police but in most instances, the police refused to cooperate. The Officer-in-Charge Station Gulu is quoted by one of the researchers as saying: “You go away, we are not politicians.” The regional office also turned down the request for an interview. However, through different channels, the researchers were able to obtain certain data, which is reproduced here.

Such attitudes reflect the generally hard-line pressures that have been exerted on the police by the UPDF in these districts. The police have been weakened since the days of the Amin dictatorship, which purged the force of its Acholi, Langi and Atesot officers between 1971 and 73. The NRM continued the purge and more-or-less recruited new officers into its ranks. The militaristic character of the NRM government has also been responsible for the further weakening of the force professionally due to the fact that the government has tried to politicise the force. It has done this because they wanted the force to be supportive of the “No Party Movement System.” From time to time, the President himself has accused the police of being supporters of the political parties. To be able to operate, the NRM needs to use the Penal Code to restrict and disperse political meetings held by opponents, which the police force alone is authorised to do. Currently the Inspector General of the Police is an army General, who was promoted to this post for the same reason.

The police force in Acholi has further been undermined by the strong army presence of the UPDF in dealing with the rebellion in the region. The Africa Rights report on law enforcement and the legal system in northern Uganda observed that during the period of the report, police posts in the rural areas had been attacked and demolished by the LRA since they were seen as the extension of the government in these areas¹³⁷. Their carrying weapons for policing purposes became a problem for them and turned them into targets for attack. In these circumstances, policing was left to the army, instead of strengthening the police force. Over time, this weakness was addressed but policing in the rural areas became increasingly difficult, especially when the army resorted to setting up military courts to try rebels. The same also happened to the L.Cs, which also performed some policing duties. They could arrest criminals and try minor offenders.

The role of law enforcement has recently come in the limelight because of the enforcement of the Amnesty Act 2000 as well as the Anti-Terrorism Act 2002.

¹³⁷ African Rights [2003]: *Northern Uganda: Justice in Conflict*, London.

Other complicating factors in law enforcement have been the involvement of the paramilitary and vigilante groups. These agencies have operated outside the legal framework and have been deployed to assist the army, although they have sometimes contradicted their work. Two such groups have operated in the war zone. They include the Kalangala Action Plan, which operates under the command of Maj. Kakooza Mutale, a Presidential political adviser. His activities have annoyed the people in Acholi because some were seen as bordering on disrespect to their traditions such as the exhuming of dead bodies from the grave in Paicho. Recently, it was reported that the Kalangala Action Plan was engaged in recruiting and training of children for military activities in an “Academy” around Kampala. The ministry of education inspectors visited the “Academy” and found that it had not been registered under the laws.

The second group is the Operation Wembley, which also involves the army. This agency was created as part of the Internal Security Organisation (ISO) to fight rampant robberies around Kampala, but has since emerged as a shadowy paramilitary organisation, operating side by side with the UPDF. The Popular Intelligence Unit (PIN) was reinforced in 2001 when the former Army Commander, J. J. Odongo, was appointed by the President to head it. It has also been involved in intelligence activities in the war zone, but its activities have not been clear. There used also to be a local paramilitary group linked to a member of the LC 5 called the “Labeja Group” with the task of hunting down robbers and thieves and carrying out extra-judicial killings to eliminate them. It operated closely with the UPDF. These agencies operate parallel to each other but towards the same goal. The population is confused because they see them as undermining the work of the police and law enforcement in general. This is because with all these legal enforcement agencies in place, rampant defilement and rape are still going on and the law is not being enforced. The activities of these agencies have been very negative and adverse to law enforcement and the reduction in crime to civilians.

In regard to the incidences of human rights violations, there are many cases such as arrests and detentions that have been reported that have a direct link to the conflict. Those arrested on very flimsy charges are sometimes kept in military barracks and subjected to torture, as well as to cruel and inhuman degradation and treatment. The traumatised population regard the legal enforcement with these problems as intended to punish them without any offence being committed. Because of such mistreatment at the hands of both the rebels and the government agencies, the population has come not to trust the legal enforcement system any longer. This reinforces the mistrust created by the lack of protection by the UPDF for the people in IDP camps and has reinforced the general feeling that the army is not as interested in fighting the rebels, as in harassing the population.

Furthermore, the law enforcement agencies have been greatly undermined by the prevalence of corruption. The government recently admitted that this is one of the problems facing the army in Acholi. The soldiers sell the fuel meant for the transportation of the troops in pursuance of the rebels. The police on their part falsely detain people unless they are paid some “little lunch.” This is called in local

speak as *camucana*-meaning “little lunch,” which is not very different from the “*kitu kidogo*” of Kenya. Corruption has come to afflict the police forces in this region as well. Some of the law enforcement agencies use their guns to harass the public since they see the guns they carry as a source of power and wealth. Thus the law enforcement agencies are no longer following the laws of the nation, as they are supposed to do. They also fear the rebels so they are unable to respond to their expected roles as law enforcement agencies. In short, the war has undermined the capacity of the state to protect the population according to the rule of law.

In these circumstances, the researchers tried to find out from the population whether they thought there were alternative systems of law enforcement? They found that there were informal law and order structures such as “camp leaders” who play the role of local police in the camps. They are elected by the camp population to help in keeping law and order in the camps. There are also LCs in the camps, which are supposed to assist in law enforcement. These committees are not organised in any legal and official way they are the remnants of the official village committees as they operated in the villages. The researchers found that some many of these LCs have also become so corrupt that they now handle cases they are not supposed to handle like defilement cases, which are supposed to be taken to the police for prosecution before the magistrate courts. They insist on payment to settle the cases locally. There are also elders’ courts that help in law enforcement. In the camps where the people have been displaced from their home areas, elders still have a lot of respect in dispute settlement.

The role of local defence units as law enforcers is dubious. In many cases, they are involved in crimes in the community such as theft and rape. This is because they possess guns which they use to good effect in their favour as a source of power. Therefore the idea of arming civilians to fight both the rebels and cattle raiders is a big mistake because the civilians are not trained well enough to counter the rebels and cattle rustlers who are well armed. Instead it has become a means of giving free guns to the rebels to continue their atrocities thereby catching the conflict. The LDUs also give guns to the Karimojong to fight the Turkana cattle raiders from Kenya, but the Karimojong instead end up selling them. They are ill trained and fear the rebels, and instead they end up harassing the general public for money and women for sex.

There is a general feeling therefore that government should create community policing provided these are well trained. The Gulu district chairperson, Col. Walter Ochola is said to be in support of the idea and the district government has asked the World Bank to finance the proposal. While there is no doubt that the idea of community policing is a good one, there still is every probability that the force would just become infected by these problems, which bedevil the existing law enforcement agencies. Therefore, it is better to empower those structures, which have been created democratically within the camps by the people themselves such as the “camp leaders” to assume greater powers. In addition, the existing agencies should be better organised and coordinated instead of them acting as lawless agencies which complicate the work of law enforcement. We need to recruit more

law enforcement staff that is much more qualified and better paid. This will ensure that there is enough protection for the people in the camps as well as create a security system in transition from camp security to protection in the communities back in the villages.

With “Operation Iron Fist” and the Anti-Terrorism Act, there has been an increase in arbitrary arrests and summary executions of people suspected of being rebel “collaborators.” The Human Rights Watch team, which visited Uganda in March, received a report of one such summary execution which took place on September 16, 2002 when the Gulu prison was raided by the UPDF which executed one prisoner by the name Peter Oloya “Yumbe” without any court warrant¹³⁸. On the same day, the army removed 22 prisoners from the legal detention and subjected them to torture and other kinds of mistreatment. The dead body of “Yumbe” was not returned to the relatives for burial. These kinds of activities on the part of the army give the impression of a general break down in the enforcement of law and order. It has put in question the whole judicial process as well.

According to the sources interviewed, there has been an increase in military arrests of civilians on the ground that they were either rebels or rebel collaborators, especially after June 2002, when the LRA is said to have returned in large numbers from their hideouts in southern Sudan. According to these sources, the suspects were arrested in large numbers without warrant and placed in army barracks. Many were accused of treason and others of other charges but none were taken to court. Apart from the army, the police have participated in the arrests together with the Kalangala Action Plan, the LDUs, the CMI and the “Labeja Group.” Although the Anti-Terrorism Act exempts from arrest the people engaged in contacts with rebels in the process of pursuing peace initiatives, such peace loving people have been arrested and accused of acting as “collaborators” undermining all efforts aimed at finding peace to the conflict. As we shall see later, the President has in fact gone as far as threatening Members of Parliament with hanging if they are found making contacts with the rebels¹³⁹.

8.7. 9 The judicial system

The judicial system has been undermined considerably by the above activities and lack of police enforcement. The courts in the rural areas have collapsed and the only reliable court system is that in Gulu Municipality. The reason is due to the widespread insecurity in these areas that has made all the sub county courts impossible to run, although they are supposed to open and operate normally. Corruption in the courts of law is also affecting the integrity and impartiality of those courts. The administration of ordinary criminal cases is made difficult because the police are not able to investigate cases and bring them before the courts within reasonable time. Those charged with offences like murder or rape are kept in prison

¹³⁸ Human Rights Watch [2003]: *Abducted and Abused*, op. cit. p.42.

¹³⁹ See section IX.7.10 (Internal Actors).

for prolonged periods and, where there is no evidence, released after 360 days. This has become standard “imprisonment” for other serious crime.

The recent addition of crimes committable under the Anti-Terrorism Act has served to impose further burden on a weak police force and a heavy handed military and paramilitary groups. Those arrested under the Act are mainly accused of treason and other serious crimes such as collaboration. The Act is quite elaborate on the kinds of offences that can be committed under it. In the short title to the Act, it is stipulated that the Act is intended to “suppress acts of terrorism; to provide for the punishment of persons who plan, instigate, support, finance or execute acts of terrorism; to prescribe terrorist organisations and to provide for the punishment of persons who are members of, or who profess in public to be members of, or who convene or attend meetings of, or who support or finance or facilitate the activities of terrorist organisations.

It also provides for the investigation of acts of terrorism and obtaining information in respect of such acts, including the authorising of the interception of the correspondence of and the surveillance of persons suspected to be planning or to be involved in acts of terrorism; and to provide for “other connected matters.” The Act is wide ranging and can cover such situations as political parties and individuals being designated “terrorists” or “terrorist organisations” if they happen to be “suspected” of planning or being involved in acts of terrorism. The crime net is quite wide and can almost cover all situations: Government may decide to act against individuals and groups of people.

The crime of terrorism is defined as being committed if a person who, “for purposes of influencing the Government or intimidating the public or a section of the public and for political, religious, social or economic aim, indiscriminately without due regard to the safety of others or property, carries out all or any of the following acts.” Section (7) stipulates ten kinds of acts, which can give meaning to the commission of the crime of terrorism. The punishment for the offence is death, “if the offence results in the death of any person” and in any other case, “be liable to suffer death.”

The person arrested on the charge of terrorism, treason and most others can only be tried by the High Court. In the conditions we have described above, the offender will in most cases be arrested or apprehended by the UPDF or the allied paramilitary organisations. They then pass on such a person to the police after interrogating him and the police are required to carry out their investigations and bring the suspect to court for trial, or release the accused. When the suspect is brought to court by the police for a formal charge, the courts will normally order his detention for the maximum statutory period of 360 days for any capital offence and 120 days for other offences. During this period, the accused is not allowed bail, although under article 23 (4) (b) of the Uganda Constitution, any arrested or detained person accused of any offence must be produced before a court of law within forty-eight hours after such arrest or detention. Government relies on another provision of the same constitution-article 23 (6) (C) to justify these detentions.

The army has often acted in a very arbitrary and emotional manner while exercising the powers given to it under this Act. During the period of our research, the resident district state attorney, Sidney Asubo was arrested by the army on the ground that he was a rebel collaborator. The attorney was in fact arrested when he was in the course of carrying out his work in the court. What actually happened were that there was some suspected rebel collaborators and their files were being submitted to the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) as required under the Anti-Terrorism Act, who is mandated to authorise the prosecution. These suspects were later sent to court by the DPP. The court later found the accused not guilty since there was no concrete evidence to convict them. Their release is what led to the arrest of the resident state attorney. In this case, it can be seen that the army is making the work of law enforcement agencies and that of the judiciary extremely difficult. By so doing, the army has not only undermined the confidence of the public in the execution of their constitutional responsibilities, it has also undermined the independence of the judiciary. This has resulted in situations of panic among members of the public since they cannot now trust the legal process, and such arbitrary acts may in fact increase support for the rebels.

Those interviewed were asked how they perceived the workings of the judicial system and how they viewed the process of justice imparted by the courts. Some expressed satisfaction with the performance of the lower courts where these courts were still functioning. There was satisfaction with the way the Amnesty law was working. The communities were co-operating well with the Amnesty Commission to rehabilitate the former rebels. On the other hand, the interviewees felt that the courts, especially at higher levels, were for only the rich. This is because there is widespread corruption in the courts today. One of those interviewed said: "Only the poor are in prisons today. They are not protected because of their poverty." Another gave the example of a case in which a former Vice Chairman of a local council, a Councillor from Lalogi in Gulu district, had defiled a young girl but the police did nothing to apprehend him and take him to court. It was only public opinion that forced him out of office.

On the other hand, it was felt that the lower council courts were fairer than the higher level courts of law. The reason for this was that the upper courts always required money before one's case could be brought to court for trial. The lower local community courts were regarded as being better because there is community involvement in these courts. The upper courts are infested with corruption because they lack community participation. The community also sees the courts as being government agents because they give more punishments to the people when the government wants them punished harshly. There is also dissatisfaction that people are being apprehended on mere suspicion. The example was given of 25 suspects who were thrown in prison without due process, and then removed from prison at night by the army and one of them, the late Mr. Oloya Yumbe, shot dead without trial.

Those interviewed in the camps were asked whether there was any alternative system that could be put in place of the present judicial system? Some

said the elders' courts "*ludito kak a*" were better. The elders were still seen as being influential and very active in cases where death has occurred. They work hand in hand with the clans to provide information. Their role could be improved upon. Rwtot David Onen Acana of Payira is for example taken seriously because of his integrity in society. Those interviewed said that right from colonial days up to the Museveni era, the administration of justice in Acholi was based on the British and Acholi traditional law. The Acholi sense of right and wrong were based on what can be described as humanitarianism. The Acholi are a clan-based people who love to be left alone to play, dance, farm, and socialise according to their own ways. Their way of life of close family ties has been gravely undermined by having to be forced to live in over crowded camps. The old Acholi sense of restorative justice based on the clan is no longer operational because the chief, elders and rituals have been replaced by the local council system, which is ineffective. Even the British system of justice is not being honoured.

However, some "coping strategies" have emerged in the camps in a somewhat creative manner, characteristic of the African 'survival' culture, which includes 'opting out' and 'opting in' according to the situation. As already noted, the official LC structure has undergone a severe test in these political, social and cultural transformations. These 'coping' strategies have been very much influenced by the manner in which the people were displaced from their community life and ordered into the "protected camps." It is noted that in the case of Gulu and Kitgum, the displacement was somehow haphazard, whereas that in Pader was gradual. In the case of Kitgum, there was simultaneous displacement of the entire population from sub-counties and parishes in Lamwo County, after the massacre of some 400 people in January 1996. In the case of Pader district, people from different parishes were able to come together at one campsite. This tended to determine the way the people were able to adjust to the changes. In the case of Gulu and Kitgum, the administrative structures were disrupted. As Fabius Okumu-Alya who has studied this situation has noted:

"Where the internal displacement was gradual and sporadic in nature, like Pader District, the resultant patterns of settlement in the IDP camps were thus the transformation of village set-ups. This enabled the people to continue with their old traditional and civil leadership such as the Rwtot and the elected local councils. In other cases, the IDPs came from several directions at the same time and converged on protected villages deemed more convenient and safe for them. In other cases, however, the settlement (was) not patterned on precedence or origin. Anybody settled anywhere¹⁴⁰."

¹⁴⁰ Okumu-Alya, F [2003]: Trends and Patterns in the Institutional Coping Strategies in the Conflict Situations in Northern Uganda, unpublished paper, Gulu.

This had the implication, as Okumu-Alya observes, that both the traditional and elected local council structures were lost at the very lower levels, with the consequence that the next level of administration was the sub-county chief or LC3 level. All these were statutory official structures of power, with one being appointed by the civil service structure and the other being elected by universal adult suffrage. In these cases, the people in the camps were grouped under “blocks” with the elected ‘block’ leaders acting as the ‘units of convergence.’ These blocks then elected a “camp leader” (referred to earlier) in charge of that block and these leaders came to have hierarchical power corresponding to the LC 3 structure, although these were no longer statutory in nature. The entire blocks came to have elected leaders corresponding to the offices of chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and committee members.

These structures have played social and political roles while also acting as representatives of the people in the camps. They handle produce documentation, including registrations, information dissemination and sometimes relief food distribution. On issues of dispute settlement, the “camp leaders” link with the official statutory structures of LC 3 for enforcement of decisions. Thus, while not ‘traditional’ in the way the Rwot Kweri structures worked, these ‘coping’ structures do fill a gap that has helped the communities in dealing with on-going problems in the camps, including administration of justice¹⁴¹. Both the traditional roles and official structures have been adjusted to enable the people to “cope.” This shows the value still existing in the traditional structures in Acholi.

