The Crisis in Uganda

**Action Needed**

**U.S. and International Leadership Needed**

The latest efforts for peace in the 22-year-old civil war in Uganda have collapsed. Religious, cultural, and government leaders have expended tremendous effort to negotiate a lasting peace with the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). It is now clear that a negotiated peace with the LRA has little hope of success.

Despite the neglectful and indifferent approach the international community has taken toward the crisis in northern Uganda for over twenty years, there are still those who believe that peace is possible. Senator Russ Feingold is an international leader on this subject. Please review his impassioned plea to the U.S. Senate in March, 2008 (page 2-3 of this document).

**We urge you to vote for a bill that’s going to be introduced in the next few weeks that would require the US to come with a strategy on how to apprehend Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army.**

The bill will also appropriate tens of millions of dollars for reconstruction efforts in northern Uganda.

As Chairman of the Committee on Appropriations and with your background on the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs, your support of this bill will dramatically increase its chance for success.

**Important Facts**

- Since 1986, the LRA has committed massive violations of human rights against civilians in the region. Lacking local support, rebel leaders have built their army by abducting tens of thousands of children and forcing them to become child soldiers.

- Since December of 2008 alone, the LRA has abducted at least 500 children and killed close to a thousand people in northeastern DR Congo and South Sudan, forcing over 150,000 people to flee their towns and homes.

**A Personal Story from the Sisters of St. Joseph Living in Uganda**

On Monday morning Archbishop invited us to attend a celebration of cleansing at the place where the Paramount Chief and elders gather to carry on the traditions, called Kal Kwaro. The event was focused on welcoming back returned LRA (Lord’s Resistance Army) abductees. Seven young men and one young woman, who had been abducted by the LRA as children, joined the group.

After an opening ritual including wonderful dancing and drumming, there was a second part where the young people told the story of what has happened while they were forced to serve the LRA and then, if there has been killing, the next step of sending a trusted person to go to the clan where injury was done and arrange the very involved and lengthy reconciliation service of mato oput.

In the course of this event, one young man spoke for the rest. He had been taken as a very young boy and had spent 20 years in the bush. There were (continued on page 4)
Mr. President, I rise today to express my grave concern at the continuing massacres, kidnappings and terror orchestrated by the Lord’s Resistance Army, the LRA, in northeastern Congo and southern Sudan. As many of my colleagues know, I have long been engaged in efforts to bring an end to this—one of Africa’s longest running and most gruesome rebel wars. In 2004, I authored and Congress passed the Northern Uganda Crisis Response Act, which committed the United States to work vigorously for a lasting resolution to this conflict. In 2007, I visited displacement camps in northern Uganda and saw first-hand the impact the violence orchestrated by the LRA has had throughout the region. I have been frustrated as the LRA has been able to move in recent years across porous regional borders to gain new footholds in northeastern Congo, southern Sudan and even the Central African Republic, with little consequence.

Just over two months ago, the Ugandan, Congolese and South Sudanese militaries launched a joint offensive against the LRA’s primary bases in northeastern Congo. Serious concerns have been raised about the planning and implementation of this operation. Since the military strike began, the LRA has been able to carry out a series of new massacres in Congo and Sudan, leaving over 900 people dead. Hundreds of new children have been abducted and new communities have been devastated and displaced. It’s tragically clear that insufficient attention and resources were devoted to ensuring the protection of civilians during the operation. Meanwhile, the LRA’s leader Joseph Kony and his commanders escaped the initial aerial assault and have continued to evade the militaries. Thus far, this operation has resulted in the worst-case scenario: it has failed to stop the LRA, while spurring the rebels to intensify their attacks against civilians.

Mr. President, I am not ruling out that this offensive—still ongoing—may yet succeed. Indeed, I strongly hope it does. On several occasions last year, Kony refused to sign a comprehensive peace agreement with the Government of Uganda, an agreement that even included provisions to shield him from an International Criminal Court indictment. At the same time, as negotiations were still under way, his forces launched new attacks in Congo, Sudan and, for the first time, Central African Republic. They abducted hundreds of youths to rebuild their ranks. It was apparent that Kony was not interested in a negotiated settlement, despite the good efforts of mediators and northern Ugandan civil society leaders. I supported those peace negotiations, but it became increasingly clear that the LRA’s leaders would only be stopped when forced to do so.

Mr. President, for many years I have pressed for a political solution to the crisis in northern Uganda. I pressed for the international community to work collectively to support efforts to bring peace and stability to this war-torn area. And against all odds, the most recent peace talks in Juba, South Sudan, did see a collective effort but to no avail. These negotiations were not perfect but for some time offered a path forward and provided a framework to address the underlying grievances of communities in northern Uganda. But then, it became increasingly clear that Joseph Kony had no intention of ever signing the final agreement and had instead been conducting new abductions to replenish his rebel group. It became increasingly clear that Kony and his top commanders would stand in the way of any comprehensive political solution.

