

Quaderns de Construcció de Pau

War and peace scenarios in northern Uganda

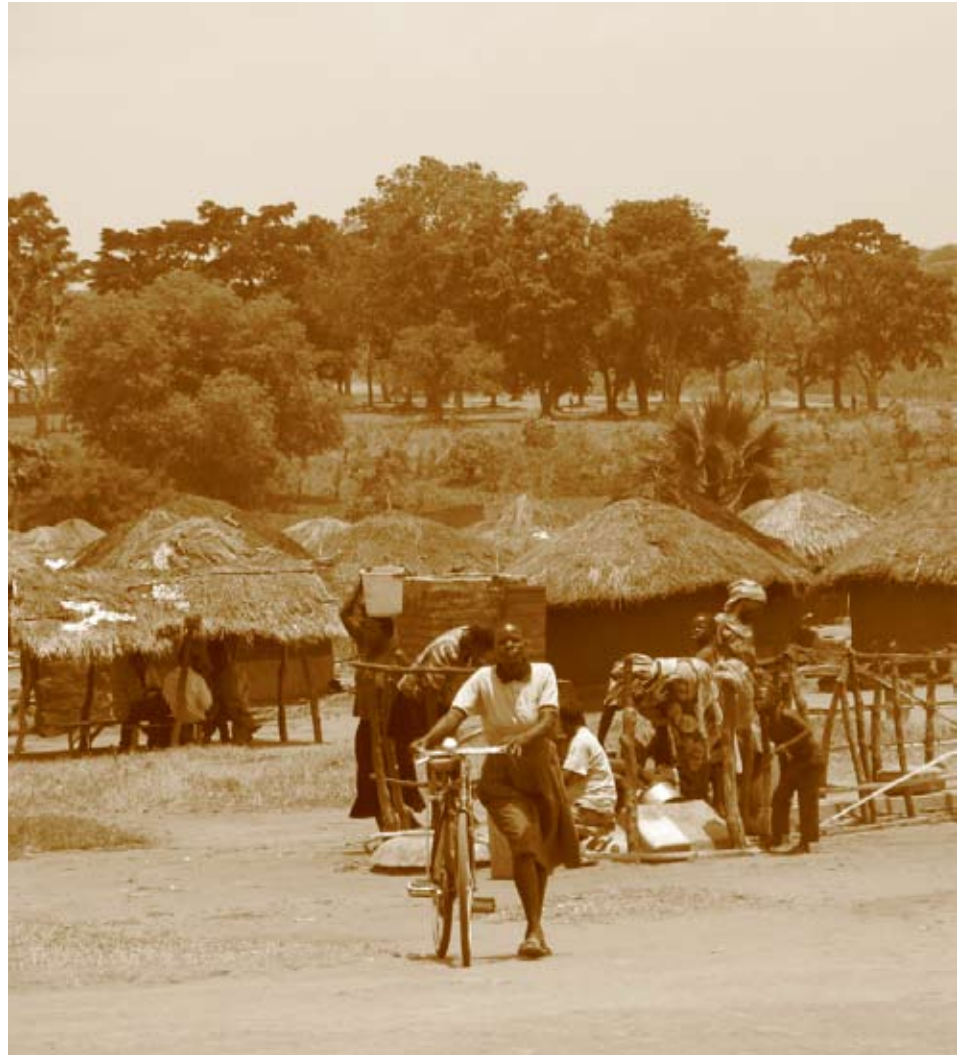
Josep Maria Royo
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Peacebuilding Papers (*Quaderns de Construcció de Pau*) is a publication of the School for a Culture of Peace (*Escola de Cultura de Pau*). Its objective is to disseminate the research conducted in this institution on peacebuilding and to bring it closer to the interested public. These research papers will follow three basic lines of work. First, they will offer academic analyses of a variety of topical issues. A second series of documents will make proposals to facilitate intervention by actors involved in the various aspects of peacebuilding. Finally, monographs will analyse current armed conflicts, situations of tension, peace processes or post-war rehabilitation processes, based on field work by researchers from the School for a Culture of Peace.

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Odek IDP Camp, next to village where Joseph Kony was born, Gulu district.

ABSTRACT:

Since 1986 the north of Uganda has been suffering from an armed conflict in which the armed opposition group the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA), motivated by its messianic religious leader, Joseph Kony, has been attempting to overthrow the government, establish a regime based on the Ten Commandments of the Bible and overcome the marginalisation of the Acholi community. Violence against the civilian population, the kidnapping of thousands of children to swell the ranks of the armed group and confrontations between it and the armed forces have led to thousands of deaths and the enforced displacement of two million people. The LRA continued expanding its activities into southern Sudan until, in 2002, the Sudanese government allowed the Ugandan armed forces into its territory in pursuit of the group, leading to an escalation of violence and the expansion of the conflict into this area.

Following several contacts between government representatives and the LRA, exploratory attempts to begin a peace process in the nineties, and the emergence of the International Criminal Court ordering the arrest of the group’s leaders, a promising peace process was begun in Juba, Sudan, in July 2006. This process is still currently awaiting the signing of the final peace agreement, which should have taken place in April 2008, although it has been postponed indefinitely and possibly definitively, which could signify the final breakdown of the peace process and the beginning of a new phase of violence.

Introduction¹

“Where else in the world have there been 20,000 kidnapped children? Where else in the world have 90 per cent of the population in large districts been displaced? Where else in the world do children make up 80 per cent of the terrorist insurgency movement? (...) For me, the situation is a moral outrage... A much bigger international investment [is needed] — in money, in political engagement, in diplomacy and also more concerted efforts to tell the parties there is no military solution... there is a solution through reconciliation, an end to the killing and the reintegration and demobilisation of the child combatants.”