At the moment there is no alternative justice system apart from the LC by-laws that help in community mobilisation, for instance in the general cleanliness of the community. Those who do not participate are asked to pay a small fine, which is used to hire someone to perform that work. The elders still help in clarifying issues and are useful in giving background information that brings people to appreciate issues in a better way. They also carry out cleansing rituals unlike the court procedures of punishment. This shows there is still some mileage left in the traditional systems under existing conditions.

8. 7. 10 Internal actors

The introduction of the anti-terrorism Act has introduced another complicating factor to the conflict and war in Acholiland. This is because the definitions of who are the “rebels”, “combatants”, “abductees,” “collaborators,” “terrorists,” and “perpetrators” has become highly politicised. Even though attempts are made by the government to criminalize some of these categories of people, it is highly contentious because many of the actors are mistaken to be one or other of these categories. Such legal categories as “accessory before the act” or “accessories after the act” obscure and bifurcate many social relationships which may have no criminal intent but which, in the context of the war, easily criminalizes very innocent people who are dubbed for convenience to be “collaborators” of the rebels. This reasoning also criminalizes politics because people who think differently as to how the conflict

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

should be handled are, *ipso facto*, regarded as being either “collaborators” or potential collaborators of the rebels. The use of the above categories in reference to the northern conflict is also highly subjective and counterproductive. It complicates all perspectives aimed at ending the conflict.

The term “rebel” is used to refer to some one who is opposed to the NRM government and has taken to the bush to oppose it. The term is also used to refer to those who aid them depending on the meaning one wishes to attach to such words and portray the person accused of doing so. The UPDF tends to use the word ‘rebels’ to mean armed opposition but also politicians who are said to be close to the armed opposition. Government intelligence organs stretch it further to mean those who aid rebellion and are relatives or acquaintances of the rebels. When arrested these groups are charged with treason. But more ominously, the term almost wholly now refers to abducted children, because it is now accepted that abducted children constitute more than 80 per cent of the soldiers of the LRA. This is what is making this war such an absurd one.

The term “combatants” refers to actual rebel fighters engaged in the battlefield but could also be used also to mean local defence unit and reserve forces that fight the rebels. It is not clear why the UPDF is not referred to in similar terms since they are also involved in the field of combat. This researcher felt that probably the term ‘combatants’ has acquired the derogatory meaning to refer to groups that are against government forces or those that do not have adequate military training. This is because the UPDF is posturing itself as a modern army and to refer to them as combatants is to put them at par with their rebel past and not as a national army.

‘Abductees’ are those people who are forcefully taken away from their homes by rebels and forced to join their ranks against their will. The government commonly uses it to refer to those young men and women who are forcefully recruited into rebel ranks. It is a concept that has acquired flexible use to include all people who give themselves up to the UPDF voluntarily or are captured in the field of combat with rebels. Security sources intimated that anybody, including those who joined rebellion voluntarily, refer to themselves as ‘abductees’ to escape the harsh punishment and reprisals. They also use it to benefit from the Amnesty Act or simply to elicit sympathy and save their lives. ‘Abductees’ are also those people the UPDF claims to have rescued from the rebels. These sometimes include even ordinary peasants caught in crossfire and herded into what are called ‘protected villages’ or internally displaced peoples’ camps. But increasingly the borderline between ‘abductee’ and ‘rebel’ has won thin due to recent changes introduced by the Anti-Terrorism Act.

The term “collaborator” is even more contentious, as we have seen above. The term originally meant to refer to those people who secretly aided the rebels but still remained among the general population. Today, however, the term ‘collaborator’ refers to the opposition or non-armed politicians who do not support the movement system of governance. In fact a source intimated to one of the researchers that government as well as the UPDF treat local political, cultural, and civil leaders as ‘collaborators’ and therefore do not involve them in programs meant

to bring about peace. The application of the term ‘collaborator’ has sometimes landed some people into trouble even those whose work is to establish contact with rebels and provide information to individual military officers. These officers sometimes behave more or less like independent warlords when they turn against these informants and detain them in the barracks accusing them of lying or hiding information. Such individuals can be detained and even tried as being ‘collaborators.’

The term “terrorist” is a recent one, which came with September 11th 2002, bombing of the world trade centre in USA. Otherwise the term that was formerly used in regard to the LRA was “rebel.” This shows that what appear to be local-ethnic struggles are now being redefined as a new discourse in global politics of peace and security as ‘terrorists’ with whatever implication this may have for those individuals nationally as well as globally. Uganda government has cashed in on this development in order to win political approval for its war in Acholiland and also in order to raise financial and military resources to pursue the war and other conflicts. The LRM/A was quickly included on a list of “foreign terrorist organisations” by the U.S. State Department. But, as we have observed above in relation to the term ‘rebel,’ the term ‘terrorist’ now refers to abducted children who are waging war against their will. How can international and national law sanction such an inhumane ‘law’?

According to the UPDF spokesperson, Shaban Bantariza, the term “terrorism” has to be distinguished from the term “war.” Whereas terrorism means, “the indiscriminate unleashing of violence against unarmed civilians”, “war” means “conflict between recognised belligerents.” The LRA in these terms was said not be fighting the government, but killing the civilians. Kony is now therefore defined as being a “terrorist” because “he has no defined targets” but only “kills unarmed people including children¹⁴².”

He added: “When you have no defined target, then you degenerate from a combatant to a warrior.” Thus a “warrior” by this new definition was a “terrorist” because he too did not have a recognised “target.” But if in fact the “target” was the civilian population and children, then it had to be asked why a rebel group would target the population it seeks to “liberate?” Could it not be that people like Osama Bin Laden or for that matter, Joseph Kony, are driven to such atrocities because of the insensitivity to their concerns, which need to be addressed? For as we have argued, if war or conflict is the extension of politics by other means, then it is important to find out what are the hidden politics behind certain conflicts in order to find a solution to them, if we are all not to be consumed in uncontrollable violence against all.

As matters now stand, the Anti-Terrorism Act has moved even further to include journalists who report on the war in the country if the information they give is seen by the authorities as promoting or abating the rebellion. This happened in the month of October 2002 when a reporter for the *Monitor* newspaper and the

¹⁴² *The Monitor*, September 17 2003.

Managing Editor of the paper were arrested because the paper reported that the reels had shot down one of the new helicopter gunships, which had just been procured. Instead of the army issuing a statement to deny the report and correct the impression, the journalist and the managing editors were criminalized and the *Monitor* newspaper was closed for one week.

Again when the *Monitor* in its editorial of September 5th, 2003 challenged the correctness of the government recruiting “Bow and Arrow” groups to fight the LRA rebels and said that the UPDF had failed in carrying out its constitutional duty of defending the country, the President, in a special article written for the newspaper, called the paper an “ally” of the LRA and an “enemy” of the people. In a toughly worded and abusive article, the President called the *Monitor* a violator of people’s constitutional rights by challenging their recruitment in the “Bow and Arrow” groups. He added that the *Monitor* and the LRA “are traitors, who work with external sinister forces to kill our people, infect children with Aids, and disrupt development programmes. In so doing, they also violate the constitution¹⁴³.”

In the same week while addressing Members of Parliament in the International Conference Centre, the President warned them against communicating with the rebels. He wanted them to report to police whenever they make any contact with the LRA. Otherwise, he warned, those MPs that communicate with the LRA “risk being hanged” for treason. Thus the MPs are gagged and cannot carry out their national responsibilities of trying to bring about reconciliation in the country and create conditions for peace.

In short, these terms in new usage may be said to mean different things to different people. It demonstrates the ridiculous extent to which this war has eaten deep in the body politic of the country, undermining the democratic and human rights of individuals who are trying to play a constructive role in their society. If the war is not stopped, all those who disagree with the government on anything can be brought under the Anti-Terrorism law and its blanket political definitions, which can cover all kinds of categories of people, including the ‘dissidents’ within the “Movement.” The Act has the potential to criminalize most people in society and to turn the country into “barracks” community in which those holding weapons define the rights and wrongs of those they do not agree with. This is why the restoration of democracy and democratic governance in the country is a crucial aspect for resolving the conflict.

Betty Bigombe in a recent interview with to the *Sunday Vision* expressed annoyance at the fact that the people with whom she had worked in the peace process in 1994 were now “rotting in Luzira prison” (Uganda’s Maximum Security Prison). She pointed out in the interview that after she left the government in June 1996 to take up an international appointment with the United Nations, she had kept in close contact with them through letter writing, but she regretted that even these letters were now being used in treason charges against them. “How does that build

¹⁴³ The *Monitor*, September 8, 2003.

confidence in the LRA rebels?” she asked¹⁴⁴. It is quite clear that the “collaborator” net had been widened to include them too. In that case, it is understandable why the NRM leaders take such hard positions when it comes to any suggestion for peace talks with the LRA. This means that until the international community pressures them into a dialogue, especially those countries that have tended to give Museveni blanket approval, there can be genuine no peace talks to stop the war in Acholiland.

8. 7. 11 The position of the Uganda government

According to the Uganda government, there are eight reasons that account for the perpetuation of the insurgency in Acholi¹⁴⁵. These are:

- NRA mistakes- which included the attacks by the 35th Battalion at Namukora. These ‘mistakes’ and ‘weaknesses’ also include corruption, drunkardness, and HIV/AIDS¹⁴⁶;
- The under-estimation of the conflict by the government in the early stages and its un-preparedness to “handle the region in a special manner” due to its “volatility”. This ‘special manner’ is not defined;
- The downsizing of the UPDF, which led to the reduction of the UPDF from 100,000 strong army to about half the size. This, according to the government, was done at the behest of the donor community and has led to the decline in the effectiveness of the army to respond to the LRA attacks, which were reinforced by Sudan;
- The Sudan factor, which led the Sudan government giving support to the LRA, [but no reference is made by the government of its own support to the SPLM/A];
- ‘Under-funding’ of the ministry of defence, which has led to lack of equipment and this is to be explained by the reduction in donor support;
- The “scaling down” of the operations of the other state organs since the onset of the conflict, which had “left the military overloaded with most of the (government) responsibility. The police, the judiciary and all other government departments and ministries need to play their role so that there is concerted effort to end rebellion¹⁴⁷.”
- The conflict in the DRC attributed to the “overthrow of the dictatorial regime of Mobutu and the subsequent power vacuum that sucked Uganda into the Congo” between 1998 and 2003. This took away 18 battalions from northern Uganda, “at a time when the conflict seemed to be coming to an end.”
- Political “moments”, by which the government means the impact of the democratisation process. This is seen negatively by the government in the following quotation:

¹⁴⁴ *Sunday Vision*, August 31, 2003.

¹⁴⁵ Uganda Government [2003]: *Concept: Security and Production Programme* (SPP), Kampala, May 2003.

¹⁴⁶ These additional elements were added by the president in his speech to the one-day dialogue at the International Conference Centre, Kampala on the 22nd July 2003-see also appendix I.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*: p.3.

“During the constitution making process, proponents of multipartism in the north rejected article 269 of the constitution and used it as a tool to give the conflict a cause. The 1996 and 2001 Presidential elections also complicated the search for the conflict resolution. Each presidential candidate had a different strategy for ending the insurgency. President Museveni had reservations about a negotiated end to the insurgency. Instead he promised a military solution. Dr. Paul Ssemogerere on the other hand promised to establish dialogue with LRA as a means to end the insurgency. The LRA preferred the “Ssemogerere approach” and campaigned for him by threatening to harm any person who didn’t vote for him. Similarly in the 2001 presidential elections, President Museveni maintained his 1996 stand while Kiiza Besigye, his opponent, toed the Ssemogerere line of dialogue with the LRA as a means of ending the insurgency. The failure of Paul Ssemogerere and Dr. Besigye in their bid for the presidency made some Wanainchi [people] in the conflict area sympathise with the insurgents¹⁴⁸.”

This line of argument by the government betrays its own commitment to the democratisation process. Instead of seeing Paul Ssemogere’s alternative as part of the rights to which the people were entitled to entertain, they look at the campaign in negative terms. They also pour cold water on the LRA support to the “Ssemogerere line,” without seeing it as a positive attitude that could have been exploited to advance peace making. Instead the people are seen as having been misled by the democratic choice for a negotiated settlement. That line of argument also betrays another fundamental weakness in the government’s understanding of the politics in the country. It is not the multiparty politicians “in the north” who rejected article 269 of the constitution, it was the entire opposition consisting of political parties in the country, that rejected and continue to reject article 269 and its replacements.

The government’s attempt in this explanation to try to isolate the north (read Acholi) also exposes its calculated efforts to ethnicise national politics by linking the war in the north to the rejection of the “No Party” Movement system. This tends to confirm the arguments of those who have contending that persistence of the war in Acholiland is intimately linked to the undemocratic system of governance in place in the whole country, and that unless that system is changed the war in Acholiland is bound to continue. Clearly, the Movement system has been an issue in the conflict because people feel they are not fully represented and the rejection of dialogue convinces many that the conflict was never intended to end until the political opposition in Acholi is *crushed militarily*.

Moreover, the reasons given by the government above as to why the war has persisted are also contradictory and misleading. The explanations very quickly skip over issues that are really crucial to the conflict. For instance, the matter of corruption in the army is not clearly explained because if it was, it could show that

¹⁴⁸ Ibid: p.3.

the corruption of the top army officers and their theft of state funds through “ghost soldiers” and other means might explain why the army is not fully devoted to ending the war through either effectively defending the country or by blocking or frustrating peace initiatives.

There are other problems with these explanations. First of all, they do not take into account the evolution of the conflict through different phases, which, as we analysed earlier, reveal different motivations by different rebel groups. Secondly, the explanations do not take into account the fact that 80 per cent of the so-called rebels and ‘terrorists’ are abducted children whom the UPDF were under legal, political, constitutional, and moral duty to protect against the LRA in the first place.

In some of the explanations, the government emphasises technical questions such as lack of equipment and avoids examining the interconnectedness of this issue with corruption, which could reveal that this lack was due to the purchase of junk equipment like the junk helicopters bought from eastern European, as well as the purchase of undersized uniforms and junk food, which undermine the morale of the army in fighting the rebellion. Moreover, the conflict in the DRC is seen in isolation of the internal conflict in Uganda say, in relation to the rebel (ADF) operations inside Uganda in the west of the country. It is also delinked with government involvement in the war in support of Laurent Kabila’s rebellion that overthrew Mobutu on the ground of Uganda’s “security concerns.”

In fact the involvement by the UPDF in the DRC was part of a full scale war that was related with other issues such as the plunder of Congolese minerals of which some top UPDF military officers, involved in the war in the north of Uganda, are accused by the United Nations. In any case, if it was a question of controlling the incursions of the ADF from Zaire, it cannot be understood how this could have required removing 18 battalions from the Uganda conflict to a new war theatre located as far as Kisangani and beyond- some 2000 kms inside the DRC, without Parliamentary approval. These more serious and revealing facts are not even admitted as “mistakes” although they continue to influence the war situation in the country.

IX. CURRENT INTERVENTION EFFORTS

The attempt to find a peaceful end to the war in Acholi has been dogged with a lot of problems caused by lack of seriousness, lack of trust as well as lack of commitment. Starting with the NRM-UPDA Peace Accord signed in Pece in 1988, there have been other attempts such as those of Mrs Betty Bigombe (1993-94) as well as international efforts by the Carter Centre between the governments of Sudan and Uganda in December 1999. Many others have aborted or were not seriously taken up because of the factors mentioned in the preceding sections. The effort by Betty Bigombe was the most serious attempt at finding a negotiated settlement, but this aborted rather unceremoniously when it was about to bear fruit. Betty Bigombe has recently reflected on her effort in an interview with the semi-government newspaper, the *Sunday Vision* when she stated:

“If the kinds of talks I am hearing now were there at that time, war in northern Uganda would have ended sometime back. At one time Kony wrote a letter to President Museveni through me asking for six bodyguards, and in addition we were to address joint rallies starting from Gulu through Kitgum. At that time a peace agreement was fourteen days a way, and Kony wanted to get acquainted to the people. But this request was refused. The powers that be said it was a waste of time¹⁴⁹.”

Those “powers that be” were the President, for one cannot imagine any lesser power having a final say on such a vital matter. Even the request by Kony to give him six months to wind up his affairs was denied. This suggests that what Betty Bigombe was engaged in was not a two-party negotiations, but a one-sided discussion through Bigombe with one side deciding all the rules of the game. This is why experience from these particular talks seems to suggest that a call for a third party mediator is the only correct one, which can ensure that all the parties to the negotiations agree to conduct a dialogue based on mutual respect, mutual faith and mutual determination to end the war.

9.1 Traditional Leaders and Elders

The Acholi traditional leaders have been active in all these contacts. To begin with, even the first peace accord between UPDA and the government in 1988 was the result of the intervention of traditional leaders who went to Sudan under the leadership of Tiberio Atwoma Okeny to convince the UPDA leadership to negotiate. They were also involved in the Bigombe peace contacts, but these efforts were frustrated by hard-line responses from the government. There is nothing that could have been lost if the government had given Kony the six months he asked for. The fact that he was using the talks to get more weapons is not convincing, because such

¹⁴⁹ Sunday Vision, August 431, 2003.

a manoeuvre could still have been exposed by the good will if the LRA had been given the six months they asked for.