These failed talks justify military action against the LRA’s top command, but that action must be carefully considered. As we have seen too many times, offensive operations that are poorly designed and poorly carried out risk doing more harm than good, inflaming a situation rather than resolving it. Before launching any operation against the rebels, the regional militaries should have ensured that their plan had a high probability of success, anticipated contingencies, and made precautions to minimize dangers to civilians. It is widely known that when facing military offensive in the past, the LRA have quickly dispersed and committed retaliatory attacks against civilians. Furthermore, to be sustainable, military action needs to be placed within a larger counter-insurgency strategy that integrates outreach to local populations, active programs for basic service provision and reconstruction in affected areas, and mechanisms for ex-combatant disarmament, demobilization and reintegration. Those mechanisms are especially important in the case of the LRA because of the large number of child abductees who make up the rebel ranks.
As this operation continues, I hope the regional militaries are identifying their earlier mistakes and adjusting their strategy in response. Meanwhile, the international community cannot continue to stay on the sidelines as these massacres continue. The United Nations Security Council should take up this matter immediately and, in coordination with the Secretary-General and his Special Representative for LRA-affected areas, develop a plan and new resources to enhance civilian protection. I urge the Obama administration to use its voice and vote at the Security Council to see that this happens. At the same time, I urge the administration to develop an interagency strategy for how the U.S. can contribute to longer-term efforts to disarm and demobilize the LRA, restore the rule of law in affected areas of Congo and Sudan, and address political and economic marginalization in northern Uganda that initially gave rise to this rebel group.

Mr. President, this is not to suggest the U.S. has not already been involved with the ongoing operation. AFRICOM officials have acknowledged that they provided assistance and support for this operation at the request of the regional governments.

As a 17-year member of the Subcommittee on African Affairs and someone who has been involved with AFRICOM since its conception, I would like to offer some thoughts on this matter. While I supported AFRICOM’s creation, I have been concerned about its potential to eclipse our civilian agencies and thereby perpetuate perceptions on the continent of a militarized U.S. policy. It is essential that we get this balance right and protect chief of mission authority. By doing so, we can help ensure AFRICOM contributes to broader efforts to bring lasting peace and stability across Africa. When I visited AFRICOM’s headquarters last December and talked with senior officials, we discussed the important roles that it can play. They include helping to develop effective, well-disciplined militaries that adhere to civilian rule, strengthening regional peacekeeping missions, and supporting post-conflict demobilization and disarmament processes. In my view, assisting a multilateral operation to disarm an armed group that preys on civilians and wreaks regional havoc fits this job description, theoretically, at least.

Mr. President, to put it bluntly, I believe supporting viable and legitimate efforts to disarm and demobilize the LRA is exactly the kind of thing in which AFRICOM should be engaged. Of course, the key words there are viable and legitimate: We should not be supporting operations that we believe are substantially flawed and do not have a high probability of success. Furthermore, we should ensure that operations we assist do not exacerbate inter-state tensions or violate international humanitarian law. If we get involved, even in an advisory capacity, we have to be willing to take responsibility for outcomes, whether anticipated or not. To that end, it is critical that the State Department is not only involved, but plays a leading role in ensuring that any military activities are coordinated with long-term political strategies and our overarching foreign policy objectives.

In the case of this current operation against the LRA, as I have already outlined, I do not believe these conditions were met or the necessary due diligence undertaken before its launch. But we cannot just give up on the goal of ending the massacres and threat to regional stability posed by this small rebel group. That is precisely why I am urging the development of an interagency strategy to drive U.S. policy going forward. By putting in place such a proactive strategy, we can better help the region’s leaders to get this mission right and protect their people from the LRA’s continuing atrocities. This could finally pave the way for a new future for this region and its people, and help shape an AFRICOM that works effectively for both Africa and America’s security interests.

I yield the floor.
A Brief History of the Crisis in Northern Uganda

The war in northern Uganda arose out of a divisive political climate, originating in British colonial policies and perpetuated by post-independence Ugandan politics. This climate created deeply entrenched regional and social divisions, particularly between the North and the South. When the current president, Yoweri Museveni and his southern-based army took power through a military coup in 1986, northerners were marginalized, and mobilized for war. However, by 1988, two stages of this popular rebellion had ended peacefully. Still, a remnant of fighters refused to negotiate. It was these fighters, led by Joseph Kony, a self-proclaimed spiritual messenger who formed the cultish Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). Though initially claiming to represent northern grievances, the rebel movement received little public support. It has since terrorized the local population, abducting as many as 60,000 children, to fill its ranks.

The Consequences of War

The toll of this crisis has been massive, not only on the people of northern Uganda, but also on the surrounding region. Current negotiations have seen a significant decrease in LRA activity, but until recent months the rebels wreaked havoc in three countries, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan, causing widespread instability. The Ugandan government’s strategy of moving northerners into “protected villages” has turned into a displacement nightmare for 1.7 million people - over 80% of the region - who now live in squalid camps and lack access to basic resources. According to recent reports, 1,000 people are dying each week as a result of camp conditions. Again, children have been the primary victims. One-half of those displaced are under fifteen years of age and more than a third of boys and one-sixth of girls bear the scars of forced soldiering and sexual slavery in northern Uganda. For many years, upwards up 40,000 of these children “commuted” up to two hours every night to sleep on town streets to avoid abduction.

Taken from www.resolveuganda.org

(Author and date information as per the original text)