Jan Egeland, under-secretary-general
of the UN for humanitarian affairs and emergency aid coordinator,
October 2004, during a visit to the region

Since 1986 northern Uganda has been suffering from an armed conflict in which the armed opposition group the Lord’s Resistance Army (hereafter referred to by its initials, LRA), motivated by its messianic religious leader, Joseph Kony, has been attempting to overthrow the government of Yoweri Museveni, establish a regime based on the Ten Commandments in the Bible and overcome the marginalisation of the Acholi community, to which he belongs. The violence and insecurity caused by the LRA’s attacks against the civilian population, which it claims to protect, the kidnapping of children to swell its ranks (about 30,000 since the beginning of the conflict) and the clashes between the armed group and the armed forces (together with pro-government militias) have led to the deaths of around 200,000 people and the enforced displacement of around two million at the highpoint of the conflict, not only in the Acholi region (including the districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, in Uganda, and Magwe County, in southern Sudan) but also other areas in the north of the country: the Teso and Lango region (consisting of the districts of Apac, Lira, Soroti and Katakwi). The LRA extended its activities into the south of Sudan, a country that provided it with support, until in 2002 the Sudanese allowed the Ugandans to go into its territory in pursuit of the group, provoking an escalation of violence and the extension of the conflict to the south of Sudan. In this region, the armed group has been fighting with the Ugandan armed forces, harming the population in southern Sudan, a region which is beginning, not without great difficulties, to overcome the armed conflict that has affected it in the last few decades.

After various contacts between government representatives and the LRA and exploratory attempts to begin a peace process in the nineties and many attempts at local and religious initiatives and by traditional leaders to establish channels for dialogue with the armed group, and the emergence of the International Criminal Court (ICC) ordering the arrest of the group’s leaders, after July 2006 a hopeful-looking peace process was begun in Juba, Sudan, which managed to establish the cessation of hostilities between the government and the LRA and achieved various agreements pending the signing of the definitive peace agreement in April 2008 so that they can come into force. However, this has been postponed indefinitely, perhaps definitively, and this could signify the final breakdown of the peace process. The purpose of this report is to offer an analysis of the armed conflict and the peace process the country is currently going through and to point out some keys to the future. The report will consist of five parts. The first part analyses the background, the characteristics and the causes of the start of the armed conflict that has affected the country since

¹ This report is the result of research carried out in northern Uganda in March 2008 by Josep Maria Royo Aspa, a researcher at the Escola de Cultura de Pau, during which he held several interviews with representatives of the government, the political parties and Ugandan civil society, as well as with the international community. At the express request of some of the people interviewed, there are no quotes and their names have not been included. The author is exclusively responsible for the content of this report.

1986. Then, an in-depth look will be taken at the figure of Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army, its origins and aims. Thirdly, the development of the conflict during the nineties will be analysed, together with its internationalisation. Fourthly, the various peace initiatives prior to the current peace process, begun in 2006, will be dealt with. And, finally, the development to date of the latest peace process, being carried out in Juba since July 2006, will be analysed and various possible short- and medium-term future scenarios will be suggested.

2. Origins of the armed conflict

2.1. The north-south divide

Since independence in the 1960s, Uganda, a former British colony, has been going through various phases of stability and political alternation by force (dictatorship, rebellions, coups d'état, civil wars). The country was ruled harshly by leaders from the north (Milton Obote, Idi Amin Dada) until Yoweri Museveni, from the south of the country achieved power in the eighties, also by force. The main cause of this instability is based on the political and economic antagonism existing between the populations of the north of the country and those of the south, competing for political power according to their geographical, ethnic, religious and political origins. The conditions for this competition were established during the colonial period and subsequently manipulated and used by the post-independence governments. Before the Second World War, the southern Ugandans were recruited into the British colonial armed forces, the King's African Rifles (KAR), but this situation changed radically after 1945. The leaders of the anti-colonial struggle largely came from the south, where the economic and intellectual elite were concentrated. Fearing the consequences of this region also having a considerable number of

trained soldiers, the British Empire began to recruit soldiers largely from the north, so the populations of the Acholi and Western Nile regions became dominant in the KAR. In addition, the British deliberately reserved the introduction of industry and agriculture for the southern area, turning the north into a reserve of cheap labour.

The term "southerner" historically included the ethnic groups of Bantu origin (Baganda, Banyankole, Batoro), politically and socially organised in the form of monarchies, largely Christianised and privileged by British colonisation and whose members occupied administrative positions and controlled power after independence. Meanwhile, the term "northerner" includes the Nilotic ethnic groups (Acholi, Lugbara, Langi, Karamojong) largely Muslim or Animist, who were geographically, culturally and politically marginalised during the colonial period, although given their pre-eminence in the KAR they subsequently had a considerable presence in the armed forces. These policies carried out by the British Empire established some challenges which were difficult to overcome in the configuration of a unified Nation State after independence on 9 October 1962, subsequently contributing to the political-military alternation in the government of the country, to the militarisation of politics and to ethnic polarisation. So, in the period from independence to 1986, the country's history can be summarised as an oscillation of power between leaders from the north and the south of the country.

The conflict currently suffered in the north of Uganda has its origins in the coup d'état which brought Yoweri Museveni to power in 1986 as a consequence of the defeat of Milton Obote's government at the hands of a coalition of groups called the National Resistance Movement/Army (NRM/A), established in 1981.

Origins of Museveni's NRM/A: the model followed by African insurgents

The NRM/A is the first insurgent movement that has managed to take power by force and overthrow an African government, as highlighted by Pascal Ngoga (1998).² This was achieved without significant outside support, normally a characteristic element of insurgent movements. While in the majority of cases armed groups tend to split, dragging out conflicts, in Uganda the opposite situation occurred: the insurgents, united in a broad front, managed to overthrow Milton Obote's government in 1986. Since then, NRM/A has governed the country, to date with the unconditional support of the West.

Yoweri Museveni developed his intellectual revolutionary activity at the University of Dar-es-Salaam, where he went in 1967 because of his admiration for the progressive leadership of the Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere, and in order to establish contact with South African liberation movements based in Tanzania. He also established contact with the Mozambican insurgents FRELIMO, and in 1968 he visited the liberated zones in northern Mozambique together with

² The first insurgency that managed to overthrow an African government was in Chad a few years earlier in 1979, at the hands of the Armed Forces of the North (FAN), led by Hissène Habré, and the National Front for the Liberation of Chad (FROLINAT), led by Goukouni Oueddei, but they failed to establish an effective regime.

various students, where he reinforced his attitude towards violent insurgency as a mechanism for political change, as highlighted by Christopher Clapham (1998). In 1971 Museveni returned to Dar-es-Salaam, where he contacted President Nyerere, who promised Tanzanian support for all opposition groups working under the command of Milton Obote, whose allies, making up the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) largely came from the north. Idi Amin Dada's regime achieved power after overthrowing Milton Obote in 1971, and, under his government, around 800,000 people died as a result of the brutality of the regime. However, there were fundamental differences between Museveni and Obote concerning strategy and organisation to defeat Amin's regime: Museveni and his group were committed to guerrilla warfare, while Obote proposed a conventional war with the support of Tanzania, Sudan and Somalia. In addition, while Museveni wanted to establish a common front of all opposition groups, Obote wanted the resistance to be organised around his own presidential figure. These differences led Museveni to establish the Front for National Salvation (Fronasa), made up of people from the south and west of the country. This organisation became the nucleus of the NRA in 1981.