Indeed, by giving the LRA only seven days to surrender or be smashed did not deter the LRA from getting those weapons. On the contrary, the hard-line response made it even easier for Kony to convince the Sudan backers that the government was not interested in peace. With this argument, the LRA was probably more successful in convincing them to give more arms than before. Worse still, the LRA was not “smashed” by the UPDF because of the refusal to agree to the six months demanded by them. On the contrary, the hard-line response from the government made it more difficult to defeat them, as has been amply demonstrated over the last ten years since.

But the elders have never given up, despite the erosion of their influence in Acholi society. Two elders were later killed in these attempts to link the rebels to the government. Currently they are involved in the background contacts and linkages, a task that is quite dangerous. They are open to attack from both sides, being likely taken to be either government agents or rebel collaborators. These peace contacts and peace initiatives by the Acholi elders are also crucial to the reconciliation process. As evidence from the camps has shown, they are central to the process of readmission of the former soldiers back into the community under the Amnesty process. It was their ideological and political arguments for reconciliation that convinced the government to embrace the idea of forgiveness under the Amnesty Act. But the commitment to reconciliation is not comprehensive, and the elders are still required to fully implement the reconciliation process.

The preamble to the Amnesty Act 2000 reiterates the “desire of the people of Uganda to end armed hostilities, reconcile with those who have caused suffering and rebuild their communities.” It also reiterates “the determination of the Government to genuinely implement its policy of reconciliation in order to establish peace, security and tranquillity throughout the whole country.” All this cannot be achieved without the active involvement of the Elders of Acholi acting closely with the religious leaders.

The words in this preamble demonstrate that the government is not fully committed to reconciliation with the “killers.” They forget that the purpose of reconciliation is precisely to reconcile with the “killers” because the objective is to stop the evil of killing being perpetrated by those caught in the vicious cycle of killing, which takes place on both sides. In the case of the LRA “killers”, the fact is that these “killers” are mostly abducted children whom the government failed to protect and are now caught up in an activity beyond their control.

The objective of Amnesty is to “end armed hostilities,” and “reconcile with those who have caused suffering” so that they and the people on whom they have inflicted the suffering can “rebuild their communities.” The people appealing for this to happen are those the LRA rebel children are inflicting this suffering upon. They want the war to end so they can reconcile with their children and stop the vicious cycle of killings and violence in which they have been forced. This is what the government should understand and not pretend to be the best guardians of the people

by committing itself to “continue” the war against the “terrorists” when the people themselves are prepared to forgive them. The government should listen to their voices instead of pursuing revenge upon innocent children, whom it is their duty to protect.

Despite these committed efforts by the elders to find peace, it should be realised that in some instances, the traditional system of authority and administration of justice as well as reconciliation have been weakened, adjusted and changed with time. This has arisen out of the fact that the Acholi communal society has been disrupted by the on-going conflict in the region. Unlike in the past when these institutions were highly revered and respected, the current situation is that in some cases, these institutions have been rendered superfluous and outdated in a number of areas in the region, depending on the level of the disruption of the cultural life of the people. Nevertheless, where they still continue to exist, their role has to be reinvented so that it can be fully exploited to the benefit of the Acholi society. Hence government should commit itself to continue to cooperate with them.

Most people in the IDP camps are now left to take decisions without taking the opinions of the *Rwodi* seriously. This is partly caused by the fact that, apart from the disruption of cultural life, some of the traditional *Rwodi* are poorer compared to the rest of the people in the camps. This undermines their respect and authority. The government ought to recognise their role and reward it in the modern context. Thus without the parameters and bounds of their beliefs, values, and traditional principles, the people have resorted to other ‘coping’ strategies and institutions¹⁵⁰.

This does not however mean that these traditional institutions are destroyed forever. Under given circumstances they are able to come back to life, as they are already doing, as the official and ‘coping’ structures find difficulty dealing with the conflict at the local and global levels. Here again the traditional leaders are beginning to redefine their roles in changed conditions in order to act as a vital link between the rebel army and the government, a role they are sharing with the Acholi religious leaders. It is both these groups that the Presidential Peace Team should cooperate with in a concerted effort towards a solution to the conflict. It is clear that in the coming process of national reconciliation and peace dialogues, these groups will play an important role, and all concerned should give support to them in this task.

9.2 The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative

The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative began in 1997 when the Catholic, Anglican and Muslim religious leaders of Acholi formalised their co-operation which they had earlier embarked on to strengthen their efforts in peace building and peace making between the government and the rebels. They set up the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative as an organisation to continue with peace efforts at a time when there was a lull in the contacts.

¹⁵⁰ Okumu-Alya, F [2003]: Loc. Cit.

Since then they have embarked on a series of advocacy campaigns, the most effective of which was their leading role for a comprehensive amnesty law intended to bring about reconciliation, forgiveness and healing in the communities. As a result they too have held a number of meetings with the rebels and the government. Sometimes their contacts with the rebels have not engendered good relations with the government and has led the government to regard their efforts of neutrality as undermining its position. In the rebel eyes, these peace efforts are sometimes seen as part of an effort by these leaders to expose their positions and their intelligence. Their churches, especially the Catholic Church, have been subjected to attacks. They have come out on issues of the abducted children and in July 2003 they came out to express their solidarity with the children dubbed “night time commuters” who walk long distances to find safety on the streets of Gulu town at night. By coming to pray and sleep on the streets with these children, the religious leaders highlighted the suffering of these children, a fact that has drawn international attention. Their recent campaign is aimed at involving the international community in the resolution of the Uganda conflict. In a foreword to their joint appeal with the Sudanese religious leaders on 20, 2003, they made the following call:

“We are sounding a strong appeal to the UN to address the conflict in northern Uganda so that all necessary measures are put in place for the protection of the civilians. We appeal to various international bodies, heads of diplomatic missions, the East African community, African Union, European Union, International Governmental Authority on Development-IGAD and Arab League to support our proposal¹⁵¹.”

9.3 The District Peace Teams

There have also been attempts to involve district leaders in the process of conflict resolution, especially after the passing of the Amnesty law. The first attempt was made with the formation of the Joint Forum for Peace (JFP) in Kitgum. This brought together different actors such as traditional and religious leaders, civil society groups, and local government elected officials. Later, the District Reconciliation Peace Team (DRPT) was formed in Gulu also encompassing a broad spectrum of the local actors as well as government officials and representatives from all sub-counties and divisions.

Both these district initiatives meet regularly to share experiences and coordinate efforts and activities at a regional level, including preparing the community to receive former combatants back into the community. They were required to promote dialogue in general in the implementation of the Amnesty law. Initially, their efforts were focussed on translating and distributing the Luo version of the Amnesty Act, 2000 and holding regular meetings between the two teams to explore alternatives to carrying forward the Amnesty and dialogue process. It is this,

¹⁵¹ The New Vision, Monday, June 24, 2003.

which culminated in the formation of the Amnesty Commission. Their role is vital in coordinating local reconciliation and rehabilitation efforts.

9.4 Civil Society Initiatives

There have been several efforts by other civil society groups to participate in the peace process. One of the significant recent efforts was the creation of a loose coalition of some 50 CSOs into the Civil Society Organisation for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) in 2000. According to the Coalition, the CSOPNU was “born out of a sense of frustration among CSOs,” which were operating within the northern Uganda region trying to mitigate the effects of the conflict in a number of ways. These activities included the offering of psychosocial support as well as efforts aimed at trying to alleviate poverty in the region. Because the groups felt their role was no more that of “sticking a band-aid on the wound, which was never actually going to heal,” they decided to come together in order to “go beyond their individual organisational objectives” and “to practically engage in advocacy and the fostering of reconciliation at all levels.” The key areas of advocacy identified by the coalition were:

- Promoting national reconciliation, using the situation in the north as an example and opportunity;
- General Advocacy for a stronger political willingness to support a peaceful resolution, e.g. to argue against “Operation Iron Fist” as the best way forward;
- Calling for more political and practical support for the Amnesty;
- Calling for the critical review of the various peace initiatives, with a view to consolidating them within one coherent approach;
- Helping community leaders lobby for a rational approach to the return of IDPs, based on a full knowledge of their rights;
- Working with donors to help them understand their complacency in papering over the cracks, and suggest ways they could more effectively support reconciliation.

The CSOPNU has since its formation engaged in a number of activities in promoting the above broad advocacy and lobby objectives. These have been in the areas of contributing to the knowledge about the root causes of the conflict, the economic and social costs of the conflict, and engaging members of the donor and international community to argue government to resolve the conflict through peaceful means since they contribute 53 per cent towards the government budget. The Coalition also embarked on the review of the Amnesty process as a basis for promoting national reconciliation, as well as reviewing the peace process undertaken so far. The groups found that the current incursions in northern Uganda by the LRA were likely to divert attention from the goals of generating debate on the root causes of the conflict.

The Coalition also investigated the lessons that had been learnt from the previous peace experiences and from this, they argued all persons and agencies with potential to peacefully influence the conduct and outcome of the conflict. In so doing, they were argued to consider it an obligation to use their influence to promote the enforcement of humanitarian principles, to engage in a proactive peace building process, including the pursuance of an effective and attractive amnesty and to work towards national reconciliation. Their emphasis was, however, placed on peace building initiatives by organs of the government and civil society, which had on some occasions offered hope, but had finally ended in failure. They analysed the lessons they had learnt from the past failures at peace making and came to the following conclusions:

- Any peace initiative must be informed by deep analysis and based on patient dialogue and the search for consensus on underlying issues and not fixed positions;
- The peace team should include civil society, religious and other community leaders, traditional elders, women and young people, care being taken to include all relevant organs of the government, especially the UPDF;
- Any peace initiative must consider the position of the government of Sudan, given the cross-border implications of the conflict, and because of the past support given by them to the LRA;
- The peace team must have clear and public terms of reference, to which it can be held accountable;
- The peace team must have consistent and patient support from the government, and adequate resources provided in advance;
- The peace process should have a realistic time frame, which is decided in consultation with all parties, not by arbitrary deadlines;
- If such a peace process is to succeed, external mediation would be highly recommended, given the depth of the feelings involved and the long history of the conflict.

With regard to the issue of national reconciliation, the Coalition observed that due to the “cycles of revenge” in Uganda’s history, where the “cycles” continue to be played out today, the nation remains highly vulnerable to destabilising influences. However, the problem will only be resolved if Ugandan leaders take explicit steps aimed at national reconciliation by:

- Recognising the northern conflict as a national problem;
- Promote public debate that recognises the underlying causes of the conflict; and
- Promote a culture of co-existence and national unity through reconciliation processes fostered by government and civil society.

These positions of the CSOPNU are crucial and they point to the consensus, which is slowly emerging in the country, which recognises the problem in Northern Uganda as a national problem, and the need for national reconciliation based on a culture of co-existence¹⁵². These important positions of the Coalition should be taken into account in new attempts at national reconciliation as part and parcel of the peace process. Their only problem is that they are Kampala-based and far from the scene of the conflict. On the other hand, their role in trying to bring Acholi-based CSOs and those based in Kampala and other parts of Uganda is a vital one and needs to be complemented.

9.5 The Presidential Peace Team (PPT)

In addition to the above peace initiatives, the president set up the Presidential Peace Team in September 2002 after the Acholi Religious Leaders approached him with a written communication from Joseph Kony making a peace offer. The president made a public reply in which he accepted the offer, but warned that such efforts could only bear fruit if the rebels ceased their atrocities, which they continued to inflict on the people and became serious in their appeals for peace. The team appointed by the president included: Eriya Kategaya (then minister of Internal Affairs)-Chairperson; Gilbert Bukenya, Vice-president (then minister for presidential affairs); Lt. Gen. Salim Saleh-presidential adviser for political and military affairs in northern Uganda; Betty Akech (then minister for Higher Education) now minister of state for security in the president's office; Norbert Mao, MP for Gulu Municipality; and Reagan Okumu, MP for Aswa. Later the president expanded the team to include Okello Oryem, minister of state for Education and Sport; and Santa Okot, MP (Woman) for Pader.

Despite the earlier statements of the president, the PPT has never met since he launched it. Moreover, the then chairperson of the Team has since been removed from the Cabinet post he held as minister of Internal affairs and it is not clear whether he is still on the Team. Honourable Norbert Mao when interviewed by the Principal Investigator at the Parliamentary Buildings on the 21st July 2003 was also sceptical about this initiative. According to him, during the launching of the Team, the president made his usual statement that he does not believe in peace talks. Instead of giving the team the kinds of expectations the government had in mind on this initiative, he instead lectured them about the new weapons he had acquired, which he was sure would do a final blow to the rebels such as helicopter gunships which can operate in the dark, night vision equipment and captured Kony anti-aircraft guns. He also took time to talk about his new strategy he called: the "combined armed element" that would involve mobile forces with stationary zonal

¹⁵² CSOPNU [2003]: The Role of Civil Society Organisations in the Northern Uganda Conflict: The Experience of CSOPNU, Paper presented at the One-day Dialogue on Conflict Management and Resolution in Northern Uganda, held on 22nd July, 2003 at the International Conference Centre.

forces and mechanised support forces. He said that the task of the Peace Team was to resettle those who had surrendered!

Mao pointed out that although they did not meet, the army became a major obstacle in any such effort. For instance, a meeting between the Team was scheduled to take place in Pader district to initiate talks, but the army deployed very heavily in the area with the result that the rebel commanders feared a trap being laid for them. Again, when Salim Saleh tried to make some contacts with the rebel commanders the army blocked him from doing so, saying there would be no security provided for him. There was also the harassment of civilians on the ground some of whom were accused of being collaborators of the rebels during this period. He also pointed out that on one occasion he went to Gulu with Honourable Reagan Okumu to meet with Salim Saleh about the peace initiatives, only to find that there was no budget provided for the Team. In a memorandum addressed to the Chair and members of the Team, Honourable Mao expressed the fear that the peace process was virtually collapsing:

“ I believe that there is no ultimate military solution to the war in the north. It is therefore necessary to pursue the option of dialogue with enough seriousness. We must learn from all previous failed attempts. I shudder each time I hear government officials talk as if the peace talks are being pursued merely for the sake of Joseph Kony and his LRA! We need to get it clear that the peace process is for millions of people who have suffered and continue to suffer as a result of the war. Sometimes it looks as if the government is not really interested in peace talks but rather wants to prove that it is not possible to have meaningful talks with the LRA!”¹⁵³

Other issues raised in the memorandum by Honourable Mao concerned the lack of a carefully planned strategy for undertaking the peace initiative. In his view the strategy should include the search for an acceptable mediator, the search for a third country to host the talks, a plan for a humanitarian intervention, a plan for resettlement of the rebels and the civilian population. There was also the problem of the president not appearing to be serious about peace initiatives. He added:

“Many of the statements by the president indicate that he prefers military confrontation and that the Peace Team is mainly for humanitarian purposes rather than serious negotiations. The PPT is collectively an agent of the president. Under rules of agency, it is the principal who calls the shots, not the agent. If the principal keeps countermanding his instructions to the agent, then the agent is rendered useless. This is the current state of the PPT. The attitude and public

¹⁵³ Memo dated 23rd June, 2003 on “The Role of the PPT”.

proclamations of the president have turned the entire peace process into a worthless circus.”

The MP made the following proposals to advance the process:

- PPT should meet and design a comprehensive strategy based on a dynamic analysis of the parties and political context of the conflict;
- The PPT should meet with the president and get his full backing for the strategy;
- The PPT should make an outreach to other groups and individuals that have been involved in the peace process, such as the Carter Centre;
- The PPT should consider its possible replacement with a Presidential Peace Envoy- a single individual with a serious mandate in order to give better leadership to the process;
- There should be attention to the problem of arrests of civilians on the ground that they are collaborators, many of whom are arrested on charges of treason. There is the case of people like Yusuf Adek and Nicholas Opoka who acted as messengers between the government and the LRA, but got arrested and charged as collaborators. The activities of militia groups such as the “Kalangala Action Plan” with the support of the state undermine the whole idea of democratic accountability.

These fears and recommendations of the Member of Parliament and member of the PPT should be taken seriously, otherwise members of the public would come to feel a sense of helplessness that the government is actually committed only to ending the war if the political and military opposition in Acholiland are defeated militarily. It is true that the government has recently made some resources available for the peace team, but these resources have not been equitably been distributed to all the members to carry out their work.

9.6 The Umbrella “Oduru Kuc”

Since the emergence of these different peace initiatives, there has been a growing feeling that there is no single organisation that can act as the voice of the Acholi people on issues of peace. Oduru Kuc was formed by CSOs in Gulu to try to create the forum for such a voice. The first and only meeting took place on 28th April 2003 at Awich Primary Teachers College and was financed by CPAR. The objective was to assess the advocacy work in the area of peace making and to find out and crystallise the “missing link.” This missing link was identified as the voice of the affected people. Oduru Kuc was therefore seen as a new organisation that could bridge this missing link and bring the people into active participation in promoting peace efforts.

But it appears that all the existing sections of the existing organisations wanted to be part of this “missing link” including the officials, the religious leaders and even the army. A key informant who was closely linked to the convening of the

meeting feels that the new set up has already stifled by this heavy over-representation of the existing bodies, with no representation of the people in the “protected villages” and IDP camps. Thus, although there is a definite room for some co-ordination of these different peace activities, Oduru Kuc is not such a body and it should be left to represent the small voices in some form. This will then have meaning of the new entity being the “Oduru Kuc” (“alarm for peace”) instead of it reproducing existing voices. In fact the very idea of “alarm for peace” does not in the present context specify whose peace it is and what purpose the alarm is for. Beneficiaries of the insecurity are members of “Oduru Kuc” and reinforce the existing suspicious rather than help to resolve the conflict. So far its activities are not clear and a thoroughgoing consideration and study of the weaknesses in the previous peace efforts should be the basis of creating such a coordinating mechanism, otherwise these piecemeal efforts are bound to fail.

