

The Voice of Peace

News and views from areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army in Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), South Sudan and Uganda

At a glance:

- From the region: a wrap of the latest LRA movements and attacks
- Rebuilding lives: ex-abductees tell their stories
- Making connections: how civil society groups are giving a louder voice to local people

What's inside:

- . Caring for an unwanted child 3
- . Will US military intervention work? 4
- . Who are the Arrow Boys? 5
- . Kony "very afraid" of US 7

REGIONAL SITUATION REPORT: military pressure dispersing LRA but civilians still under threat

The general situation remains difficult as abductions and attacks although reduced are still happening, indicating that the LRA are still present and terrorizing local communities.

South Sudan shows an improving situation although the three affected countries still face the presence of foreign troops resulting in negative social and economic consequences.

Issues	CAR			DRC			South Sudan			Total
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Dec	Jan	Feb	Dec	Jan	Feb	
Dates 2011-12										
Attacks	2	4	2	10	20	20	1	-	-	59
Abductees	4	6	-	6	19	31	6	-	-	72
Killed	2	1	-	1	4	8	1	-	-	17
Newly Displaced	1216	-	-	-	-	-	200	2	6	1424
Returns/Rescued	4	6		11	19	31	6	-	14	91

Continued on page 2

Editorial opinion: Kennedy Tumutegyereize

Welcome to the first edition of *The Voice of Peace*, a new quarterly review of events in countries affected by the Lord's Resistance Army.

This newsletter is produced by a regional Civil Society Task Force from Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan and Uganda, with support from Conciliation Resources in the UK.

We are all working together to find sustainable solutions to a conflict which continues to hurt communities and destroy lives.

The LRA problem has now taken on a complex regional dimension. It requires a coordinated and comprehensive response.

We believe that local people have a key role to play in improving understanding of local dynamics, aiding return and reintegration of abductees, and promoting reconciliation, especially for women and children who are the primary victims of the conflict.

Together, we can find peaceful alternatives to violence.

Kennedy Tumutegyereize, Director, East and Central Africa Programme, Conciliation Resources

Find out more: www.c-r.org

Regional Situation Report: continued from page 1



Ex-Combatants - CAR

“The general situation remains difficult as abductions and attacks although reduced are still happening indicating that the LRA are still present and terrorizing local communities.”

CAR: Between September and December 2011 the LRA were concentrated more in the northeast than the southeast of CAR, close to Zemongo National Park bordering Sudan.

LRA atrocities seem to be reduced with the arrival of the US soldiers, reported movement of LRA commanders southwards as well as due to increased patrolling by both the CAR and Ugandan national armies (FACA and UPDF).

From December 2011 there have been sporadic attacks and abductions by the LRA. Four hunters in the village of Fode, and some villagers were captured by the LRA but luckily released after four days.

During the same period other rebel groups fought with the FACA adding to the confused picture on the ground.

It is hard to tell who caused the displacement: the LRA, other rebel groups, or a combination of the two. Other armed groups seem to be more active than the LRA in CAR.

DRC: The LRA are still operating freely in parts of Haut Uele. Between Dec 2011 and 15 Feb 2012 50 attacks have been recorded.

The LRA tend to move in small groups that are highly mobile but are also able to affect and target local communities.

LRA recent activity has been in the axis's from Dungu to Faradje-Aba, Dungu to Duru and Nabipay and finally Dungu to Bangadi and Doruma.

Between August to November 2011 LRA attacks were limited due to the presence of Congolese Commando FARDC troops from Kisangani and movement of some

LRA commanders to CAR. However, from 27th November to 10th February the LRA killed 14 people and abducted a further 56 although some managed to escape.

Elements of the FARDC continue actively target civilian populations in LRA affected areas. Three FARDC battalions are present in the affected zones supported by MONUSCO.

South Sudan/Western Equatorial State (WES): LRA attacks, killings and abductions have reduced since December 2011 to February 2012.

This is due to community involvement in their own protection against the LRA.

Due to the community and home guards pursuing the LRA deep into the bush and sometimes destroying their bases, LRA activities and atrocities are slowing down in WES allowing a semblance of normality among local communities.

Uganda: Since 2006 no major incident of LRA attacks have been reported in the country and the majority of IDPs are returning to their villages of origin. There is no active presence of the LRA in Uganda.