When Tanzania invaded Uganda to overthrow Idi Amin's regime in the war of 1978-1979, Fronasa was one of the movements that moved into the country and won support alongside the advance of the invasion. Museveni became a minister in the provisional government of Professor Yusuf Lule installed by Tanzania, which was replaced by other provisional governments until, in December 1980, elections were held and won by Milton Obote. Although these controversial elections were declared free and open by the Commonwealth, in the south of the country it was believed they had been manipulated, which was the seed of the formation of the NRA. Based on this situation, Museveni organised opposition to Obote's new regime and began a guerrilla war against it. Various elements come together in this issue, according to Christopher Clapham (1998). Firstly, the members of Fronasa were seen as a threat by Obote and, of its 9,000 fighters only 4,000 were integrated into Obote's forces, the UNLA (which took on the function of new armed forces). So, some Fronasa officers were forced to resign and others were assigned to various UNLA units, while the rest were sent to the northern districts, far from their places of origin in the south and in Kampala, while Obote's forces were concentrated in and around the capital. Secondly, Museveni's training in Mozambique with FRELIMO and in Tanzania backed the doctrine of a people's war in his ideas: political education would form an integral part of his programme, putting greater emphasis on political aspects than on military ones, which contributed to his success, unlike other African insurgent which, once in power, do not achieve support. Thirdly, the conditions in the country were favourable towards guerrilla war, as the State was in a situation of great economic, social, political and military fragility and the fall of Amin's regime did not lead to an improvement of the situation, contributing towards eroding Obote's support, particularly in Buganda, where the hatred of the population had already been cultivated with the murder of King Kabaka in 1966, and in the Western Nile region, where the UNLA had committed serious human rights violations against the civilian population accused of supporting Idi Amin. In addition, the UNLA, established to replace Amin's defeated Ugandan army, was still too weak and poorly trained to deal with a well-organised insurgency. The presence of arms in the country was, and still is, very high, as a result of the persistence of the culture of violence and the abandonment of armaments during the course of Amin's forces' flight to the former Zaïre and Sudan.

In February 1981 Museveni's forces, initially called the Popular Resistance Army (PRA), began their activities, although they prioritised the establishment of clandestine political networks and contacts with local populations in order to strengthen their credibility and legitimacy among the civilian population, creating a pyramid organisation (under the Leninist principles of democratic centralism) for activism based on local committees in the parishes, displacing the governmental administrative system inherited from the colonial period which was based on the traditional chiefs. Gradually widespread desertions of the Fronasa members making up the UNLA occurred and they joined the rebellion. The committees, which were in charge of recruiting and training new group members, established roadblocks and systems for maintaining order and providing protection, they were coordinated at district and county level right to the top of the movement's principal political body, the National Resistance Council (NRC, which was the basis of the council that exercised formal power until the 1996 elections), whose nominal leader was Professor Yusuf Lule from his exile in London and whose effective leader was Yoweri Museveni, who also ran the armed branch of the organisation, the NRA. The NRC had various subcommittees, for foreign relations, finance, politics, diplomacy, and publicity and propaganda. Its internal structure made the NRA one of the best-organised and most effective and successful insurgencies on the continent. Museveni achieved the symbolic military support of Ghadaffi's Libya, which, ironically, had given military assistance to the Amin regime against the UNLA and Fronasa until its fall. This support was used by Museveni to give an image of massive Libyan assistance, although the majority of Museveni's arms were obtained by capturing them from government forces. Its initial operations base was known as the "Luwero triangle" to the north-east of the capital. Mass repression and executions by Obote's forces against the population suspected of sympathising with the NRA led to many young people joining the ranks of the NRA as an alternative to government repression, including thousands of children which became child soldiers in the NRA, the so-called kadogos. The persecution of Rwandan Tutsi refugees and the attempts to discredit Museveni, accusing him of being Rwandan, led to the Rwandan Tutsi population massively supporting the NRA.³

³ As a symbolic anecdote, but one with deep significance, it should be highlighted that three of the names of the sections of the NRA corresponded to heroes of the struggle for liberation on the African continent (the Nkrumah, Mondlane and Nasser sections), two more corresponded to Ugandan kings who resisted the British empire in the 19th century and another more with the name of an NRA martyr.

So, the support from the population provided by the rejection of the Obote regime and fed by violent counter-insurgency operations, the effective organisational structure that maintained the cohesion of movement (and which has helped it to last to the present day, despite it becoming gradually discredited and authoritarian), the education policy strengthening commitment to the insurgency and the weakness of the Obote and Okello regimes turned out to be the main reasons for the success of the NRA. The tensions deriving from the situation within the government led to the overthrow of Obote by a coup d'état in July 1985, replaced by the fragile military regime of Tito Okello who, on the edge of collapse, tried to negotiate a peace agreement with the NRA, facilitated by Kenya. This process was subsequently used by the NRA to take the capital in January 1986 and declare the end of the war.

On the international scene, the success of the NRA insurgency had an important impact in the countries of the region. Although Museveni had repeatedly reiterated that his revolution could not be exported, various armed groups in the region tried, with relative success, to import the insurgent ideology. Fred Rwigyema, the top political and military leader of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and his successor, Paul Kagame, were among the first to begin NRA-style insurgency in 1981, and many members of the RPF received their insurgency training from the NRA. Alongside this, Laurent Kabila, who rose up in arms against the Mobutu regime in the former Zaïre and who coordinated the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (ADFL), with which he managed to defeat Mobutu and install himself in power, received military assistance from the NRA and the RPF, which sent their troops to DR Congo in support. Meanwhile, in the south of Sudan, where the SPLA had been fighting against the Khartoum government, the NRA has collaborated, militarily, politically, tactically and diplomatically with the Sudanese insurgency. In addition, the late leader of the SPLA, John Garang, and Museveni, were "revolutionary" colleagues in their university days at the University of Dar es Salaam. In response, the Sudanese government has been supporting the LRA guerrillas. In neighbouring Kenya, the evergreen Daniel Arap Moi, who was in power in the country for 24 years, always declared his fear that Uganda would support an internal opposition movement to attempt to overthrow his regime, and relations between the two countries have never been cordial.