9.7 Assessment of the Peace Process by the Public

Those interviewed in the camps were asked how effective these peace initiatives had been. Their responses were varied. The majority responded that the efforts were not effective because those involved on the government side were not doing their work and those doing so did not have adequate government backing to those efforts. An example was given of the ARPI initiatives aimed at talking peace with the rebels directly, which were not successful because government did not give them effective backing. Some pointed out that government had sometimes continuously bombed areas where the peace team were supposed to meet. They also point out that the Acholi Traditional Leaders Peace Initiative (ATLPI) also tried in the same way to achieve peace. The government instead arrested Pyen Lye one of the traditional leaders involved in the efforts and accused him of being a rebel ‘collaborator.’ Other respondents argued that the rebels sometimes were serious in wanting the government to negotiate, but that they sometimes did not act seriously because of lack of trust.

The interviewees were also asked what positive lessons had been learnt from these peace initiatives. They said that the elders should be allowed to come out clearly and discuss issues with the rebels so that a clear resolution can be found. However the good efforts of both the traditional and religious leaders were being undermined because of lack of trust on both sides. They found themselves caught in between the crossfire coming from both sides. The way for peace is therefore not clear because there are no clear government guidelines. Betty Bigombe did a wonderful job here as regards peace efforts, in 1991 because of that. She could sacrifice to talk to Kony herself, take photos with the rebel leader and even conduct a video coverage of the talks because there was trust on the side of the rebels. She managed to talk to some of the LRA commanders and even bring some back from the bush for contacts on the government side in Gulu town, they argued. However, some people deceived the president that Bigombe was only looking for her own survival. So Museveni gave only seven days to the rebels to come out of the bush,

which damaged the whole effort. Therefore there was the problem of information exchange and trust.

They were also asked how these positive experiences could be built upon to find a peaceful solution. Some suggested to request the president to come back to Gulu again, talk to the local leaders and get their views about how to go forward in the peace initiatives. If he is to do that he should take multiparty and movement politicians into consideration as go-betweens. He should bring in the opposition because they always tell the truth. Let the president work with us the local leaders. We therefore see this conflict as very tragic and represent a very big challenge to the whole concept of the respect for human rights and the rule of law. One respondent from the Amnesty Commission argued that in his opinion, there was no one particular solution to this conflict that can be initiated. It should be a combination of initiatives and endeavours:

“We feel it’s important to continue to tell the population about their rights. Quite a number of people do come here (to the Commission) and those that come are assisted and I think that if the commission ceases to exist things will be very different. The Commission and other Human Rights bodies should intensify the campaign against Human Rights violations. We should address the root causes of this conflict and in so doing we must be very open and people should be prepared to listen to each other. There are people who say this is a war without any agenda but this is wrong. Just look at the methods being used by the rebels. It has led to so many frustrations but the question is which country has a war of insurgency without understanding the reasons behind it as we have here in Acholi? There might be differences but does it matter? Look at Sierra Leone, peoples’ lips being cut, hands chopped off, but in the end they found peace. Even in Vietnam the Americans committed serious atrocities, such as those committed at Mai Lai in which Americans killed so many Vietnamese. Therefore our concern is that the protagonists must listen to each other. Therefore we must address the root cause to this conflict.”

Some pointed out that the Uganda Human Rights Commission-UHRC-has advised that this war should be resolved by dialogue between the government and the LRA. Both sides should listen to each other and that can only be done if we build trust and yet at the moment, there is too much bad blood between the two sides, propaganda, and mistrust etc. For the last 17 years, the government has been on the warpath with big guns and how far have we gone? Have they stopped the LRA from operating in areas like Katakwi and Teso?

The interviewees were asked why there should be a dialogue. They responded that people must talk to each other because many young people are being trapped in this war. Young people are being abducted and once they are in the hands of the LRA, they are recruited in the ranks of the rebel force and become combatants

whether they like it or not. It's therefore the young people, the future leaders of tomorrow being killed by the government troops in bush. Why can't we stop this? People are removed from their homes and congregated in camps and it's only the WFP that tries to help them with very little food, yet every time the government is making promises of ending this war. How can you therefore convince anybody in these camps that the military solution is the best? Youths should be given something to own and also there is the urgent need to fight ignorance and poverty that has made some of our youths what they are today. Hence there is need for dialogue.

In order to bring peace in Acholi we should not criticise any party fighting in this conflict but find ways that get the parties to a peaceful resolution. We support on going peace initiatives and hope that the parties in the conflict cooperate and abandon their arrogance and think of the poor children on the streets, without a future to dream about. Just go to the streets and see for yourself. There appears to be a growing cynicism in Acholi and, indeed in the rest of the country, that attempts to end the conflict in Acholiland can ever be achieved. Many of the respondents questioned, expressed their desperation in statements like: "so long as Museveni or NRM is in power, there can never be an end to the war in Acholi." Many expressed the view that these efforts had become a waste of time.

Many respondents argued that since the first peace initiative that was uninitiated by Tiberio Okeny Atwoma in 1986, the different peace initiatives have proved ineffective and if anything, they have revealed that neither the government nor the rebels are prepared for a real peace negotiation that can resolve the conflict. While the government heaps all the blame for the failure of talks onto the rebels, evidence seems to suggest that the government has no real serious intention of concluding the war or finding peace. The government continues to play a cat and mouse game while the rebels keep on making overtures for peace and seeking ceasefires, which never lead to anything. There must therefore be serious confidence building measures, if peace is to have a chance.

There is a big division now among people on the issue of whether peace is possible under existing conditions. Any peace initiative will now be questioned as to its motives. One can easily be branded a collaborator when such a person is trying to promote confidence. The government is not committed to use truth seekers in this struggle and prefer using "wayaye" or lumpens. The Government should stop fighting and seek peace. It seems President Museveni does not want this war to end. Peace talks are useless. The two sides don't trust one another. President Museveni will never keep his side of the bargain. Did he keep his side of the Nairobi Peace Agreement? The Bishops and their team tried to talk peace several times and this thing is dying a natural death. Kony tried to talk peace several times, but nothing has come of it. And every time it is the government, which spoils the efforts. Even the American sponsored "Iron Fist Operation" will not succeed.

These were the reactions from the general Acholi population, and the feeling is one of desperation. Some now called for the intervention of the United Nations. When asked about the on-going presidential peace initiatives, the majority of those

asked said they were doomed to failure since the president has since got new weapons, including missiles and helicopter gunships to wipe out the rebels. They argued that Kony is no fool to go to peace rendezvous knowing that such rendezvous could be attacked at any time. In any case the president has declared since then that he was not interested in more peace talks. In his recent public communication to explain the recent LRA attacks, the president has even poured water on any hope that the Amnesty given to the rebels who surrender would promote peace. In his letter to the editor of the *New Vision*, he is quoted as saying:

“It is a no-win for the bandits. Their only way out is to take advantage of the Amnesty and come out. I am thinking, however, of proposing to the Government to revoke this amnesty law so that the ringleaders responsible for these crimes only get what they have long deserved-death¹⁵⁴.”

Although the Amnesty law was extended for another six months in July 2003, these kinds of remarks coming from the leader whose word is law do not augur well for the people of Acholi and Uganda as a whole. In his statement to the members of parliament in early September 2003, he threatened that the law will no longer be extended to the top leaders of the LRA, who in his words, would be “killed.” This was after the US government had assured the Uganda government of its two-year military assistance aimed at continuing the war.

9.8 Resettlement of Former Rebels and Abducted Children

The Amnesty initiative was the result of the pressures from the community, religious leaders, elders and the community at large that were concerned about the plight of the victims of the conflict. The Amnesty Act 2000 was intended to grant immunity from prosecution to any of the combatants who voluntarily surrendered. However, article 2 of the Act was amended in 2002 to ensure that any one who had been granted amnesty but had absconded and rejoined the rebels could never be re-pardoned unless such person was re-abducted or forced to go back into the bush. The process of resettlement has been bedevilled with a number of problems, but to understand these problems, it is necessary to understand how the law operates.

In the first stage the ‘reporters,’ as they are called under the Act, are detained in the military barracks where they are subjected to a process of interrogation. In the second stage, they are moved to the UPDF Child Protection unit, where they are subjected to a further process of more gentle interrogation and even recruited into the UPDF. In the third stage the reporters are then taken over by civil society groups to look after them in rehabilitation centres. There are two civil society groups undertaking this work. These are the Gulu Civil Society organisation- GUSCO and the Kitgum Child Welfare Association-KICWA. Despite their impressive work,

¹⁵⁴ “Museveni explains Kony rebel attacks” in *New Vision*, Friday, June 20, 2003, page 4.

these groups are not doing enough since they do not have adequate resources and facilities. Their work is to counsel the returnees and send them back to the villages, where they are in most cases re-abducted by the LRA. This is why some prefer to remain with the UPDF Protection Unit and join the army. UNICEF is involved in supporting this process together with the World Vision.

These two centres are ill funded and can only provide very temporary counselling for the children. But the real guarantee to their rehabilitation is in the communities, where they are welcomed back despite the atrocities the children had been forced by the LRA to inflict on them. There are cases where the children are readmitted by the extended family in cases where their parents are long dead. This is done without attaching much stigma to them and hence the only reliable means of rehabilitating them into their communities and society at large, is the process of resocialisation into the culture. It is therefore the rehabilitation of the entire community back into their ancestral locations that can provide the real answer to the problem of the rehabilitation of the abducted children and former rebels..

Those who are given resettlement packages on surrendering from the LRA under the Amnesty law fare a little better than those who remain home in the camps. This assistance is given in the hope that it will convince other rebels to come back home. However, so long as the conditions of the entire community is worse off because of their encampment in the IDP Camps, those hopes is not well founded. It is not the way forward. There is more that needs to be done, but this cannot be done in isolation of the entire population. What is being done is not adequate since those who return are those that come back home with children especially the girls, who were forced into marriages. There is also abuse and stigmatisation on these returnees because of what they have gone through and hence the need for a much more comprehensive response. According to Christopher Alwal, the manager of the KICWA centre:

“Our major problem is with the child mothers who often find it difficult to get support from their families. When they are with two or three children, they become an extra burden for the families¹⁵⁵.”

The whole amnesty process has been plagued by lack of resources. It is true that the government set up a fund for the Commission to carry out its mandate, but these resources have been inadequate. Moreover, the process has also been brought into question by the fact that those who have remained at home and placed into camps are not given similar treatment. Their terrible conditions in the camps makes them envy those who went into the bush and are rewarded by a total package of shs. 350,000 shillings. This comprises shs. 240,000 in cash and the rest in items such as jerrycans, hoes, seeds, mattresses, blankets, pangas, and the like. This approach calls for a rethinking so that those who internally displaced are considered for resettlement as well. In addition, due to the shortage of funds, the Commission is also burdened by the complex mandate it has under the Amnesty Act, which out-

¹⁵⁵ Quoted by IRIN in *The New Vision*, May 12, 2003-p.21.

stretches its capacity. This is partly due to the fact that its mandate has to be renewed every six months.

These concerns call for a much more coordinated approach to the problem. There is no doubt that the government has been giving thought to the issue. They have recently come up with an overall plan, which in their view will address the problem comprehensively. But the programme has other elements to it, which makes it difficult to say to what extent it can be regarded as a solution (see below). Responses from the people interviewed in the camps emphasized that rehabilitation meant going back to their homes and not giving support only to the returnees. This was said although the people realised that going back involved a lot of risks to their lives. Others talked of the need for infrastructure development in the villages, including road and bridge construction to enhance mobility. They also called for the increased role for traditional leaders in cultural rejuvenation and the restoration of traditional education and socialisation. Resettlement, they argued, required resettlement packages for the entire community that has been displaced. But government policy seemed to be moving in the opposite direction, as we shall see below.

Predictably, very few rebels have taken advantage of the amnesty law. The Commission lists the following numbers of “reporters” or returnees as of July 2003: Gulu 1,549, Kitgum 1,100. The reason for these small numbers of returnees include the threats of retribution by the LRA, rumours that those surrendering have been detained by the UPDF, tortured and even killed. There are also complaints that public statements and threats attributed to high-ranking figures in the UPDF and the government have also undermined the confidence in the Amnesty process. There is therefore need for the Commission to have a strong focus on its core functions and engage in proactive communication of the Amnesty at village level as well as to the rebels. The benefits and rights due to them should be stated and publicised. Those who return should be given promptly the amnesty certificates and a comprehensive resettlement package and in that way provide a strong incentive to apply for amnesty.

Side by side, there should be a strong partnership between the government and NGOs such as the World Vision in the provision of comprehensive resettlement services. There should also be independent monitoring mechanisms that can monitor performance of the amnesty including equality of access. The special interests and needs of children should be considered throughout the process. But as already indicated, even these efforts will not succeed unless they are followed by a comprehensive drive to end the conflict and embark on overall resettlement of the people in the IDP camps. This can only happen if the process towards a negotiated end to the conflict is accompanied by other measures that can assure the whole country that there is a serious attempt to end the war.

TABLE SHOWING RESETTLEMENT OF SURRENDERED REBELS

	Former fighting group	Resettled	Awaiting packages	Sub-Total
1	Action restore justice	3		3
2	ADF	131	293	424
3	CAMP		1	1
4	FOBA/NOM		66	66
5	FUNA	1	2	3
6	Holy Spirit Movement		16	16
7	LRA	18	2053	2071
8	NALU		12	12
9	Not Stated	6	12	18
10	PRA		4	4
11	UDA/F	3	1	4
12	UFDF	18	3	21
13	Uganda Salvation Army	2		2
14	UNRF II	2568	332	2900
15	UPA		21	21
16	UPDA		1	1
17	WNBF	53	1933	1986
Total		2803	4750	7553

Source: *The New Vision*, May 7, 2003, p.22.

9.9 International Humanitarian Agencies

There is not doubt that the international humanitarian agencies efforts in tackling some of the problems facing the IDPs, returned abductees and the problem of planted mines are commendable. But as already indicated above, the issue of food aid is proving contentious. There is also the problem of lack of coordination and competition between agencies. This work also becomes questionable in situations where the conflict seems to be endless so that the work of humanitarian agencies is viewed as supportive to a never-ending conflict. There are moral and ethical issues posed here which need to be examined with a view to defining a better role for such efforts if the work of these agencies is to be appreciated by the communities, instead of them being looked upon as intelligence gathering agencies for the regime and foreign governments, as is the case now.

The major role of International agencies is advocacy and relief. However at the moment their hands are tied since they are not allowed to openly address certain issues that the government feels might tarnish their image. If they do this, they fear that they might be forced out of the country. So they are also caught inside the conflict. The government just wants them to give relief and leave the war to them and in this way the international agencies and even Ugandan NGOs become part and parcel of the perpetration of the war. This is a dilemma for these agencies, which they must address. The WFP is helping the population in providing food relief, but as we have seen, this is creating an aid dependency syndrome. Caritas International are giving clothing, and other materials to the returnees, they also give temporary

shelters to these people. CPAR is helping the communities in demining the anti-personnel mines planted by the rebels, but this work is compounded by a lot of risks.

Other international agencies such as UNICEF are engaged in the delicate work of providing trauma counselling. These activities are now being referred to as doing more harm than good. They are accused of requiring children to reveal what they did so that money can be found for the organisation. Margaret McCallin, argues that “this comes from the same assumption that because children have been through a particular event they are traumatised. The more it is discussed in these terms the more likely we are to open the floodgates of trauma programmes since it is currently easier to get money for this rather than to look at the same children in the context of their communities.”¹⁵⁶ She argues that such a strategy would include setting up income generation for female heads of households, instead of concentrating on the trauma of the children. Those opposed to imported programmes argue that they not only ignore local social norms and people's own healing mechanisms, but also define whole nations as mentally sick. In fact, they argue, people are simply displaying normal distressed reactions to abnormal circumstances.

These kinds of problems reveal how complex it is to work in communities with different cultural understandings, especially a community such as the Acholi who are themselves going through a generalised trauma affecting the entire society. It also creates problems for local CBOs and NGOs, which work side by side with these agencies or are funded by them to do the wrong thing in their own communities. Such local NGOs as GUSCO, Concerned Parents Association, KICWA and others take most of the beating in these kinds of situations. The struggle for funding by organisations such as UNICEF for these questionable approaches also intensifies the fighting amongst international agencies in their work resulting in millions of dollars being wasted.

The question arose whether their role has helped or hindered the peaceful resolution of the conflict. The answer was that the international humanitarian agencies have never complicated the ending of this conflict, but have maintained it through their activities. They have played a positive role in sensitising the community on human rights issues and given the local actors protection since they are more feared than the local ones by the government and the UPDF. But there are also conflicts in some areas of cooperation with other NGOs. There is need for more co-operations between them to ensure effectiveness. There is already the NGO Forum that tries to iron out conflicts and problems among them, but the coordination requires improvement.