International Organisations and UN agencies are scaling down, changing their focus or closing their offices. Many of these were emergency oriented and are changing to development interventions.

Although fighting has been absent from Northern Uganda for some years other issues remain unaddressed such as land disputes, inter-communal tensions, gender based violence, poor service delivery and poor infrastructure.

Returnees Voices: school-girl mother, Marlene, 19, CAR

"My name is Marlene Yagassourouma. I am from Obo in the South East of CAR.

In 2008, when I was 16 years old, I was abducted by the LRA from my home.

I spent two years in the bush with the LRA. I was raped many times by LRA fighters and I became pregnant.

When my baby was one month old I was among the group that attacked a village close to the South Sudan border.

It was very difficult for me to run and avoid the gunfire with the baby on my back,

I took the chance to escape and came out in a town close to the Sudanese border.

I went to the very first house I saw. An old

woman helped me. She took me to the UNHCR. They brought me back home to Obo.

It's not easy at my age to care for a child that I did not want to have in the first place.

I do not need to hide from you it's very difficult for such a child in our society and African culture, but thanks to JUPEDDEC we had some family reconciliation counselling which has made my case much easier.

Now I want to find a sponsor to help me continue my education and to look after my baby while I'm studying. I appeal to any good person who can help me and my child." (JUPEDDEC)



Marlene tells her story

Returnees voices: opening up, John, 22, Congo

In 2007, 19-year old John, from Congo, was abducted with his mother as they were walking to their allotment.

His mother was released the next day, but John was forced to undergo LRA military training.

Within a month he was given a gun and assigned to guard 22 women who were "wives" of LRA commanders.

When one of them ran away John received a brutal beating leaving him with a broken arm.

He finally managed to escape in 2010 during a skirmish on the South Sudan border.

John made his way into CAR where he was picked by and handed over to the Sudanese military in Yambio.

John was very reluctant to talk about his experiences with the LRA and so the Sudanese military kept him in custody, suspecting he might be a spy.

He finally opened up when the Ministry for Social Development got involved and arranged for him to get some counselling from social workers and church leaders.

With their help John was able to tell his story and Sudanese officials then helped him to go back home to his family in Congo. (WESTERN EQUATORIA STATE, INTERCHURCH COMMITTEE)

"It's not easy at my age to care for a child that I never wanted in the first place." Marlene 19, abductee from CAR

Security Updates

Will deployment of US troops to LRA affected areas have a positive effect?

Joseph Kony of the Lord's Resistance Army has become a wanted man by the United States government after a huge bounty was placed for his head in February 2012.

This comes after 100 U.S. troops described as 'non-combat' have been deployed to the LRA affected states since October 2011 to assist regional militaries mandated by the African Union to capture Joseph Kony and dismantle his forces.

In addition U.S. President Barack Obama signed into law last year the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act- legislation aimed at stopping Joseph Kony and the LRA.

The bill passed unanimously in the Senate in March 2010 with 65 senators as cosponsors.

The news has however generated different views from both affected governments and civil society actors.

On the one hand many national and international policy makers believe that taking out Kony and his senior command will end the LRA problem. However clerics, civil society organisations and church groups from the affected states in the region have expressed concern at the continued use of force to end the conflict.

Over the past two decades military initiatives have failed to successfully address the LRA issue and have instead led to the broadening of the conflict to neighbouring countries.

History has taught us that military intervention alone is not the way to resolve the LRA conflict and achieve a sustainable peace.

UPDF military action during the 80's and 90's had a devastating effect on the populations of Northern Uganda and

external interventions have also failed.

UN peacekeepers in DRC were massacred in 2008 by the LRA and other peace missions in the region have had a limited effect. Most importantly such approaches have directly resulted in the intensification of LRA violence and the increased targeting of civilians.

While many have lost hope in any peaceful resolution to the conflict, the reality is that the peace process, in particular the Juba peace talks which began in 2006, is responsible for the relative peace in Northern Uganda today.

Therefore it is essential that all concerned parties prioritize and creatively explore non-violent means to resolve the conflict alongside military interventions.

In particular dialogue and negotiation must be explored.

In conclusion the regional CSO Task Force recommends that all participating entities must enter into and remain in consultations with regional CSO's, NGO's, grassroots leaders and their communities about the best ways forward to bring an end to one of the world's longest-running conflicts.