Milton Obote's forces regrouped in the north of the country to try to overthrow the new regime, beginning the conflict that has lasted to date, with the addition of tribal, ethnic and religious issues that have made it difficult to resolve. So, different groups including former UNLA officers (the forces that defeated Idi Amin Dada) and members of the Acholi communities in the northern districts of the country, Gulu and Kitgum, fled to Sudan and formed the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) in August 1986.

The conflict began as a popular rebellion against Yoweri Museveni's NRM/A and its efforts to consolidate its control of the north of the country. In mid-1986, Alice Auma Lakwena set up the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF) in the Acholi region (including the districts of Pader, Gulu and Kitgum. Now, after the division of Gulu, it also includes the district of Amuru).

The HSMF fought the government under the advice and protection of spiritual powers forming part of Acholi culture, carrying out a "Holy War" against Kampala. However, the government dismantled the HSMF in October 1987, when Lakwena and 10,000 followers left the Acholi region heading for Kampala, suffering a massacre and serious defeat to the east of Jinja, 80 miles from Kampala. The leader of the group escaped and fled to Kenya, where she lived in a refugee camp until her death in January 2007. The main legacy of this period of confrontation was the fusion of the conventional

military tactics and objectives of the UPDA (re-establishing the communities of the north of the country in power and defeating Yoweri Museveni's new regime) with the spirituality and messianic approach of the dismantled HSM. These two currents were the seed of the group that Joseph Kony, a relative of Alice Lakwena (her nephew according to some sources, cousin according to others) set up in 1987.

Various sections of the UPDA and the government achieved a peace agreement in Gulu in 1988, but Joseph Kony decided to continue the rebellion and split from the UPDA, setting up the United Holy Salvation Army (UHSA). That same year, Yoweri Museveni decided to appoint a person from the Acholi community, Betty Bigombe, to his cabinet to sound out the possibility of establishing peace talks with Joseph Kony, and, alongside this, the government began an offensive against the UHSA. In March 1991, the offensive "Operation North" began, but was frustrated in its objective of defeating the UHSA insurgency, although it did deal a severe blow to the armed movement, which reorganised in 1992, rechristening itself the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

2.2. Alice Auma Lakwena and the Holy Spirit Movement

Prophets and prophetic movements are nothing new in the history of the African continent, but it has been difficult to analyse them. Many appeared during the colonial period as a reaction to unpopular administrations. Colonial administrations also considered prophets as rebel leaders. On 2 January 1985, an Acholi woman from the north of the country called Alice Auma, who was originally one of the many local Christian mediums and healers, was “possessed”, according to various sources and reports, by a Christian spirit from outside the region known as Lakwena, which means Messenger in the Acholi language.

From then onwards a powerful prophetic movement began to be established, the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), from which emerged a military insurrection against the Ugandan government. In August 1986, Alice Auma established the military arm of the HSM, the Holy Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF). From a local perspective, she declared she was adopting this decision under the orders of this spirit called Lakwena, a spirit that came to form part of her and which became the commander-in-chief of the movement, although other spirits⁴ also “took possession” of her and “directed” the war, as Heike Behrend (1999) and other authors point out. One of the main reasons for the preliminary success of this movement and its rapidly increasing number of members was that the leaders promised to put an end to all acts of witchcraft in the country: belief in the presence of the “devil” had become a reality in the Acholi land as the population had suffered years of violence and abuse under the military regimes of Idi Amin, Milton Obote and, at that time, the NRA government of Yoweri Museveni, with continuous attacks, periods of famine and disease afflicting the population. The country was affected by multiple divisions and insults, seen as a consequence of witchcraft, and the power of the enemy – the NRA – was also seen, as mentioned by various authors, as an evil power based on witchcraft. From this standpoint, Alice and the “spirits who accompanied her” announced that they would first “purify” the north of the country of its internal witchcraft impure soldiers, witches and sorcerers – and would then destroy external witchcraft, from the rest of the country. Witchcraft, like armed violence, was a form of aggression that created a climate of terror among the population, and the prophetic discourse gave reasons to oppose it and fight against it.

4 “Wrong Element” from the US, “Ching Po” from Korea and “Franko” from the former Zaire, some Muslim spirits and an Acholi spirit called “Nyaker”, according to various sources. For an in-depth look at this issue, see Behrend, H. (1999). *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits, War in Northern Uganda 1986-1997*. Oxford: James Currey. Kampala: Fountain Publishers; Nairobi: EAEP; Athens: Ohio University Press.

The aim of the Holy Spirit Movement and its military arm, the HSMF, was, in its own words, “the purification of society through the eradication of sin”, particularly expressed through acts of witchcraft. Purified soldiers, according to the ideas elaborated by Alice Lakwena herself, must not fear the enemy’s bullets but must remain fearless, singing salms, and their spirits would protect them from the bullets. From this standpoint, defeat was seen as a consequence of their own moral weakness and not the enemy’s military superiority.

The organisation of the HSMF, the military arm of the movement, was complex. After Lakwena, there were many levels of command and regulations that had to be respected, the Holy Spirit Safety Precautions, understood as prohibitions, and the Holy Spirit Tactics. This organisation provided the HSMF with a coherent structure in an incoherent situation, as highlighted by Behrend (1998).

Members of the UPDA joined the HSMF and they were “purified” at the end of 1986. At this point the HSMF began attacks against various NRA units stationed in the Acholi region. The movement began to gain sympathy in important sectors of the region and gradually, not only soldiers from other opposition movements but rather peasants, students, teachers, businessmen, a former minister and a large number of women joined the movement. The HSMF were pushed out of Kitgum to Lira, Soroti, Kumi, Mbale, Toro and were defeated at Jinja. However, the war did not end with the defeat of the HSMF, as the spirit Lakwena, according to various reports and authors, “took control” of Alice’s father, Severino Lukoya, who continued the rebellion with the remains of HSMF until he surrendered in 1989.