There is need now for all these organisations to work together with the 50 Civil Society Organisations through the Civil Society Organisation for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) working on the issue of peace in the region. As we have seen their programmes are focused and there is need for reinforcement in the drive for the call for international involvement at a political level to encourage the

¹⁵⁶ This criticism is made by Margaret McCallin, author of a U.N. study on the impact of armed conflict on children.

parties to the conflict to work towards a comprehensive end to the war. Their collective voice will carry weight and therefore the need for a concerted coordination across the board.

9.10 The United Nations

The United Nations political involvement has not been forthcoming since the Security Council has regarded this conflict as a domestic conflict, which can be handled by the Uganda government. This position is mainly held by the United States and Britain, who have regarded Museveni and other new African leaders as “New Breed” who are able to solve African problems by themselves. In fact they are favoured because they have shown a willingness to carry out economic reforms advocated by the Bretton Woods institutions. Yet as we have indicated above, the conflict in northern Uganda has been woven increasingly with the conflict in southern Sudan and has attained global dimensions in that the U.S. has designated the LRA as “foreign terrorist organisation.” There is therefore need for some kind of intervention by the UN.

Currently, the Human Rights Watch is carrying out a campaign to get the UN to deploy a “Special Envoy” with a mandate to negotiate the release of the abducted children from the LRA. This effort should be seen, as part of a wider advocacy strategy aimed at stopping the conflict because the attempt to negotiate the release of the children will encounter the same kind of problems that have faced peace initiatives, namely lack of trust, lack of confidence, and lack of seriousness to end the war. So long as the LRA is determined to continue the war, it cannot surrender the child soldiers, since this would amount to surrendering. The only realistic approach to the problem is therefore to pursue a more comprehensive approach in which the release of the children is seen as one aspect of the process directed at ending the war. Indeed, in the “talking points” of the Human Rights Watch representative during the launching of the report in Kampala on the 15th July 2003, the HRW proposed that it was “high time” for the international community to “take action to bring the human rights abuses in northern Uganda to an end.” This, with other calls, makes sense in that comprehensive context¹⁵⁷.

There is an increasing demand calling for international intervention in the conflict. On 20th June 2003 religious leaders from Sudan and Uganda called on the Security Council of the United Nations and other international bodies to intervene in the conflict in northern Uganda as a way of protecting civilians as well as bringing about an end to the 17-year war. In the statement released to the press, the religious leaders issued the following call: “We appeal to various international bodies, heads of diplomatic missions, the East African Community, the African Union, the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development-IGAD and the Arab League to support our proposal.” Archbishop

¹⁵⁷ HRW [2003]: *Abducted and Abused*, op. cit.

John Baptist Odama of the Catholic Church Gulu Archdiocese, Bishop Paride Taban of Torit diocese in Southern Sudan and 50 other bishops said the situation in northern Uganda was intolerable. They said the concern of the international community should go beyond the mere humanitarian assistance¹⁵⁸.

Indeed, it seemed as if this message was getting through to some members of the international community. It is high time that the UN Security Council paid attention to this matter. But before this happens, the advocacy strategy should target the African Union and examine the possibilities existing within the new institutions such as the Security Council and the New Partnership for Africa's Development -NEPAD, especially its Peer Review Mechanism (see below).

There was a feeling that the UN is doing nothing here apart from funding her agencies to provide relief aid to the people. This relief supplies are increasingly getting into the hands of the LRA since they are able to attack the IDP camps and ambush relief convoys. Some of the people who were interviewed argued that if UN can go to Congo, Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, why can they not come to Acholi sub region? It is felt that the UN is not interested in ending this war, and this gives the government arrogance to brush aside all positive viewpoints on the matter. This is why the conflict is continuing. The work of the UN can only be improved if they get the right kind of information on the conflict, which they are not getting because they do not have a channel for the flow of information. They take this position although the members of the Security Council are well aware that Uganda gives support to the SPLM/A and they also know that Sudan is supporting the LRA. Yet the U. S. is giving support to the Machakos Peace process. The demand for international involvement is therefore widely shared.

The recent visit to Uganda by Dr. Francis Deng, the special representative of the U. N. Secretary General on internally displaced persons revealed that the U. N. is still emphasising its role in the humanitarian field. Moreover, these activities are being handled through the existing international humanitarian organisations such as the WFP, the World Vision and other organisations handling IDP relief assistance. The U. N. still argues that it cannot interfere with the sovereignty of the states where it operates. This then raises the question of the role of those states, such as the Permanent Members of the Security Council, in conflicts of this kind if they are to carry out the obligations of the U. N. under the Charter and other conventions?

¹⁵⁸ *The New Vision*, Monday, June 23, 2003. p.3

X. REHABILITATION AND LONG -TERM RESETTLEMENTS

We examined above the resettlement of former abductees and returnee rebels who have managed to escape and return to Acholi. Here we are concerned with the rehabilitation of the entire population now living in camps. These two activities must, in our view be linked to the whole question of ending the war and embarking on a comprehensive programme of rehabilitation. The piece-meal approaches so far employed have become part of the low intensity conflict management, which the government has adopted. For that reason, these strategies are unsatisfactory and need rethinking, if there is any good will left on the part of the government. There are two emerging government programmes intended to cater for the medium- and long-term needs of rehabilitation of the communities into productive activities. One is based on making the IDP camps as the venue for the resettlement. The second looks at returning the people in the IDP camps back to their villages, along side conflict resolution and reconciliation mechanism. We examine each of these below.

10.1 The UPDF Resettlement Policy

On April 30, 2003 the government of Uganda presented a 12-point programme to president Bush entitled: “The Government of Uganda’s Northern Uganda Reconstruction and Counterterrorism Initiative,” which laid out the government strategy for rehabilitation and resettlement in Acholi. The programme consisted of the twelve points: a) elimination of terrorist threat to security; b) road infrastructure; c) water, d) education, e) emergency relief; f) health immunizations and educational outreach; g) farming; h) light processing facilities; i) micro-lending fund; j) re-education and reprogramming; k) vocational training; and, l) outreach to the local population. Under this last point, the document states that the government has an “extensive outreach campaign,” which was accelerated with the president’s relocation from the capital, Kampala, to Gulu in the North. It adds that the president now lives with the local population and “personally oversees the military campaign.” It goes on to state that the government’s outreach also includes a peace team that has “successfully negotiated with some factions of the LRA, provided amnesty for the LRA soldiers who surrender, and launched a programme for re-integrating LRA soldiers and abductees into the community¹⁵⁹.”

This paper was sold to the US government just before president Bush made his visit to the African continent in July 2003. It place emphasis on “fighting terrorism” which fitted in very well with the mood in Washington and used this to woo the US to accept the government strategy of fighting terrorism globally. In its conclusion the document re-emphasised that “security” was a prerequisite for peace

¹⁵⁹ Uganda Government [2003]: “The Government of Uganda’s Northern Uganda Reconstruction and Counterterrorism Initiative,” Kampala, April 30, 2003.

and development. It added: “The government counter-terrorism campaign is bringing stability to the region. The Government of Uganda is also providing military protection to internally displaced person camps, World Food Programme aid convoys, the main transportation routes. The document was designed to seek financial support from the official donors as well as the faith-based and international organisations. But this flowery language did not represent the truth on the ground since during the month of April, May, June and July 2003, the LRA rebels were all over the place in Acholi and had managed to reach as far as eastern Uganda, attacking Paabo IDP camp six times in June.

Soon after this, a concept paper called: Security and Production Programmes (SPP), dated May 2003 appeared and was widely circulated in Gulu and Kampala. The Office of Northern Reconstruction in the Prime Ministers office printed and circulated many copies of the programme at the one-day Dialogue on the Conflict in the North. A few days before being published, a story appeared in the *New Vision* in which Lt. General Salim Saleh, the president’s brother, was reported as asking Parliament to budget shs 4 billion for each of the 46 IDP camps. It was reported by the paper that a number of Acholi MPs had supported the request and Norbert Mao; the MP for Gulu Municipality was quoted as stating that the project was overdue and that “we cannot wait for the last bullet to talk of economic transformation.

The SPP was a government blue print, which wanted to consolidate the existing IDP camps into new socio-security structures called “security and production units.” The programme is seen as “strategic plan for solving insecurity in Acholi region”. It is expected to work by “beefing up local defence” using community youth volunteers who will be recruited and trained specifically to secure production areas in which they live. The “project” is aimed at reducing the workload of the UPDF so they can be able to “concentrate on fighting the rebellion.” It is also said to be aimed at “bringing back other social economic services, “which have been pulled back leaving only the UPDF to operate in the countryside and a plethora of NGOs to operate only in town centres.”

The second objective is said to “allow the population to produce their own food and break the dependence on food aid.” Having been driven from the villages “because of fear of abduction and killing by the rebels, they are forced in “large communities in crowded conditions.” In the camps, there is a minimum production on adjacent land because of constant expectation to move back to the villages. The government does not seem blame itself for failing to provide security to the population, but rather places the blame on the rebels, who seem to be running the show to which government reacts. The government has lost all initiative and therefore sees the camps as “the only practical solution for current food and security crisis.” In these conditions, the government expects that the population will be provided with adequate technical support not only to produce food for home food security, but also to attain surplus volumes for sale to generate income:

“Promotion of group marketing and availability of the same varieties, good quality produce in the same location will be a key attraction for

produce buyers. It will be viable to buy and transport volumes from the same source. Increased grain production and export would contribute to national income. Through provision of information about availability of produce in Acholi region, the programme should be able to attract agro-processors into the area. There will be value addition to the produce, which will increase market value and product shelf life. It will lead to small-scale industrialization, which will create jobs in the region¹⁶⁰.”

If people had hopes that the existing IDP camps were a temporary phenomenon, the projected SPP is clearly a blueprint for a new form of concentration camp. According to the SSP, with the new structure, it will be easy to plan other social services like education, water, health services, road network, law and order. Planning of social services by the responsible ministers will be able to coincide “with where the population is settled now.” This, according to the project, will be “cost effective way of reaching the population.” This is a rather economic way of looking at the matter. The bureaucrats who worked out these proposals ignored completely the socio-cultural aspects of the people in camps, their alienation, loss of self-dignity and even self-identity. They did not look at the disruption of family life and its implications for the culture and social organisation of the people affected.

Instead the planners look at the new structures as the basis for better “security” in rather one-sided manner. The establishment of the SPP is conceived in terms of the ease with which “strangers and suspicious elements” can be detected. It is conceived in the context of the “efficiency and cost effectiveness” with which deployment of patrols can be carried out. The document argues that defending organised settlements will become easier, “because it is simple to apportion responsibility of securing specific areas by specific people.” It cannot be understood why this cannot be done under present conditions. But according to the document: “Violence, robbery, defilement, vandalism in homes and neighbourhoods can be easily detected. Instilling discipline among the civic defence personnel and creating an environment for accountability for the population can be achieved.”

The project is planned to run on a co-operative basis, “drawing useful experiences from Israel’s Kibbutzim and Mosheim system, which worked effectively for strategic defensive purposes and at the same time providing over 70 per cent of Israel’s food output.” The expected outcome will be the transformation of the population from dependence on food aid to production of own food.” These are described as “temporary measures of food production while the UPDF continues to fight the insurgents.” Under the plan, the farmers will work and live near the “block farm,” making the project “ a starting point for provision of other social and economic services. The project will identify security production units (SPU) where they will grow maize, beans, upland rice, and sorghum, where they will clear land and be provided with inputs such as seeds, implementation and extension services,

¹⁶⁰ Uganda Government [2002]: Security and Production Programme (SPP), May 2003.

“which will make it possible to start new production cycle and attain a higher standard of life “in less densely populated communities.”

The process begins with the project and the local community identifying the land and allocating it to SPUs. Locally formed SPU committees will then divide the land into equal size plots for allocation to each household. The project will work together with community leaders, local chiefs and district land registrar to acquire certificates of communal ownership to the SPUs that will give the project legal status to the use of the land. Where private land is involved, a memorandum of understanding will be signed between the landowner and the community using it. A government project implementation unit, which will have membership drawn from all participating line ministries, will run the project.

The ministry of defence with the district authorities and local communities are responsible for planning the location of the SPUs, the private sector will manage the ploughing equipment on behalf of the districts and the district tender boards will grant the private sector contractors contracts to pay for the ploughs. When the district LC 5 chairman was interviewed at the beginning of the research he said 120 tractors and ploughs had been ordered from Iran. The ministry of internal affairs through the police are expected to be responsible for community policing, while other line ministries will carry out responsibilities according to their mandates in collaboration with NGOs.

The project budget is drawn up on the basis of a three-year projection, but from the basic conception, the SPP is a permanent structure, which in the final analysis is based on the idea that the conflict will be managed on a long-term low intensity conflict management strategy. This strategy, which is now supported by different actors such as the armed forces for their own survival, would go to confirm the hypothesis that the NRM never intended this war to end until the Acholi people had been crushed politically and militarily. This feeling is to be found in the different kinds of responses we obtained during the research.

The reaction to the plan has been varied. As already indicated above, the chairperson of the Acholi Parliamentarians Association, Norbert Mao, at first welcomed it as something, which was long overdue. He had pointed out that in 1996, the Acholi MPs prepared a proposal in which they asked the government to enter into a dialogue with the rebels, initiate economic integration, provide humanitarian assistance and end human rights abuses. Their project was only for shs 2 billion but the then vice-president, Dr. Wandira Kazibwe, also minister of agriculture embarked on another project of opening up land in Kolo for agricultural purposes, which swallowed shs 800,000 and killed off the project. The Woman MP for Pader, Santa Okot, added that the leaders of Kitgum, Gulu and Pader had made inputs in “Salim Sale’s project.” Indeed, the project was published in Lt. General’s Salim Saleh name and was seen as a personal project for Acholiland.

Other comments on the project were less generous. In a one-page written “brief critique,” Hon. Odonga Otto, MP for Aruu County, Pader district, said the SPP assumed insecurity to be permanent and was helping the IDPs “*to learn to live the conflict.*” According to him, this “betrayed the whole of purpose for moving

people in camps.” He added that the SPP security provisions were a myth given the recent capacity of the LRA to penetrate the camps. Therefore the project commencement “shouldn’t be a precondition for the provision of security and social services, which the people badly need now.” He added:

“The Acholi populace were forced into the camps by a 48 hour ultimatum. Therefore a decision on whether they intend to change their pattern of settlement need to be wilfully sought in line with the relevant convention on the status of IDPs¹⁶¹.”

Odonga Otto’s main criticism of the SPP was that the pattern of settlement of 17,500 in one SPU or concentration camp is alarming compared to the 300-400 per SPU in the case of Israel. Such a concentration would have a further disruptive impact on Acholi cultural and moral fabric and would be alarming in terms of social cost in that the creation of a new pattern of settlement would change “the entire Acholi precious culture.” The MP was also worried about the land title deeds issue raised in the SPP. Odonga Otto bemoans the fact that this will fragment and balkanise Acholiland, which in current conditions of poverty and desperation now prevalent in the camps, the people “could fall prey to selling their land.” Moreover the allocation of land by the committees in equal allotments to each household is bound to cause problems at the onset and in the post-IDP camp resettlement period¹⁶².

Norbert Mao later also argued that while the SPP may lead to increased food production, the certificates of land ownership “connote that the people will never go back to their traditional home areas¹⁶³.” Dr. Fred Opio, the executive director of the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) in the Prime Minister’s office was concerned about the lack of community participation. He said that for SPP to work, there are many aspects that need to be streamlined “so as to conform to the real needs and desires of the population on the ground” in the camps¹⁶⁴. The researchers did not have time to interview the community in the camps about the SPP, but the views of Dr. Opio would seem to be reflective of their concerns if we look at their responses to the other questions posed to them. In fact NUSAF was set up by the government precisely for the purpose of addressing the socio-economic needs of rehabilitation of the community in the camps. We examine their projections below.

The editorial of the *Monitor* newspaper took a different angle to the SPP. It argued that “Saleh’s proposal” started from what the paper called a “mistaken premise that the northern insurgency is economically driven and ignores – or downplays – perhaps the most important question, the political question – democracy and the political consensus at a wider national level.” The paper argued

¹⁶¹ Odonga Otto [2003]: A Brief Critique of the Security and Production Programme, The Parliament of Uganda, Kampala.

¹⁶² Ibid:

¹⁶³ *The New Vision*, August 13, 2003.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.:

that money can do many things, like building roads, levelling mountains, buying food and medicines, etc., “but cannot buy permanent peace.” The paper added a very important point, which points to the real basis for resolving the Acholi conflict and war:

“so long as there is lack of political consensus and trust, attempts to build the economy in the north will come to naught because a few rebels will destroy all. And, with the level of corruption in Uganda – and in the military especially, you cannot discount that the fear that many people along the bureaucracy will simply stand in the queue to line their pockets with this money to the disadvantage of the intended beneficiaries. WHAT is critical is for the government to offer a genuine olive branch to the rebels and agree, unconditionally, to peace talks in a neutral country under the aegis of neutral mediators –perhaps the United Nations. Only such a move stands a chance of bringing peace and prosperity to northern Uganda which guns and money have (failed to achieve.)¹⁶⁵”

This view of the *Monitor* is sound and reflects the general feeling of the people of Acholi who were interviewed as well as those of the country as a whole. It also, as we have seen above, reflects the views of the government’s civilian programmes for northern reconstruction-NUSAF, which we examine below. The views also form the real basis for national reconciliation. But it would appear that although the project has not been debated and authorised by parliament, it is understood that the project was approved by Cabinet and has begun to be implemented at the Palenga IDP camp, 12 kms on the Gulu-Kampala road and this raises questions of suspicion already referred to.