Policy-makers in the United States, Africa and elsewhere must heed the lessons of history and focus their efforts on dialogue rather than force, and engagement rather than confrontation.

This may be the only way that the LRA issue will be brought to an end. Military action alone seems likely to fail.

See related article on page 7: "Escapee: Kony feeling US pressure in CAR."

"It is essential that all concerned parties prioritize and creatively explore non-violent means to resolve the conflict alongside military intervention."



IDP Camp - DRC

"History has taught us that military intervention alone is not the way to resolve the LRA conflict."

Who are the Arrow Boys of South Sudan?

The Lord's Resistance Army came to Western Equatoria State (WES), South Sudan after the failure of the Juba peace Process in 2006.

At the beginning the LRA did not target local communities and coexisted peacefully for a time. However they later started to loot and force civilians to carry food to the forest.

In 2008 after the joint military Operation Lightning Thunder by Ugandan and Congolese forces supported by the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC the LRA became extremely violent towards the community in WES in retaliation to the military initiative.

The LRA started to systematically loot properties, burn houses, abduct and kill civilians in WES. As there was no military

protection of communities by state forces due to logistic challenges, other priorities and the sheer vastness of the area civilians left their villages and moved to towns and IDP camps for safety.

However they experienced a lack of humanitarian and life support for their needs.

This lack of social support and services forced people to go back to their villages even if areas were insecure.

As a result communities formed Home Guard units called the 'Arrow Boys' to defend themselves and to enable them stay in their own villages near their gardens, homes and food source.

Continued on page 6



Arrow Boys

Viewpoint: are the Arrow Boys a force for good?

The Voice of Peace editorial team talk to Father Mark Kumbonyaki, a church and civil society leader from Yambio, WES:

Question: Tell us a bit about the local Arrow Boys and how they emerged.

Father Mark: There was a vacuum on the ground. The LRA was looting and killing and there was no response from the army. People would run to towns and there was no help for them there. There wasn't enough food, medical care or schools for their children. So people had to go back to their villages, and they tried to protect themselves with whatever weapons they had there. They couldn't stay in the towns so they had to find a way to survive at home.

Question: But are the Arrow Boys really protecting civilians or is there a danger or them abusing their position?

Father Mark: So far we haven't heard anything like that happening. These are just local men and boys who keep watch over their villages at night. They are people who don't go far from their villages. They have families living there.

Sometimes if they have to go into the forest to pursue the LRA and rescue people who have been abducted after a raid, then the local village chiefs might ask the villagers to give food.

Continued on page 6

"There was a vacuum on the ground. The LRA was looting and killing and there was no response from the army"

Who are the Arrow Boys: continued from page 5

The Arrow Boys network is responsible for providing a local security and defence system against LRA attacks.

They also follow and fight the LRA to rescue abductees and retrieve looted items.

“Locals say without the Arrow Boys their suffering would be far greater.”

It also provides information and early warning to the community about LRA in the area.

They use arrows, bows, pangas (machetes), knives and home-made guns.

Arrow Boy fighters are on watch day and night for LRA. Where they can they lay ambush to the LRA to prevent attacks taking place.

Local people say that without the Arrow Boys abductions, killings and suffering of civilians could have been far greater.

(WES INTERCHURCH COMMITTEE)

Viewpoint on the Arrow Boys: continued from page 5

Question: Have there been any cases so far when the Arrow Boys have ended up being in conflict with the army?

One is positive. They're people from the same village who are all related to each other and who have joined hands to protect themselves. So why would they start attacking each other?

Father Mark: We've heard some rumours that sometimes the soldiers feel resentful that the Arrow Boys are taking over their responsibilities, and getting money and support from the government.

The negative view is that there will always be conflicts in society and in families and if someone has a weapon at home there's always a danger he will go home, get it, and use it.

But that's only rumours and the fact is that the Arrow Boys haven't actually got anything from the government so far.

It's possible this could happen as some of the Arrow Boys have captured weapons from the LRA and haven't surrendered them. But so far there haven't been any problems of this kind.

Question: Could the Arrow Boys be a model for how other communities in affected areas can protect themselves from the LRA? Could this be a good example for DRC for example?