3. Joseph Kony and the Lord’s Resistance Army

3.1 The origins of the armed group

A young man from Gulu who had abandoned his studies in 1987, Joseph Kony, who must then have been about 20, declared that the spirit Lakwena “had taken possession” of his person.⁵ According to him, following the orders of the spirit, began to build his own Holy Spirit Movement, recruiting his fighters in Gulu, while Alice Lakwena had operated largely in the Kitgum district, from where she marched on Kampala. Joseph Kony had previously offered himself to Alice Lakwena to collaborate in the struggle against the common enemy, the NRA, but she rejected him, after which the two groups had poor relations and confronted each other at times. When Alice was defeated at

the gates of Kampala, some of her fighters joined Kony's movement. Despite the rivalry between the two, he gradually adopted the discourse and methods she had created and established his own Holy Spirit Precautions and complex rituals for joining the group. Like Alice, too, he fought against acts of witchcraft and executed pagan mediums and spirits known as ajwakas. He combined the military tactics of guerrilla warfare with ritual practices. He organised the group into three divisions, each made up of three units called Won, the Father, Wod, the Son, and Tipu Maleng, the Holy Spirit. Kony, unlike Alice Lakwena, organised a small guerrilla force which operated in small combat units in the Acholi region and southern Sudan. Although power and decision-making were concentrated in his person, monopolising the main spirits, the small units and militias had their own spirits. Unlike Alice Lakwena, who did not allow men and women to have sexual relations, the spirit Silly Silindi "allowed" Kony's movement, according to him, to lift this prohibition, with the result that the fighters began to abduct and kidnap hundreds of children, distributing the girls and women among the fighters as concubines, partners, servants, cooks, porters and even fighters and security services, according to various studies and interviews.

3.2. The aims and discourse of the LRA

For more than 20 years, Joseph Kony has been incapable of communicating a coherent political programme, as highlighted by the International Crisis Group (2006c). The group is seen as a spiritual armed movement led by an evasive, unstable, capricious leader declaring that he has prophetic, supernatural powers allowing him to talk to spirits in order to make the decisions affecting the group,

5 As well as the spirit Lakwena, Joseph Kony declares that other spirits have taken possession of him and communicated with him on many occasions, such as the spirit "Juma Oris", or "Juma Oris de-boo" (who acts as chief of the spirits) and of a former minister of Idi Amin. This spirit would move to Sudan and, since 1993, according to these same sources, it has directed another movement - the West Nile Bank Front (WNBFF), made up of former members of Idi Amin's forces. This has been ratified and expanded on in personal interviews with former child soldiers abducted by the LRA in Gulu and Lira in March 2008. These interviews demonstrate the important place occupied by this phenomenon among the local population and among the children abducted during the conflict, demonstrating issues linked to Stockholm syndrome. Apparently, according to Joseph Kony and his entourage, other spirits advise him and in some cases order him (he avoids responsibility) concerning the decisions he should take about the war and the peace process and give him a supernatural authority over his fighters, which he exploits as it suits him. Among these spirits appear the names of "Kingbruce", who would exercise the functions of commander for placing bombs, "Ginbriki", who would be the head of intelligence and would be translated as the spirit that asks: "Who are you... to oppose God? Who are you... to come here and annoy me?", the spirit "Cilicilindi" or "Silly Silindi", who would be the commander of military operations, and the spirit "Snaka", the informant, who takes possession or communicates with Kony to inform him or advise him what he should do at all times.

directing an army of children who he has terrorised and brainwashed after having inflicted a system of harsh punishments and rewards on them to create a climate of unconditional love and terror around his own figure, apparently in order to govern the country according to the Ten Commandments from the Bible. The group takes on a hierarchical and personal character, revolving around the messianic, charismatic and coercive figure of its leader, Joseph Kony, due to the arbitrary decision-making within the group. Kony has fed the creation of a mysterious legend and he has hardly had contact with the press, living in isolation and leaving the construction of conjectures and suppositions about his aims and his person in the hands of public opinion.

Apparently, according to various versions, his aims are the fall of the Museveni government, the re-establishment of order and legitimacy in the State of Uganda; the establishment of a fundamentalist Christian regime based on the Ten Commandments from the Bible, and the restoration of Acholi culture. However, these elements are controversial and the different studies are not categorical on the issue.⁶ The matter continues to be rather unclear as a spiritual ideology, a clear indifference to political commitment and brutal military tactics directed against the civil population of the Acholi community it declares it is fighting for, play an important part in the movement,⁷ which leads to the conclusion that power itself is its sole objective. At no time during the past 22 years has the LRA attempted to control any portion of territory, although its sporadic, violent attacks, burning houses, displaced persons' camps and mutilating its victims, create a climate of permanent terror throughout the region that persists even if months pass without it acting again. The attacks often occur when the population of the displaced persons camps - generally women - leave them to fetch wood or water or to work on their crops in their places of origin, which are a few kilometres from the camps.

In conclusion, the group and its leader have no identifiable political agenda, so they are filling it with content as the peace negotiations go on and substantial proposals become necessary for debate and comparison. This issue raises a new question, which is the lack of will to find a negotiated way out of the armed conflict, and it has even been asked whether the LRA has used the various peace negotiations to reorganise the group as a result of the weak position it is currently in due to the numerous military offensives carried out by the Ugandan armed forces against the armed group's rearguard in southern Sudan since 2002. Along these lines, the number of LRA fighters at the end

6 In a manifesto that appeared in 1997 supposedly published by its more political wing, which at times has been known as the Lord's Re-

of the nineties stood at between 5,000 and 10,000 combatants, although this figure would have notably reduced. According to various sources, it is currently estimated that the LRA has between 1,000 and 2,000 fighters and a similar number of women and children, although these figures must be taken with a great deal of caution. However, this figure involves an important issue: although the number of fighters has reduced, the group has enough capacity to continue destabilising the region using the same tactics that have characterised it since its formation; that is, acting through small units with great mobility to advance on foot, attack, flee and look for somewhere to hide.