10.2 The Government Rehabilitation Policy (NUSAF)

The Uganda government has over a number of years, through the office of Northern Reconstruction devised a number of programmes aimed at taking the people in the north out of the conflict in order to enable the people in this region to be part of the process of national economic progress. One of these latest programmes called the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF) is a 5 year Community Driven project Funded through an IDA credit from the World Bank to Uganda Government and the Government of Uganda with contribution from the communities. It is meant to reduce the imbalances in terms of development existing between the rest of the country and Northern Uganda that ranks lowest. It is meant to enable Northern Uganda “catch up” with the rest of the country.

The project intends to transfer funds to the communities through direct financing of sub-projects they identify so that the goal is to use targeted investments

¹⁶⁵The Monitor, June 30th 2003.

in a participatory, equitable and sustainable manner to promote reconciliation and thereby contribute to eradicate poverty in 18 districts in the North and Eastern region of Northern Uganda. The main objective is to empower communities by enhancing their capacities to systematically identify, prioritize, and plan for their needs, and implement sustainable development initiatives that improve socio-economic services and opportunities. The specific objectives are to: strengthen community participation, leadership development and resource mobilization; improve quality and access to social services and community-initiated infrastructure; support community reconciliation and conflict management through local institutions and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). It is also to provide and facilitate support to vulnerable groups, especially the youth and women affected by conflict; and to provide institutional support to strengthen project management capacity, disseminate information, monitor and evaluate activities, as well as strengthen the local government institutions that provide technical support to the Project.

The project is to operate in all the districts of the newly redefined “Northern Regions, which include districts of Moroto, Kotido, Nakapiripirit, Soroti, Kumi, Katakwi, Kaberamido, Pallisa, Lira, Apac, Kitgum, Gulu, Pader, Arua, Nebbi, Moyo, Adjumani, and Yumbe. In this way, NUSAF can promote reconciliation across these districts and diminish the enemy images, which have tended to focus on Acholi and the people of Acholi as being a “problem.”

The positive aspect of NUSAF is that it has components, which focus on community development initiatives whose overall objective is to significantly contribute to poverty reduction in the region, by responding to the identified, and prioritised needs articulated by the respective communities. The specific objectives of the community development initiative-CDI components therefore are: to improve access to and delivery of social and economic services for communities: to upgrade community infrastructure by rehabilitating unusable structures and constructing new ones; to build capacity of communities and various actors in community development, and equip them with skills in participatory methods for planning, implementing and monitoring and evaluating poverty reduction interventions. It will also bring together and strengthen grassroots initiatives intended to enhance the technical and managerial capabilities and attitudes for self-managed development in all sectors such as education, health, water and sanitation, economic infrastructure, agriculture and environment, as well as support to vulnerable groups through financial grants and providing technical resources. This is to be based on building the capacity of CSOs and other institutions that work directly with vulnerable groups in order to ensure effective and efficient delivery of services to the disadvantaged. These disadvantaged groups will include: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Persons abducted by various armies and have returned (ex-abducted), Gun-dropped outs, youth from Karamoja, Widows and widowers, the aged, HIV/AIDS affected and infected persons, Orphans and foster parents, the destitute and the disabled.

This approach has a more promising response from the population because of its inclusiveness and the fact that it will be grassroots, operating on the basis that

the communities will operate within their village -community environments. That is why the USAF also has a community reconciliation and conflict management component, which aim at supporting the processes of social preparation and social capital enhancement of all communities, community groups, and individuals in support of reconciliation and conflict management and peace building activities. It is also to support the evolution and transition of communities from conflict situation to that of sustainable peace and minimize the re- occurrence of conflict; identify innovative ways for community reconciliation and conflict prevention using traditional and non-traditional approaches; and, testing out community-driven approaches to conflict prevention and development by targeting traditional leaders, local elected leaders, and religious leadership to review and strengthen on-going processes.

The project focuses on developing and testing of innovative mechanisms that are built on indigenous knowledge for inter- and intra-community's conflict management and prevention in the region. It will strengthen the capacity of traditional institutions, as well as CSOs to develop and apply appropriate mechanisms for peace building; reintegration of reporters, "gun dropouts" and other vulnerable groups. It will also strengthen the capacity of all stakeholders to foster inclusive planning with communities affected by war; providing relevant information for communities and stakeholders related to peace building conflict management and prevention; as well as developing and disseminating a resource kit for use in form of community wide dialogue tools.

The conflict resolution and conflict management programme is detailed and includes "sub menu" elements such as: training community peace promoters, traditional leaders and community groups, meetings to foster community cooperation (youth, elders, women, etc.), community centre construction, development of materials for reconciliation, traditional ceremonies, psychosocial counseling, structured activities (sports, Drama, Music and dance), as well as facilitating the development and preparation of appropriate bye-laws by local authorities. The "sub menu" also includes activities aimed at constructing memorials in the communities, strengthening community safety nets, peace Education programs, reconciliation education programs, strengthening traditional early warning for conflict, and, supporting documentation. This programme is comprehensive, and unlike the SPP, provides a good basis for the communities to own the programmes, as part of the process of resettlement in the villages, while also promoting reconciliation. This programme can be implemented along other programmes such as Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programmes-NURP,etc.

XI. RECONCILIATION

The above programmes, especially those of NUSAF, have demonstrated that within the government, there are serious efforts being made towards addressing the issue of reconciliation as part of the process of ending the war and beginning to embark on reconstruction programmes in the country. Those questioned as to how reconciliation could help the communities end the war and facilitate a return to normal life responded that traditional reconciliation processes have to be carried out between the government and the rebels. Traditional and religious leaders should act together, with CSO to intervene with the process of reconciliation, including the use of "Mato Oput," as well as spiritual religious approaches. The old traditional leadership structure should be reinstated because they still play a unifying role in the communities. Many interviewees argued that reconciliation should be part of the process of ending the war. Since the government had allowed the functioning of traditional institutions, it should also allow the people to practice their traditions without any hindrance. Some said that people should follow their ancestor's traditional way of life where there was respect for all individuals. Others said that reconciliation by the traditional institutions should be used because we have used all military means and had failed. The military has constantly been giving deadlines but nothing has been achieved. The only way is to use the local chiefs and the elders to end this conflict.

Some key informants were also asked to state which aspects of the truth and reconciliation experiences in other countries could be utilised to bring the Acholi conflict to an end. The response was that this aspect of reconciliation can be only be applied in Acholi sub region if the traditional rule of law is allowed and improved upon. Many respondents believed that reconciliation was possible and necessary. One of the respondents said: "Yeah, I think it can work because people have forgiven the rebels and are willing to live with them. The population believe in reconciliation and given their strong Christian background, they are surely willing to forgive." Some regretted that some of the religious leaders had taken political stands instead of reconciling people and reminding them of basic religious moral values. Instead they had taken politics to the church. Many pointed out that conflict could only end if government stopped provocative and abusive utterances about Kony and his commanders. There should be no threats of killing. Many Acholi people want to participate to end the war. There are those who even volunteered to play a mediatory role between the government and the rebels even if this meant getting killed in the process.

The question was raised with some key informants as to whether aspects of restorative justice could be applied to the Acholi conflict. The response was that restorative justice here is different. Restorative justice works only where there has been a killing of someone. There has to be admission of responsibility and the whole community must then be involved in imparting justice through rituals and reconciliation. In cases of war, the ending of the war is accompanied by the

“bending of the spears.” The conflicting parties exchange their spears symbolising an end to the war or conflict.

It is clear that there is a strong traditional base and capacity to adjust the Acholi traditional practices as has been demonstrated by the adoption of “copping strategies” adopted in the IDP camps. This demonstrates that different kinds of combinations of restorative justice can be applied in the case of the war in Acholi. There should be a study of these processes and involve third parties. There are many experiences emerging on the African continent such as the one being promoted by the Justice and Reconciliation Institute in South Africa and the Gacaca Facilitation Initiative in Rwanda. These initiatives have demonstrated that there can be combinations of different experiences to strengthen restorative justice in Acholiland, provided such attempts are part of a comprehensive programme to end the war.

XII. THE WAY AHEAD

We started this research with the hypothesis that the war in Acholiland was never intended to end until the political and military opposition in the sub-region had been crushed militarily. This determination was based on the wrong premises that were utilised by the initiators of the war in the “Luwero Triangle” to end what they regarded as “the northern domination” of Uganda’s post-colonial politics and the military. It was based on the premise that the “north” had “dominated” Uganda’s post-colonial politics because the “northerners” dominated the Uganda army. This report has shown these premises to be wrong since the real issues in the conflict was the seizure of power by a small political group that was not representative neither of the “south” nor of the country as a whole.

The research has revealed that this ethnic-orientation of the conflict in northern Uganda, which has later come to be concentrated in the Acholi sub-region, in fact obscured these political objectives of the NRM, but it also obscured the wider regional and international dimensions to the conflict, which have now manifested themselves as “the war against terrorism.” It is for this reason that the research team set out to expose this hidden war in which the people of Acholi increasingly became a forgotten people, because the people of Uganda and international community had decided to shut their eyes to their suffering and plight. What is more serious is the fact that their own compatriots-Ugandans-have for a long time also looked at the conflict in the north as too distant to be of any immediate concern to them. Others have shown no concern because of the attitude shown by the leaders who have looked at the conflict purely from military and ethnic angles. Those who have looked at the problem in this way have tended to say: “Let them die, they also killed us!” or “the problem is too far a way from us, we are safe for the time being!” But as the conflict has come nearer to them in the east of the country in districts such as Soroti and Katakwi, there has been a general panic and voices of concern have been heard. There has even recently been talk of the conflict in Acholi not being an Acholi affair, but a “national issue.”

But the president has since the war spread eastwards taken even a more strong position against peace talks with the LRA. As pointed out earlier, he even threatened Members of Parliament who communicated with the rebels with the death penalty on the grounds of treason. This is meant to give a message that any talk of peace talks with the LRA rebels is out of the question and that anybody who engages in such contacts aimed at promoting peace will be treated as abetting the rebellion and can be categorised as a rebel “collaborator” which has become a common accusation used against government opponents. This does not augur well for the redemocratisation process the government promised when it agreed to the opening of the political space to political parties, which had been in the cold under the “Movement Political System.” Such strong reactions against opponents is also strengthening the attempt to remove the presidential two term limit because it will encourage those who speak in these strong terms to argue that we cannot change leadership when we are about to finish the war.

But there is a general feeling in the country that peace should be pursued. Reflecting somewhat similar concerns, the Local Government leaders (LC5 Chairman) of Mbale district to the east of the country nearer to Soroti and Katakwi, Bernard Mujasi, called on the government of Uganda to involve former president Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya in talking peace with the LRA: “Honestly, we need to review our stand on the Northern war by intensifying peace initiatives with Kony and his people,” he was quoted as saying. He called on the government to involve a third party in negotiating peace with the LRA and added that one of the reasons why the government had not been successful in bringing an end to the conflict was “because of mistrust and suspicion on both sides. We have people like Mandela and Moi who can help us mediate this peace process. This has succeeded in South Africa, Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique. If it can work out in those countries, then why not here?” Mujasi asked. All these developments indicated that Ugandans are getting tired of an endless conflict and war in the country.

We therefore recommend that there should be a four-pronged comprehensive response to the war in Acholi, all working side by side. These four responses are:

- International involvement and third party mediation;
- National Reconciliation Conference;
- Social and Economic Responses; and
- Community Reconciliation Efforts.

We look at each of these responses separately but also in their interconnectedness.

12.1 International Involvement

The voices calling for an international involvement have increased since the Acholi Religious Leaders called for it. The leaders noted that they were troubled by the intolerable situation the people of the north found themselves in and noted that the international involvement had so far been humanitarian in nature. They now wanted a political involvement on the part of the international community to stop the war. As quoted above, the ARLPI said:

“We are sounding a strong appeal to the UN to address the conflict in northern Uganda so that all necessary measures are put in place for the protection of the civilians. We appeal to various international bodies, heads of diplomatic missions, the East African Community, African Union, European Union, International Governmental Authority on Development-IGAD and Arab League to support our proposal¹⁶⁶.”

This voice of the religious leaders was re-echoed in a number of quarters. An official of the EU Humanitarian Aid Organisation (ECHO), Ms Costanza Adinolfi,

¹⁶⁶The New Vision, Monday, June 24, 2003.

who was on fact-finding mission to Uganda at the end of June called on the international community to give more attention to the forgotten crisis of northern Uganda, where about one million people had been displaced: "We have witnessed a forgotten crisis in northern Uganda, a crisis that has aroused little interest in the donor community." While noting Sudan's alleged support for the Lord's Resistance Army rebels, she said that the conflict in northern Uganda is essentially internal and must be solved internally. But this overlooked the fact that the war is in fact a regional war, with global implications since the LRA was now regarded as a "foreign terrorist organisation" by the U.S. government. Therefore it is only international involvement that can help bring this war to an end.

Nevertheless, she insisted that her visit to northern Uganda revealed the consequences of a purely military solution to the conflict. She added that the mission had visited Kitgum and Gulu and what interested her there was the fact that children were the main victims of this forgotten crisis. She said that the crisis is not only forgotten internationally but also nationally. Ugandan authorities have done less than they should have done to solve the problem, she said. The solution to the problem lies in dialogue, but neither side has fully explored this option, Adinolfi added, noting that current figures indicated as many as a million persons having been displaced: "There is now a duty by the international community to support dialogue and reconciliation in this conflict, a duty by the Ugandan authorities to embrace a political solution than a purely military one," she said. Adinolfi said that the situation has worsened since the last visit by a EU team in February. At about the same time, the European Parliament also debated the war in Uganda and called for a political settlement. A debate also took place in the British Parliament, which also called for a similar action.

Apart from the religious leaders, other Ugandan organisations have for some time been calling for international involvement in the Uganda conflict, but these voices have never been listened to. The Ugandan independent newspaper, *Monitor*, has made it its policy to call for a political settlement as well as protesting any idea of extension of the Presidential term of office, which would merely perpetuate the enemy images necessary for intensification of the war. The Executive Director of Foundation for Human Rights Initiative based in Kampala, Anthony Sewanyana, in a signed statement, called on the United Nations to take immediate steps for intervention in the conflict. His proposal included sending a special envoy to northern Uganda and southern Sudan for the "express purpose of ascertaining the extent of the conflict." This was a kind of fact-finding mission. Another proposal was that the UN Secretary General should call for a Special Security Council Session on Uganda "with the possibility of designating a specialised force to oversee the Sudan-Uganda border" and also passing a United Nations Resolution "with the prospect of military sanctions against the Sudanese government."

The press release also called on the Uganda government to "put in place immediate measures to restore confidence among its citizens that the UPDF has the capacity to protect them and their property by increasing deployment of troops in Northern Uganda and Eastern Uganda. It appealed on the government to resume

talks with the government of Sudan “to forestall further accusations and counter-accusations between both sides¹⁶⁷.”

However because of the assurances by the US to continue supporting the Uganda government in its continued fight against the LRA, The Uganda government was also reportedly opposed to a Special Envoy being appointed or human rights monitors being placed in Gulu, although many states at the UN had given support to the idea. The reason for the government attitude was that it perceived such a measure to undermine its “international image.” But such an image has been maintained because some donors had been keen not to interfere with Uganda’s handling of the conflict because of his performance in other fields. The US for this reason appeared not to be prepared to support a UN human rights monitoring or even the appointment of a Special Envoy. But Canada was said to be mobilising resources to support such monitoring team in Gulu. It is therefore in the interest of peace that civil society should intensify its pressure to get the US government to change its policy of continuing the war.

It is heartening that many civil society organisations internationally are focusing on the issue of a peaceful settlement. The British Church Missionary Society-CMS-in early August, 2003 issued a long statement in which it announced that as from 21st August, 2003 it was going to embark on a campaign to break “an international conspiracy of silence” on the horrors of the 17-year rebellion in northern Uganda. This was a welcome addition to the voices calling for an international involvement in the cessation of the war in Acholiland and these voices now reinforce the earlier voices that had hitherto been ignored. These voices included that of Lloyd Axworthy, former foreign Minister of Canada, who sponsored a conference in Winnipeg in autumn of 2000 on child protection. At this conference certain commitments were made by Uganda, Sudan and Egypt and other governments to provide protection for the abducted children in northern Uganda. But these commitments were not honoured.

His further efforts resulted in other researched reports by the Liu Institute, the Human Rights and Peace Centre, Makerere and the Human Rights Watch. Two of these reports: *The Stolen Children*¹⁶⁸ called for the appointment by UN Secretary General, of a Special Envoy to carry out a “shuttle Diplomacy” for the protection of the abducted children. In the report that followed, entitled: *Abducted and Abused: renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda*¹⁶⁹, the three organisations called on the Uganda government and the LRA to stop the abuses, which were outlined in the report. At the same time, at the launching of the report, the three organisations made calls for:

¹⁶⁷ *The Weekly Message*, 24-30th June, 2003, Kampala.

¹⁶⁸ Uganda: *Stolen Children: Abduction and Recruitment in Northern Uganda*, Vol. 15, No. 7 (A), March 2003.

¹⁶⁹ *Abducted and Abused: renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda*, Human Rights Watch, July 2003.