Father Mark: It depends. In South Sudan the scale of LRA attacks has gone down since the Arrow Boys have been protecting their villages.

But it depends how each country wants to defend itself against the LRA.

Question: If the LRA threat ends, is there a danger of the Arrow Boys' role changing and of them becoming a threat to local communities themselves?

Father Mark: There are two ways of looking at it.

“If someone has a weapon at home there's always a danger he will use it.”

Fr Mark Kumbonyaki



Fr Mark - WES

Escapee: Kony feeling US pressure in CAR

Eleven year old Ngbimo was abducted from his village in CAR in 2011 and was held by a team responsible for guarding the LRA leader Joseph Kony.

He was held for 7 months before managing to escape into the bush. Now back with his parents he is showing clear signs of clinical trauma, but nonetheless agreed to tell his story to local NGO JUPEDEC:

“One day Kony gathered us to tell us about the attacks that the US and their allies were planning.

He was very afraid of the presence of the US in the region.

He said he was ready to release the first group of captives and take them back to their home villages.

He said he would release some captives and see how they were received by their local communities.

If the situation became complicated, if they were attacked, Kony said he would find a way of disappearing.

One day when the guards weren't watching I ran away. I was found by a patrol who took me to the Red Cross and then back to my parents.

My mum and dad thought I was dead so they and others in the village were very happy to see me.

But I think about the atrocities we committed and sometimes I think I should just go back to the bush.” (JUPEDEC)

Taking down a testimony



Connections: meetings in DRC and CAR

Two local organisations from Eastern Congo travelled to Kinshasha in mid February to meet local officials and diplomats for talks on LRA issues.

Solidarité et Assistance Intégrale aux Personnes Démunies (SAIPD) and Commission Diocésaine de Justice, Paix et Réconciliation (CDJPR-ARU), NGOS's from Dungu and Faradje in DRC, and the UK based Conciliation Resources (CR) were in the Congolese capital from 15th-19th February.

They met key organisations and people working on LRA issues who rarely or if ever travel to affected areas.

Meetings focussed on human security and humanitarian impact with the aim of pushing LRA issues higher up the agenda of politicians and diplomats in Kinshasa.

They spoke to local MPs from Haut and

Bas Uele, diplomats from UK, France and Belgium, MONUSCO, DFID, EU, and the Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference of Congo. Meetings were also held with Congolese parliamentarians.

Discussers promised to travel to LRA affected regions to assess the situation. Government officials promised to do more, specifically by providing more aid to affected areas.

In **CAR**, NGO's JUPEDEC and CR held meetings with political authorities and representatives of international organisations.

Continued on page 8

“They met people working on LRA issues who rarely if ever travel to affected areas.”

Got information to share?
Get in touch with us:

IN CAR:

coordojupeDEC@gmail.com

IN DRC:

ernestsugule@yahoo.fr

IN SOUTH SUDAN:

Frkumbomark@yahoo.com

IN UGANDA:

Arlpi.interfaith@gmail.com

IN LONDON:

ktumutegyereize@c-r.org

Connect with
us online:

www.c-r.org

Connections: continued from page 7

Minister of Social Affairs, National Solidarity and Gender received the team on 3rd December 2011.

Minister Marguerite Zarambaud listened to the situation on the ground and talked about the government's attempts to address the situation.

She said the Ministry wanted to support a project to help LRA victims.

The team also met the AU representative Madame Awa and talked about the role of civil society in helping the social reintegration of victims.

Madame Awa assured the team that a special representative on the LRA would be named soon. The person is from Mozambique and will be based in CAR.

(SAIPD, CDJPR-ARU, JUPEDEC)

About our network...

This newsletter is produced by local organisations who are all members of the Regional Civil Society Task Force – a network of groups working on LRA issues.

They are:

ARLPI - The Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, Northern Uganda

The Interchurch Committee for Western Equatoria State, South Sudan

JUPEDEC – Jeunesse Uni pour la Protection de l'Environnement et le développement Communautaire, CAR

SAIPD - Solidarité et Assistance Intégrale aux Personnes Démunies, DRC

CDJPR-ARU -- Commission Diocésaine de Justice, Paix et Réconciliation., DRC,

CR – Conciliation Resources is an independent UK organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence. We've been working on the LRA conflict since 1997.