Odek IDP camp, Gulu district

4. The nineties: violence and the internationalisation of the conflict

In 1991 the Ugandan armed forces, christened the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF), began a military operation known as "Operation Sesame", in which the north of the country was isolated, information relating to the conflict was limited and various members of the political opposition were detained. After the failed peace initiative of 1994, a period began characterised by the escalation of violence and the internationalisation of the conflict, as Sudan and Uganda mutually accused one another of supporting their respective armed groups, Sudan the armed LRA and Uganda the rebellion in southern Sudan, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA). The LRA, which had bases in southern Sudan, managed to improve its military capacity and armaments but lost the support of the Acholi and Lango communities as

sistance Movement (LRM), although its importance and power over the LRA is quite doubtful, there are 10 outstanding political objectives including: the re-establishment of a multi-party democracy and federalism in the country; respect for human rights; a national socio-economic balance; the suppression of corruption; the protection of the independence of judicial power, and guaranteed free and open elections. In other manifestos it attacked Uganda's involvement in DR Congo and the rejection of structural adjustment programmes, confirming that the LRM/A is an inclusive national political organisation and not a primordially religious movement. For further information, see International Crisis Group (2006). *Peace in Northern Uganda?* Crisis Group Africa Briefing N°41. Kampala/Nairobi/Brussels: ICG, 13 September. 7 "I am not a terrorist, I am a freedom fighter, says Kony", Monitor, 25/05/06

a result of the failure of the negotiations, giving rise to the first child kidnappings in order to swell its ranks in 1995, as well as massive population displacements and serious human rights violations (including sexual abuse and mutilations) which have characterised this armed conflict since then. At the beginning of the nineties, the group had about 3,000 or 4,000 fighters, and gradually came to be movement largely made up of child soldiers.

Sudan and Uganda broke off diplomatic relations in 1995 and the UPDF regularly invaded southern Sudan in pursuit of the armed group, leading to condemnation from Khartoum. The LRA has a network of bases in southern Sudan from where it launched attacks on the population in northern Uganda and, gradually, also in southern Sudan. Four years later, in 1999, the two countries began to move closer together, reaching the Nairobi Agreement under which they pledged to exchange prisoners of war and put an end to support for each other's respective armed groups, although this issue persisted in subsequent years. The re-election of Museveni in 1996 gave new life to his warlike policy, leading to an unprecedented escalation of violence. Between 1996 and 1999⁸ the government forced the population to move to "protected villages" in order to strangle the LRA by eliminating the support provided by part of the population to the rebels, creating large camps of displaced persons. That means the camps of displaced persons were established with military rather than humanitarian logic. In this sense, the area the camp occupies is based on the military capacity to protect the area in question, without taking into account the size of the population who would live there, in some cases for two decades and in most cases for around 10 years. The consequence of this precarious planning are overcrowded camps of displaced persons with no kind of organisation of the area in relation to the inhabited space (which should be separated from the latrines, for example); access to water is limited and there are few or no health centres, to mention only some of the main issues. These camps, which are theoretically under the protection of the armed forces (outside the camp) and pro-government militias, the Local Defence



Koro Abili IDP camp, Gulu district

Units (inside the camp), suffered the attacks of the LRA, aggravating the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda deriving from the conflict.

En 1999, Yoweri Museveni offered the LRA an amnesty, which caused the first split in the group, which was prepared to negotiate, as opposed to Joseph Kony's faction which persists in its rebellion. In March 2002, Uganda and Sudan reached an agreement so that the UPDF could go into southern Sudan in pursuit of the armed group, beginning a new phase of escalation of violence and increasing forcible displacement of population, with the figure of two million displaced persons reached during this period. The agreement allowed the UPDF to go into a portion of territory within 100km of the border between the two countries. This military campaign was considered a failure in its objective of doing away with the armed group and it indirectly caused a worsening of the humanitarian situation in the southern region of Sudan and the north of Uganda. The LRA increased its attacks in northern Uganda and, alongside this, sought refuge further into Sudan, increasing its attacks in southern Sudan. In addition, the LRA increased its child abductions, beginning a practice known in the Acholi language as *alup*,⁹ which in this case led people to travel to seek refuge in town centres, the central parts of displaced persons camps and religious missions before nightfall to avoid being abducted by the group or being victims of an attack. In many cases, military garrisons were situated in the middle of the camps, so it was not clear who was protecting whom.¹⁰ Between 20,000 and 30,000 young people, who travelled every night for several months or even years, were known as "night commuters". During this period, the LRA regularly attacked villages, displaced persons camps and the suburbs of towns, mainly Gulu and Kitgum, burning hundreds of houses. One of these attacks, at the beginning of 2004, on the Barlonyo displaced persons camp, in the Lira district, caused the deaths of more than 300 people in a single night, when the LRA set light to the camp and burned some of its inhabitants alive, before the ineffectiveness of the army, which arrived too late, as it had on other occasions, to prevent the massacre, according to Rodríguez Soto (2008) and another sources.



Night commuters' centre, Gulu

5. Peace scenarios

5.1. First peace initiatives

In 1994, the first meeting was held between Joseph Kony and Betty Bigombe, the member of Yoweri Museveni's cabinet in charge of mediating in the armed conflict, agreeing a draft peace plan which failed because of Yoweri Museveni's ultimatum, which ordered the group to disarm within a week. Since then, intensive diplomatic activity has been carried out by local agents, together with limited initiatives from the international community. Kacoke Madit's initiative was established in 1996 by the Acholi community in diaspora, in order to achieve peace through peaceful methods. The Community Sant'Egidio also tried unsuccessfully to intervene to promote exploratory contacts. Meanwhile, Carter Centre also began mediation work between Uganda and Sudan in 1999, achieving a first agreement between the two countries, although it would not be until years later, in 2002, when a new agreement – in this case a military one – allowed the Ugandan armed forces into Sudan, as has been seen above. At the end of 1997, the Ugandan government agreed to meet an LRA delegation, although there were no results. The following year, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI), an organisation made up of various religious faiths and denominations present in the north of the country (Catholics, Anglicans and Muslims) began an important task of raising awareness for peace, acting as a mediator and maintaining regular contact with the LRA, which were intensified after 2001 via Tarcisio Pazzaglia, an Italian missionary from the Comboni order.