- The international community to take action to bring human rights abuses in northern Uganda to an end-reiterating that it was now high time for the international community to do so;
- The UK, U.S, and Norway to include LRA in the Sudan peace talks in Kenya, and in that context require that the Sudanese government guarantee that its agents (including army officers) no longer maintain relationships with or provide assistance to the LRA;
- The international community to monitor any military assistance to the Uganda government to ensure that human rights standards are strictly observed by the UPDF and the security forces, as well as encouraging the Uganda government to provide security to Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts;
- The Secretary general of the United Nations to appoint a Special Envoy for Peace in Northern Uganda, with mandate to negotiate the release of child abductees from the LRA;
- The Uganda government to prevent its forces from abusing the people of northern Uganda in different ways, which were stipulated, and for the LRA to stop abductions of the children and to immediately release those who had been abducted to a third party such as the International Red Cross.

As part of these calls, in July 2003, the prime minister of the government of Canada, Jean Chrétien, at the Summit of the 14 Centre-Left World Leaders, which included Thabo Mbeki president of South Africa, advanced his plan for broad guidelines to prevent genocide and ethnic cleansing in which the Uganda conflict was seen as one. He proposed the use of international bodies other than the United Nations, if the later was unable to act to stop such wars. The other members of the Summit, however, argued that the UN was the only body with the legitimacy to authorise humanitarian intervention in such cases. Following this communiqué Lloyd Axworthy called on the international community to intervene quickly in the Uganda civil war, which, according to him had become “invisible to many people¹⁷⁰.”

These calls also have to be addressed to the African Union-AU to take steps under its own mandates and those of the UN Security Organisation to intervene and help stop the war in Acholiland on a regional security basis. It should be noted that under the Constitutive Act of the AU, as amended at the Maputo Summit in July 2003, the new organ of the Peace and Security Council was created under article 5 (f) and article 8 by inserting a new article 20(bis), which states: “There is hereby established, a Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the Union, which shall be the standing decision-making organ for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.” Although not yet operationalised, this organ has the power to intervene under the new amended article 4(h) which gives “the right to the Union to intervene in a Member State pursuant to the decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely; war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity as well

¹⁷⁰ *Globeandmail.com*, 16th July, 2003.

as a serious threat to legitimate order to restore peace and stability to the Member State of the Union upon the recommendation of the Peace and Security Council.”

Additionally, there are provisions under the New Partnership for Africa's Development-NEPAD's African Peer Review Mechanism-APRM, under which there is a Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. There are provisions in the APRM for the Implementing Committee to set in motion an investigation and assessment of the situation in each member state. Although this mechanism is voluntary, the corresponding provisions under the African Union Constitutive Act are compulsory and can be enforced under the Constitutive Act. It is the submission of this report that the situation in Uganda falls under one of these AU mandates and that the African Union should find a mechanism for initiation of the process of conflict resolution and management of the war in Uganda. It is high time that African states took seriously their commitments to their own people.

New hopes for the involvement of the U. S. were raised when on the 9th September 2003 the U. S. Ambassador to Uganda, Jimmy Kolker, while addressing a meeting organised by an NGO called Always Be Tolerant-ABETO-announced that the US government supported peaceful resolution of the northern conflict, although he added that “there should be no compromise on any outcome that would allow terrorism to continue.” He said the US would like to facilitate the dialogue “to relieve the people of rebel atrocities.” He concluded that: “We are already looking at ways in which we can be helpful but a ground needs to be set because the dialogue is going to be between Ugandans¹⁷¹.” This was a positive step, which would remove any fears that the US wants to increase its military support to the Uganda government to pursue the war. But as later events have revealed, the US has already embarked on training the UPDF in a two-year programme to strengthen the government in fighting the LRA rebellion. This is bad news for the people of Acholi and therefore there should be intensification of the campaign to get the US to change its policy and pursue a consistent peace policy.

The purpose of the involvement of the international community is to establish the mechanisms for dialogue leading to a ceasefire as well as creating neutral forces to create a buffer zone between the government forces and the LRA rebels. This will create a level of confidence building and trust between all the parties. This, however, can only be facilitated by an internationally agreed third party, which must play a mediatory role between the parties. Furthermore, a third country must be agreed between all the parties in which official contacts between them can be maintained and in which meetings for dialogue can take place. Side by side, the creation of a buffer zone will facilitate certain contacts being made internally between different actors. One such key actor who could be introduced in the buffer zone is Alice Auma “Lakwena”, who is the only person in a position to talk to Joseph Kony “ideologically” since he claims to have inherited the spirit of Lakwena from her. The Acholi elders and the religious leaders could facilitate such

¹⁷¹ *The New Vision*, September 10, 2003.

a meeting, because in this dialogue these parties have a role in reconciliation in which they also have to admit their own weaknesses.

12.2 The National Conference

There has been a growing call on the political front within Uganda for the convening of a national conference. This call was made much earlier in the day by the Uganda Peoples' Congress as the NRM set about forming a government. These calls have increased in voice and frequency that there should be a national conference to deal with issues of governance, constitutionalism, conflict resolution and reconciliation. This new concern was manifested in a consultative seminar called by a political pressure group called the Free Movement along with other civil society stakeholders in Makerere, Kampala on the 13th August 2003, which was attended by different stakeholders. The papers presented at the seminar called for the end of the war in Acholi as a precondition for the normalisation of the system of governance from the single "No Party" Movement rule to a democratic multiparty system. Indeed, some of the paper presenters argued that the conflict had persisted in the north of the country because of the continuation of a No Party system, which was far from being democratic. One of the paper presenters declared:

"There has been a general interest in the convening of the National Conference that can enable the different political players to agree on a framework for the transition to multiparty democracy. These voices do not feel satisfied that the promise to 'open up political space' (by the NRM) is a genuine attempt to restore democracy in the country. This is particularly so when the same people who talked of 'opening up political space' at the same time insisted that the 'opening' must be approved through a referendum. This suggests that there are other plans being worked upon to dislodge the whole idea of 'opening up' the political space at the last minute. They link the continued war in Acholi with a possible extension of the NRM rule through a declaration of a state of emergency if the war is escalated to ensure that the One Party rule continues¹⁷²."

Professor John-Jean Barya who presented a timetable towards the holding of such the national conference argued that in order for the current political, economic and constitutional problems and disagreements under the no-party Movement system to be resolved, both the government and the opposition must agree on the need for dialogue. Such a dialogue must involve the spirit and practice of give and take and should involve other actors other than the opposition and the government. This should include religious leaders organisations, cultural leaders organisations

¹⁷² Nabudere, D.W [2003]: Towards the convening of a national conference in Uganda: Some Experiences and Lessons from other African Countries, Kampala.

and the civil society broadly conceived. According to him even individuals with relevant experience, stature and knowledge should participate in the dialogue¹⁷³.

Professor Tarsis Kabwegyere, the minister of Local Government who discussed Professor Dani W. Nabudere's paper, and Moses Byaruhanga, the presidential political Assistant, who commented on Prof. Balya's paper, attended the seminar. The Speaker of Parliament, Edward Sekandi, also attended, as well as the leader of the Democratic Party and the former presidential candidate in the 1996 presidential elections, Paul Ssemogerere. This demonstrated a certain interest by both the government and the opposition to take some steps towards such a conference, and towards this possibility the idea of an expanded committee to promote the proposal was approved, which will include the different stakeholders, including the NRM government and the opposition. The next step is to widen the consultation and agree on initial steps towards a dialogue that will lead to a conference. These steps should include contacts being made with the LRA rebels, as well as the RPF and the UPA, who are already in the war theatre, and the politicians in the diaspora/exile. This should be done conjointly with the involvement of the international community, which should facilitate such contacts with the rebels.

The national conference is not just a good forum for consensus building between the political parties and the government; it is most importantly also a platform for reconciling the people of Acholi with those of Uganda as a whole. The position taken by the political parties as well as civil society that the conflict in Acholiland is not just an Acholi affair, but a national one is a good beginning for discussing the conflict with the local Acholi actors. As already indicated in our analysis of the root causes to the conflict, there is still a strong feeling that the war in the north was a way of revenging the alleged atrocities of the Acholi soldiers in Luwero Triangle. The government has, as we saw, admitted that there were mistakes committed by the 35 Brigade. This is not enough because it is known that the NRA looted cattle, as well as committing atrocities of different kinds in 1986-87 period. This is what contributed to the poisoning of the relationship between the people of Acholi and the government, as reflected in the persistent electoral results.

Therefore to overcome the feeling in Acholi that the revenge activities of the NRM in Acholi was a form of state *culo kwor* (revenge), it is necessary for the government, especially president Museveni personally, to accept responsibility for these "mistakes" and not attribute them to brigades or individuals within the NRA/UPDF-after all he is the commander and as commander you take all the blames, accolades and ululations. The feelings reflected in this research still indicate strong wish for reconciliation and government acceptance of responsibility about what has happened in Acholi. It is a crucial part of the reconciliation process and this can be done in the forum of a national conference. Many have in fact associated the displacement of the people in Acholi into IDP camps without protection and the refusal to hold peace talks as an indication of this attitude of revenge. Therefore, we

¹⁷³ Balya, J-J [2003]: Issues and Time Table for a Transition to Democracy, Kampala.

must take advantage of the national conference to end these suspicions in order to bring about national reconciliation.

Later, there will be need for rituals to be performed in public of “bending the spears” so that the public at large can revive their confidence in the democratic political process. Also at the national level is the need for the Acholi elders to address the problem of wrong doing in “Luwero Triangle.” The NRM mishandled this issue when they took the Acholi elders to the Triangle in which the elders felt they were being accused of the atrocities of the UNLA. This was not the proper way to go about it if real reconciliation was what was aimed at. The NRM/A must also atone for having initiated an ethnically oriented war, which led to the atrocities in the “Triangle.”

We have a precedent which could have been used and to which the Acholi people had organised themselves in the earlier conflict. This was the traditional reconciliation between the Acholi and the people of Madi, Kakwa, Lugbara and Alur land in West Nile. This was done in 1979-80 and again 1981-85, after the Acholi and Langi soldiers in UNLA had revenged against these communities by attacking these areas because of the accusations that the soldiers from these areas had, during the rule of Idd Amin 1971-78, played a part in killing of the Acholi and Langi soldiers who were supposed to have supported the Obote regime. The Acholi elders intervened and initiated the process for reconciliation on 11th February 1986, in Palaro, 26 kms from Gulu in Acholiland. In that reconciliation, the Acholi traditional leaders and elders with their counterparts from the four communities from West Nile carried out traditional rituals and cleansings, which included acceptance of blame and symbolic recompense.

There is also a recent example of a national reconciliation process in Southern Sudan. Two major peace conferences were organised by civil society and the SPLM/A, which brought together over 800 participants from different ethnic communities of southern Sudan, with the exception of the Kechipo and Jie, who were delayed. The first was the All Upper Nile Peace Conference (AUNPC) and the second was the Upper Nile SPLM Regional Conference (UNSPLMRC). These two conferences brought about a spirit of reconciliation, forgiveness and the determination by all communities to work together in the future. One of the most important events at these conferences was the reconciliation between the Nuer and Dinka communities. One particular person who was crucial to this reconciliation was Dr. Riek Machar, who led the Nasir coup in 1991, which was responsible for the conflict in Upper Nile between the Dinka and Nuer that split the SPLM/A.

At the conference Dr. Riek Machar publicly apologised to the people of Upper Nile and those of Bor County in particular on behalf of himself and the political elite of the SPLM/A. His own personal apology was welcomed by the Dinka people when he said publicly: “I am sorry, I did not approve of what had happened, things went out of my control as I was far from Nasir.” These words of apology brought the Dinka women on their feet as they sung songs and poems reciting the tragic situation that had prevailed when the people were disunited. A

report about the conference summarised the proceedings in the following words that should make the Uganda political elite to think once again:

“When the women representatives read out their speech, full of wisdom, sensibility and patriotism, men of valour, courage and dignity, felt ashamed and sorry for the violence and senseless brutalities they had inflicted on their innocent women and children, the very ones our present and past generations fought for and defended for many centuries with their spears and clubs, and now with modern weapons from the onslaught of lustful foreign invaders and oppressive regimes¹⁷⁴.”

What the people of Uganda need is a reconciliation gathering of this kind, which can bring all Ugandans together and create an atmosphere in which these kinds of atonement can take place and a reconciliation made possible. The people of Acholi in particular need some apology from those who have subjected them to this long suffering of modern weapons, which foreign and personal interests of some leaders have subjected them to.

12.3 Economic and Social Rehabilitation

The objective for involving the international community is to create an atmosphere of confidence between the conflicting parties that a resolution to the war will succeed. But a fundamental element in all this is to relax the situation, which enables the people in the IDP camps to return to their homes. The creation of a buffer zone and the cessation of the hostilities will create a favourable environment for this to happen. Equally, the movement of the IDP back to their homes creates a favourable psychological and conducive atmosphere for the rebels to feel free to return to their homes and rejoin their families. Such a development will encourage a serious approach dialogue and negotiations at international mediation and national conference levels.

The people of Acholi, after so many years of economic disruption, need a special attention and support in economic and social reconstruction. Such special attention and support will be construed as some attempt by their fellow Ugandans to compensate them for the destruction of their economy and hence a positive step towards reconciliation and reconstruction of Acholiland. We have referred to one such special programme worked out by the Office of the Prime Minister as one positive step. The programme-Northern Uganda Social Action Fund-NUSAF aims at putting these districts back to the path of national progress and development, while also promoting reconciliation at the same time.

What is now urgently required is the international community to pledge further support to these kinds of programmes so that efforts aimed at consolidating

¹⁷⁴ *South Sudan Post*, June 2003.

the basis for reconciliation take firm root as the process of national reconciliation also proceeds to avoid frustrations and feeling of helplessness that can prove counter-productive to the whole effort. What is required is a multi-pronged and comprehensive approach to the cessation of conflicts so that while efforts at involving the international community in the peace process are beginning, plans for national dialogue through the national conference, are also pursued in earnest. With a programme of social and economic resettlement, rehabilitation and reconstruction being initiated, these local reconciliation efforts will bear fruit and reinforce the processes going on at higher levels.

As soon as the ceasefire is declared and put in force and a buffer zone is created there must be no time lost in beginning to resettle the IDPs back into their villages, where they can embark on immediate steps at economic and social rehabilitation and reconstruction. This is why we do not recommend the implementation of the SPP, because to do so, as has already been seen, would be to acknowledge failure to end the war. This would have the implication that the population of Acholi has to reorganize their lives in encampment on a permanent basis and to adjust to life in detention centers a long-term reality. This will mean the total destruction of Acholi society, their economy and culture, as we knew it in the past. No Uganda society has gone through this process and the people of Acholi would be justified in regarding this as a continued process of genocide. Failure to stop the war and find a national reconciliation would entitle the people of Acholi to demand the right to their own self-determination since the right to such self-determination within Uganda would have been denied them. That is why we call for a process of national reconciliation as the only sane alternative.

12.4 Community Reconciliation

Reconciliation at a national level will not be enough in bring the people of Acholi back to a normal existence. There is a lot that has to be done to reconcile individuals, families, clans, religions, and whole communities. The community has to be resettled so that the children, their fathers and mothers, as well as other members of the extended families, can function again as coherent units. For this to happen, reconciliation at local grassroots levels is fundamental, and civil society groups should, as soon as the ceasefire is declared and enforced by the creation of a buffer zone, proceed to help the communities organise these community reconciliation processes.

As we have seen above, the NUSAF has a community reconciliation and conflict management component, which aims at supporting the processes of social preparation and social capital enhancement of all communities. It will involve community groups and individuals to support reconciliation and conflict management and peace building activities in their communities, and support the evolution and transition of communities from conflict situations to that of sustainable peace, and minimize the re- occurrence of conflict. In addition these, local reconciliation efforts will identify innovative ways by using traditional and

non-traditional approaches to conflict resolution, testing out community-driven approaches to conflict prevention and development by targeting traditional leaders, local elected leaders, and religious leadership to review and strengthen on-going processes. In this effort, we can borrow from several experiences in post-conflict management drawn from other countries. The civil society organizations must move quickly to help the communities take advantage of this programme.

One of the most important works to be undertaken in this local reconciliation will be the readmission of abducted children and former LRA fighters back into their families. As we know, these children and their families have gone through a traumatic experience, which needs to be healed. There has emerged a feeling that Western psychiatric counselling and care, which has been availed to abducted children on their return is inappropriate to their cultural situations. Some western experts have claimed that often there is no long-term provision of therapy so that children who have attended a few counselling sessions are then left to drift on their own along with unresolved problems after the psychiatrists have packed up their bags and gone home.

Patrick Bracken, a consultant psychiatrist who has worked with children in conflict in West Africa, argues that by concentrating resources on mental trauma, such programmes deflect attention from real survival issues, which include the loss of livelihood, separation of children from parents, and a lack of schooling. But these in our view must include the trauma suffered by the children in the rebel ranks, their participation in killings of their own relatives, and the dehumanisation and alienation suffered by the communities in IDP camps over prolonged periods. All these traumatic, social-cultural and psychological problems have to be confronted at once in the community.

In this connection, Bracken argues that: "People can be helped by letting the community get back together, helping them to rebuild their houses, getting the markets and trading going again the things that make their lives meaningful" he said. "These are the important things that can allow people to leave behind the past. The problem is that concepts and techniques which are alien can interfere with this process of moving forward." While this is correct, we have nevertheless prepared to go beyond that by carrying out traditional and spiritual rituals in the communities, churches and mosques. This can only take place in an atmosphere of relaxation and lack of intimidation and fear in which the communities regain confidence over their own lives and try to reinvent their environments.

In the case of Acholi, these rituals will have to be carried out in a number of localities where wrongs have been committed so that there is a reconciliation of the communities and families. Joseph Kony, with the participation of Alice Auma, will have to work closely with the elders and the religious leaders to bring about such reconciliation within Acholi society as well as the other communities of Uganda. At the level of national reconciliation, special programmes of resettlement and rehabilitation will play the role of compensation for wrongs committed by the Uganda state against Acholi, while these local reconciliation efforts will reassure the rest of Ugandans that Acholiland has returned to normality.

XIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The ending of the war in Acholiland will signal the beginnings of a new era for the people of the region, which will need reinforcement by other developments. Moreover, what has happened in Acholiland has produced new situations, which will need to be digested and understood not only by the people of Acholi, but also of other Ugandans and the world at large. We therefore recommend that as part of this processes of reconciliation, a programme of further research be undertaken that will reveal the impact of what has happened so that future generations can avoid their re-occurrence. The knowledge so generated and the process of research, which should be participatory and grassrooted, will also go to reinforce that the rehabilitation will be based on sound knowledge of what has happened, what has changed and what new ideas we need to adopt to meet these new situations.

That is why we agree with professor Stephen Owen, whom we referred to earlier, when he observed that peace in northern Uganda will be achieved only by rekindling Acholi traditional practices of Mato Oput and a process that was, in his view, directly relevant to Canada's search for justice and self-determination of First Nation Peoples. It was in this connection that he recommended that a short-term (12-18 months) planning project be instituted "to fully develop a mandate, support networks, work plan and a budget for an Acholi Peace and Research Centre followed by a long-term support (3-5 years) programme to establish and implement the Centre." In his view, such a centre should be indigenous, autonomous, and inclusive.¹⁷⁵

We agree, with the revision that such a centre is needed urgently and should proceed on the basis of the experiences that have been gained in the region with similar civil society efforts. We recommend that such a centre be called the **Institute for Reconciliation, Justice and Human Security**. Acholi will become the seat of such a reconciliation centre in which the communities will explore new forms of restorative justice in a human security centred society. It should right from the beginning be organised by the local people with the support from Canada and slowly link up with other African organisations throughout Africa and the world over so that these communities can share experiences on post-conflict management and sustainable development based on human security considerations. It should develop research agendas that can explore these issues in a participatory manner and develop the capacity to teach these results of such research. We think that the Institute would be a good venue where research into these kinds of interventions can take place.

The following areas of research would deserve attention. They are not exclusive and the research agenda can develop with

¹⁷⁵ Stephen Owen [2000]: War Affected Children in Northern Uganda: Assessment of Canadian Programming Opportunities, Overview and Recommendations, Report, July 2000.

the needs that the situation demands. Research issues must not be arbitrarily determined, but must emerge from the actual needs of the communities.

- Acholi Traditional Reconciliation processes such as *mato oput* and the impact of the conflict on them;
- Restorative justice in Acholi and in global contexts;
- The changes in cultural behaviour and patterns, especially the position of women, youths and the elderly;
- Acholi Traditional Religion and its links to Acholi Traditional Beliefs and cultures-and their relationships with the Christian and Islamic religions;
- Post-Conflict Management and Reconstruction;
- The environment, Land, Natural resource control and use and Management;
- Human security and sustainable development;
- Lessons to be learnt from conflicts and how to avoid their recurrence.

XIV. CONCLUSION

The objective of this research was to investigate further the causes to this on-going conflict and to recommend ways in which civil society interventions in the conflict could be further strengthened. The research was also to provide an informational basis for an advocacy strategy aimed at ending the abduction of the children, their release from captivity and their readmission in their community. The research has given us an opportunity to explore deeply the underlying causes and the factors contributing to the perpetuation of this conflict and has built a case not only for stopping the abduction of children, but of ending the war in general. The researchers were of the concerted conviction that unless the war in Acholiland was ended, there was no real possibility that the abduction of the children and their use in the war would stop. For this reason we directed all our efforts in providing information that could open up avenues for newer thinking aimed at ending the war.

Many events have happened in this brief period during our research to give a sigh of relief that at last, some attention to the Acholi conflict is receiving some attention from the international community. But these signs of relief will not bear fruit unless pressure is exerted at a very level to get the international community and the African Union to act. Hence the importance of embarking on a comprehensive advocacy strategy that addresses all the four components of our recommendations:- international involvement; national conference; economic and social rehabilitation; and community reconciliation. This strategy means the need to deploy several players at the same time both at international, national, and local-community-camp levels. This will require that during the discussion stage of this report, concerted efforts be made to include all the stakeholders in this strategy.

Finally, the research has verified, the hypothesis with which the research team embarked on its task, namely that the war in Acholiland was never intended to end until the political and military opposition in the sub-region had been crushed militarily. This determination to continue the war was based on the need to end “the northern domination” of Uganda’s post-colonial politics. This report has shown that these premises were wrong and opportunistic since the real issue in the conflict was the seizure of power by a small political group that was representative neither of the “south” nor of the country as a whole.

The report has also shown that this narrow ethnic orientation of the war also obscured other fundamental factors in the conflict, which have increasingly taken the form of regional and international dimensions of what is currently called “the war against terrorism.” The abducted children of Uganda are now targeted as “terrorists” and “killers” when they have been turned into “killers” because the Uganda government failed in its duty to protect them from abduction. No longer do we hear loud voice about the “Acholis” wanting to dominate Uganda, except in the villages of Buganda where it is uttered to convince “the Baganda,” with promises of “federo,” to agree to life presidency “third terms” (*kisanjja*) for Museveni, if their

interests are to be protected against the “Acholis.” This goes to prove that the war was intended to go on as part of the process of maintaining a particular individual in power. This is why the war must go on if the NRM is to continue to hold power.

APPENDIX I:

**REMARKS BY H.E. PRESIDENT YOWERI K. MUSEVENI ON
THE WAR IN THE NORTH¹⁷⁶**

My remarks have been anticipated some how by Moses Ali's presentation on the history of the root causes of the conflict. ... While Northern Uganda was made a labour reserve, western Uganda was also made a labour reserve, but the local leadership made a difference. Kigezi, Ankole, we were all labour reserves. Banyankole were Balalo labourers of the Baganda after the rinderpest of 1918. ... We need to look at other interpretations. Why have other groups behaved differently?

The battalion, which misbehaved in Namukora, was battalion 35 not 31. But, we arrested them. But the local leaders misled the people -- there was no misbehaviour with impurity. ... Some northern Uganda politicians alleged we had violated the 1985 Peace Accord. ... But the Lakwena rebellion although initially popular, after 2 or 3 years people found out the war was (i) going no where, (ii) it was not true that revenge was taking place, and (iii) that they were suffering lots of casualties. Hence UPDA's Kilama, Angela Okello, and Charles Alai came out of the bush. After that the war became unpopular. The LRA began atrocities (cutting lips and ears), because of the opposition by the people. ...

I do not agree with those people who say there is general support in Acholi, but there is some support from a bunch of leaders from certain areas because of their hatred for the NRM. Their case is based on lies. That is why I disagree with the DP, which I joined in 1960 because they said anything against Obote is good, that is why they supported Amin. I was the first person to oppose Amin, he ruled me for one day. He took power on 25th January 1971 and I left the country on 27th January 1971. I do not agree that "both sides" are committing mistakes. ... We are not committing crimes. ...

From 1989, the groups in northern Uganda became criminal. Lakwena confused people about shea-oil protecting their bodies. The army mowed them down at Corner Kilak when they tried to attack it. We counted 1,000 children who tried to attack the army. But she did not commit crimes. The people do not support the rebellion -- but leaders do: (i) by inaction and (ii) by confusing the international community by going to embassies. Thus although unequal development was a factor in northern Uganda, it was not the sole factor. The issue of poor local

¹⁷⁶ His Excellency, The President of Uganda, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, remarks were made at the One-Day "Dialogue on Conflict Management and Resolution" at the International Conference Centre, Kampala on the 22nd July 2004. Prof. Dani W. Nabudere, Principal Investigator, took these notes during the remarks. They should be read with that understanding that they were taken in long hand.

leadership of not taking a firm stand against “backward practices” was crucial in the case of northern Uganda. The leaders did not provide a good leadership. ...

Obote abrogated the 1962. On the other hand the 1994-5 Constituent Assembly was legitimate. Therefore, anybody engaged in rebel activity is a traitor because there was no cause, which could not be addressed constitutionally. The question is sometimes asked: Why has the Kony rebellion persisted. There are five reasons:

- The Sudan factor-who sent Odong Latek, to attack us at Bibia on 22nd Aug. 1986. They also tried to develop a front in West Nile and sent ADF through Kasese;
- Poor road infrastructure-we have built roads from Pabbo-Amum-Rhino Camp, another from Pader to Kalungu ... These roads will help solve the problem of Sudan;
- Under spending on defence since 1991. At this time we had a large infantry of about 100,000 but it was expensive and ill equipped. Therefore, we had to reduce the numbers, save money and buy better equipment. In 1996, Sudan unleashed the UNRF II of Bamuze to attack us in West Nile and a second front to Acholi. Therefore, how did West Nile get peace? It was by using that harmer. The mistake happened when the donors came to disrupt our plan by budgetary deductions. That is why the threat has persisted. Our going to the DRC was to deal with Sudan. We were out-stretched to deal with the LRA;
- Weaknesses in the Army: (i) Drunkenness, (ii) Corruption, (iii) HIV/AIDS; We are now dealing with this;
- The cover up of Kony atrocities by Acholi political leaders who spoke of “another way” Amnesty!!! “Some one who has killed people in cold blood to be given amnesty”? Sure? But there was pressure for me to accept “Amnesty for All.” It has never worked anywhere. I agreed due to pressure - but even after this Kony continued killings. “These apologists confused a lot of people.” Now they want a “high level team” so I appointed Kategaya, Saleh, etc [PPT], because of all of this diversion. Then some people (Okumu Regan) spoke of “Kony who was misled.” ... I gave them my phone number but no communication. I am in a process of writing a confidential document entitled “From Mistake to Mistake”, addressed to a number of friends to refute the idea of working on mistakes. Opoka, Bataringaya (from Alero) joined Kony. They were instructed to “re-orient” LRA into a respectable organisation”. They were killed.

Nevertheless we shall defeat Kony. What is required in the short run: -

- i.Relief . . .
- ii.Road infrastructure,
- iii.Mechanised production from the camps into big farms (SSP). I told Dr. Kazibwe to do this five years ago, but something else happened. The land is still owned by clans. There should be right Owners in short-term. This will also help to control security,

iv. Support the Army.

The money we have in the budget is enough to finish the problem of Kony so long as other security situations remain good: DRC; Sudan.

We are on a peacetime budget when we are at war. It is 2.5 of GDP. If Sudan persists in supporting LRA, I shall recommend that we embark on “Partial Mobilisation.” ... There is this talk of the “cycle of revenge”. Where is this? Who has NRA revenged against? We execute our soldiers who engage in killings. ... In the medium-term, I presented a 12-point programme to President Bush. It is with the minister who shall hand it out to you. ... There is now a campaign against the helicopter gunship, which help the children to escape when the bandits have hidden from them. These are silent supporters of terrorism. Kony is a criminal.

Kony’s incursions in Teso and Lira were intended to disorganise our forces so that they can enter Acholi more easily. I intend to go back to Acholi and deal with the situation. The situation in Gulu is now a little quiet. Because of “zonalisation” there has not been much trouble. ... There is a decampaigning of the IDP camps, but they have saved a lot of youths from abduction. ... There are now 198,000 children in UPE, compared to 71,000 before UPE. ... I got these figures this morning from the LC5 chairman. There is progress that has been made.

APPENDIX II-QUESTIONNAIRE

A.CAUSES, GOVERNANCE, AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE CONFLICT:

1.CAUSES OF THE CONFLICT

- i)What do you think are the fundamental causes of this conflict?
- ii)What has compounded these causes?
- iii)How has the different understanding of these fundamental causes affected the conflict?
- iv)How has the Government and rebel explanation impacted on the conflict?

2.GOVERNANCE

- i)To what extent did the following elements of governance become a factor in the conflict
 - (a)Behaviour of NRA/UPDF
 - (b)Structure of government and administration e.g. RC
 - (c)Judicial structures and procedures
 - (d)Past experiences of the Acholi
 - (e)Information circulating; word of mouth, radio, newspapers
- ii)How can the above weaknesses of governance be addressed?

B.FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR PERPETUATING AND/OR COMPOUNDING THE CONFLICT:

1.ECONOMIC FACTORS

- i)What are the economic factors that contributed to the conflict?
- ii)What are the economic factors that are perpetuating the conflict?
- iii)What can be done to mitigate the economic situation?

2.CULTURAL FACTORS

- i)How has Acholi culture impacted on the conflict?
- ii)How has the conflict impacted on Acholi culture?
- iii)How can aspects of cultural degeneration in Acholi be addressed?

3.SOCIAL FACTORS

- i)Are there social factors impacting on the conflict?
- ii)Which are these factors and why do they arise?
- iii)How can these social factors be overcome?

4.POLITICAL FACTORS

- i)What are the factors that have complicated the relationship between the LRA, Government and the populace?

ii)How has struggle between multipartism and the Movement System contributed to the conflict?

iii)How can these problems be resolved?

5.RELIGION AND MYTHS

i)What place does metaphysics play in the conflict?

ii)What are these manifestations of metaphysics?

iii)What impact has the deployment of these metaphysical explanations had on the conflict?

iv)How can these problems be addressed?

6.EXTERNAL FACTORS

i)What are the external factors involved in the conflict and how have they influenced and complicated it at different times? Why?

ii)In which ways has the Sudanese involvement complicated the conflict?

iii)How has its relation with Uganda and Sudan complicated the conflict?

iv)How has factors such as:-

a)Arms trafficking;

b)Cattle rustling across borders;

c)Inter SPLM/A ethics divisions;

impacted on the conflict?

v)How can these external complicating factors be overcome?

vi)Has the issue of Sudanese Refugees affected the conflict? Why? How?

vii)How can the issue of Sudanese refugees be handled?

7.ABDUCTION

i)What is the present position of the abduction?

ii)How is the treatment of formerly abducted persons being handled at these centre:

a)Military Centres e.g. detachments, barracks,

b)Child Protection Unit (CPU)

c)Counselling Centres like GUSCO, World Vision, etc...

d)Community

iii)What are the rehabilitation programs and how is this dealing with the needs of the abductees?

iv)How can it be approved?

8.INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs)

i)How has the problem of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) been handled?

ii)What can be done to improve the handling of the problem?

iii)What are the community responses to the issues of IDPs and to what effect?

iv)How is the trauma from the violence and atrocities inflicted on the civilian population being handled?

9.LAW AND ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

i)How is the legal enforcement system functioning?

ii) Are there alternative systems of law enforcement?

iii) What are these and how can they be put in place?

10. THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

i) Are the courts in the affected areas functioning normally?

ii) How does the community perceive the system?

iii) What are the alternatives to this judicial system?

11. INTERNAL ACTORS

i) Who are the “rebels”, “combatants”, “abductees”, and “collaborators, “terrorists” and “perpetrators”?

ii) Are there links between the LRA and other rebel groups?

iii) Are there internal personal conflicts within the rebel and government forces, which perpetuate/complicate the conflict?

C. CURRENT INTERVENTION EFFORTS

1. PEACE INITIATIVES

i) What are the current peace initiatives being undertaken?

ii) How effective are there?

iii) What positive lessons can be learnt from the previous peace initiatives?

iv) How can these positive experiences be built upon to find a peaceful solution?

2. RESETTLEMENT OF FORMER REBELS

i) How has the resettlement of these former rebels been handled?

ii) Are there mechanisms in place for handling these former rebels?

iii) What are these mechanisms?

iv) Are they adequate?

3. INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES

i) What has been the role of the International Humanitarian Agencies?

ii) In which ways have they complicated the ending of the conflict?

iii) Are there conflict of interests and competitions between these agencies and their roles in the conflict?

iv) What are the reasons behind these competitions?

v) How can they be overcome?

4. UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES

i) Is lack of political involvement by the African Union and the United Nations a complicating factor to the conflict?

ii) How can the role of the UN and its agencies be increased and improved?

5. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

i) What are the current civil society interventions?

(Produce a table including: Name of Organisation, Nature of activities, and area of intervention).

- ii) How can these activities be improved?
- iii) What is their future plans?

D. REHABILITATION AND RECONCILIATION PROCESSES:

1. REHABILITATION

- i) What are the current rehabilitation efforts?
- ii) Are these efforts adequate?
- iii) How can they be improved upon?

2. RECONCILIATION

- i) How can the reconciliation role of the traditional institutions and systems be more involved in resolving conflicts?
- ii) How can improved governance including involvement of traditional institutions be utilised to bring the conflict to an end?
- iii) Which aspects of the truth and reconciliation experiences in other countries can be utilised to bring the Acholi conflict to an end?
- iv) Can processes of truth, reconciliation and acceptance of responsibilities be applied in the Acholi case?
- v) How can the existing legal system be improved?
- vi) What roles can the traditional institutions of justice play?

Can restorative justice system be developed even further into a comprehensive system in Uganda to help resolve conflicts and manage post conflict situations?