In December 1999 the Ugandan Parliament approved the Amnesty Act, ratified by President Yoweri Museveni in 2000, granting a total pardon to all members of the LRA and other armed groups who renounced rebellion and gave up their arms. This law, as stated by the ex-priest and member of the Peace Commission and ARLPI,

8 It must be highlighted that the displacement of the population and the regrouping of the displaced population in protected camps had already begun in 1986 after various massacres committed at that time. The aim is to provide the displaced population with security and protection against attacks by armed groups.

9 Word used for the game of hide-and-seek.

10 Personal interview, Odek displaced persons' camp, March 2008.

José Carlos Rodríguez Soto, who also formed part of these exploratory contacts, was the result of a broad consensus in Acholi society, one of whose fundamental pillars has always been the peaceful resolution of the conflict and the restoration of the relationships broken by them. The ARLPI and the traditional leaders had a considerable influence in drawing up this law, as indicated by José Carlos Rodríguez Soto (2008). About 22,000 fighters from the various armed groups present in the country have, to date, made use of the law, including thousands of children.¹¹ In 2000, as part of an AU summit, Libya and Egypt tried to promote measures for peace in the region, meeting in Uganda and Sudan. These efforts gave no positive results, above all because of lack of trust between the parties, the LRA's history of failing to stick to agreements and the government's conviction that it could end the conflict by military means. However, at that time the LRA had between 5,000 and 10,000 fighters. Channels for dialogue had begun to be created which later became important in consolidating the peace negotiations: in July 2002, the Anglican bishop Baker Ochola, the Catholic archbishop John Baptist Odama and Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga were received by President Museveni, who authorised them to begin contacts with the LRA. In August that same year, Museveni announced that he was prepared to declare a temporary truce on condition that the LRA stopped acts of violence, without success, and he appointed some of the members of the Presidential Peace Team he was setting up: Eriya Kategaya, Gilbert Bukenya, Salim Saleh (brother of the President), Francis Ayume, Betty Akech, and two members of the opposition, Norbert Mao and Ronald Reagan Okumu. Later, Santa Okot, a parliamentarian from the governmental NRM party, would join the peace team, later becoming a member of the LRA delegation in the Juba peace process.

After that, sporadic contacts were held between ARLPI representatives, traditional leaders and members of the LRA, joined in certain situations by members of the Presidential Peace Team, without leading to substantive advances beyond keeping channels for dialogue with the group open. In February 2003, at one of these contacts, the LRA for the first time made some specific proposals, such as a demand for a ceasefire from the beginning of March, United Nations presence at peace talks and demilitarised zones for holding contacts. However, the clashes went on and, in April 2003, the Team announced it was ending exploratory contacts with the LRA. From then until the end of 2004 the violence increased, with attacks by the group on the civilian population in the Acholi region, and they even spread to other regions, such as Lango and Teso.

5.2. Emergence of the International Criminal Court and escalation of violence

In 2003, President Museveni went to the International Criminal Court (ICC) to denounce the top leaders of the LRA. The ICC had already announced, in 2002 when it was set up, that the first case it would investigate would be the serious human rights violations committed in the north of Uganda. The government declared a temporary truce in mid-November 2004 to facilitate dialogue between the LRA and the government commissioner Betty Bigombe, together with a government delegation - the first steps to establish peace talks in that they achieved the first direct contacts. The truce was extended to 31 December without success and clashes started again at the beginning of 2005. These meetings were financed by the United Kingdom, Holland and Norway. At the beginning of February President Yoweri Museveni, after meetings with religious leaders, traditional leaders and parliamentarians from northern Uganda, agreed to declare a 18-day truce from the beginning of March, although the flight of the LRA's historic negotiation leader Sam Kolo, after discovering that Joseph Kony was not committed to the peace process and was ordering his members to withdraw to their bases in southern Sudan, frustrated the process. Sam Kolo rebelled against Kony's orders and the latter ordered his arrest, so Kolo fled and gave himself up to the Ugandan armed forces. With Sam Kolo's surrender, the LRA lost its principal negotiating figure, who had enjoyed Kony's support, so the contacts were frustrated and clashes went on. During these months there was a fragile ceasefire, after which a serious escalation in confrontations occurred.

During this period, local and international bodies highlighted the deaths of 1,000 people a week as a direct or indirect result of the violence, for which the LRA and the armed forces were

¹¹ The culmination of the Amnesty Act 2000 came in May 2008 with a positive balance. The act involved a full, automatic amnesty for combatants, while group leaders could take advantage of the amnesty following discussion in Parliament. To date, 22,000 ex-combatants have taken advantage of the amnesty, including women and children, from different groups such as the LRA and the ADF-NALU. Up to now, the WB has given over 4.2 million dollars to the scheme, and five million dollars are budgeted for the period 2008-2010 via the WB's Multi-donor Trust Fund. The scheme should have been publicised between May and June, awaiting the signing of the peace agreement. Various problems and challenges have been encountered in its development: 1) the duration of the Commission, as its mandate is not guaranteed, so no long-term plans can be made; 2) scarce resources; 3) to date, the Commission has dealt only with reinsertion, but not reintegration because of lack of resources - in future the reintegration of ex-combatants is planned to be included; 4) the impossibility of monitoring the development of the scheme, as there is no means of overseeing all ex-combatants; 5) the International Criminal Court, which is reviewing the way the amnesty was granted and to whom. It is proposed that the future plan should cover between 1,000 and 3,000 combatants.

responsible, although the UN Security Council took no measures to condemn what was happening because of the Ugandan government's inability to halt the situation.¹² However, the signing of the peace agreement between the government of Sudan and the southern Sudanese insurgents of the SPLA in January 2005 encouraged the authorities in southern Sudan to become involved in a conflict that also affected them and looking for international legitimacy, as the LRA was attacking the civilian population on both sides of the border. In the second half of the year, various donor countries including Ireland, the United Kingdom, Holland, Denmark and Sweden, decided to cut their aid to the Ugandan government because Yoweri Museveni was prioritising the military campaign over the peace negotiations. Cases of corruption in the Ugandan armed forces, which had inflated its numbers to receive more of the budget, which was then diverted into the pockets of military leaders, were also leaked. Uganda, the country which had until then represented one of the (fictitious) successes of democracy and stability on the African continent, began to show a hidden face which the international community knew nothing about - the serious conflict affecting the north of the country and the corruption that was rife within the government.

During the third quarter of 2005, the peace commissioner Betty Bigombe confirmed that the LRA had made telephone contact with her and that both parties had indicated their desire to restart peace talks, broken off at the end of 2004. In October 2005 an event occurred that would mark the development of the conflict and the subsequent peace talks: the ICC ended its investigation and issued search and capture orders against the five main leaders of the LRA: Joseph Kony and his lieutenants Vincent Otti, Raska Lukwiya, Dominic Ongwen and Okot Odhiambo, accused of having committed serious human rights violations during the armed conflict in northern Uganda. This has made the negotiation process difficult and has become a key point. To date, three of these lieutenants have died in combat or have been executed. The ICC's order was accompanied by an unprecedented escalation of violence by the LRA on both sides of the border. A month later, the Ugandan and Sudanese governments agreed that the UPDF could pursue the LRA in a larger area of Sudanese territory, which led it to move its base to the Garamba National Park in the eastern DR Congo, where the Congolese government refused its Ugandan counterpart access. It must be remembered that Uganda has taken part in the armed conflict in its Congolese

neighbour, occupying a large area of the northeast of the country, from where it supported Congolese armed groups and devoted itself to plundering the considerable Congolese natural resources between 1998 and 2002, when the peace agreement was signed between DR Congo and Uganda, under which the Ugandan armed forces withdrew from Congolese territory.

The most important features of the early months of 2006 were the contradictory messages over whether the government would grant an amnesty to the leader of the LRA if he gave up his arms. Although at the end of March the Ugandan president denied such a possibility, a decision confirmed in April by the Ugandan parliament, in May he made a new offer of amnesty and safe conduct if he disarmed before July. This offer happened shortly after the leader of the LRA held a secret meeting with the Vice-president of southern Sudan, Riek Machar, in which Joseph Kony agreed to end attacks against the civilian population and to hold talks with the Ugandan President, an aspect that was initially accepted by President Yoweri Museveni provided that the LRA ended military activities before July. In June, INTERPOL issued an order to arrest the five main leaders of the LRA, which led to a petition by the local religious initiative the ARLPI requesting the cancellation of these orders to give the negotiations a chance.

6. The Juba Peace Process

6.1. Development of the peace negotiations

After several months of exploratory contacts in Juba (southern Sudan), with the mediation of the Vice-president of southern Sudan, Riek Machar (but called into question because of the lack of credibility and political weight of the LRA delegation),¹³ running alongside the military operations of the UPDF, in July 2006 the government and the LRA took up the fragile peace talks once again. These led to the signing of a cessation of hostilities on 26 August in Juba in southern Sudan, which has been renewed to date. This cessation of hostilities has been the first bilateral truce between the government and the LRA. The agreement largely establishes the billeting of the LRA's forces in two camps near the southern Sudanese border, Owiny Ki-Bul and Ri-Kwangba, so that the peace talks can go ahead. Although its implementation has suffered various difficulties and delays, the cessation of hostilities has been respected and, at the beginning of May 2007, the establishment of safety corridors was agreed so that members of the LRA from their base in DR Congo could be billeted at Ri-Kwangba.

12 Including, most importantly, the Ugandan Health Ministry, WHO, UNICEF, PMA, UNFPA, the NGO the International Rescue Committee and the governmental body the DFID (United Kingdom).

A demonstration of the positive development of the process is the fact that the same month the parties reached the Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions, which established a framework of good intentions concerning the separation of powers in the country's political institutions, recognised the right of the displaced population to return and resettlement, established the need to give greater resources to rehabilitation programmes in the areas affected by the armed conflict in the north and northeast of the country and incorporated a clause on transitional security arrangements recognising the need to provide protection to the leaders of the LRA, the combatants and all related personnel during the transition from war to peace.

On 29 June a new partial agreement was reached on accountability and reconciliation for crimes against humanity, under which the government pledged not to hand the LRA's leaders over to the ICC and to judge those responsible for human rights violations using a traditional, non-punitive justice system, the Mato Oput, as an alternative to ordinary justice.

6.2. Advances and setbacks

The fragility of the process was demonstrated with the disappearance of deputy commander Vincent Otti during the last quarter of 2007, an issue which generated a climate of concern with regard to the peace process. In January 2008 Joseph Kony confirmed Otti's death and the replacement of the negotiating team in Juba, but the contacts continued to move forward with the peace process. Through reports from members of the LRA who had deserted the group's ranks, it was revealed that Otti's execution had been ordered by Kony himself due to disagreements between the two men and Otti's gradual rise in importance at the peace process, making him its great supporter, in opposition to Kony.

However, multiple factors contribute to feeding expectations, which still continue, that the current peace process could result in a final peace and reconciliation agreement. For the first time in the history of the rebellion, both parties recognise the

existence of a political problem requiring a political solution.¹⁴ The Juba process has structured an agenda, made up of five aspects agreed in various round of negotiation: 1) the cessation of hostilities, extended until mid-April; 2) the Agreement on Comprehensive Solutions; 3) accountability and reconciliation; 4) a permanent ceasefire; and 5) disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). Ultimately, the negotiation, awaits only the signing of the Final Peace Agreement, due at the beginning of April 2008. Secondly, overall respect for the cessation of hostilities signed on 26 August 2006 has been demonstrated, strengthening mutual trust, unlike previous cessations of hostilities which were breached both by the Government and the LRA. Concerning the negotiations, the process is increasingly inclusive as the parties gradually allowed the participation in the peace process, and in facilitation and good offices work, of local agents (the peace commissioner Betty Bigombe, Ugandan MPs, local leaders of the Ancholi community - Rwodi - and bishops from the ARLPI initiative), regional agents (the mediation led by the Vice-President of southern Sudan, Riek Machar, representatives of DR Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa and Mozambique) and international agents (the former President of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, as Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for the Peace Process, and observers from the US and the EU). Local initiatives have promoted trust between the parties and have served as a catalyst for contacts at a higher level, and the international support from the process has been much more important than in previous initiatives, when Betty Bigombe had hardly any foreign support. The peace process has also contributed to bringing Joseph Kony and his group out of its hiding, creating communication channels for keeping the process open.

The manifest weakness of the LRA, as a result of the gradual loss of members due to the successive amnesties and the clashes with the Ugandan armed forces should be highlighted, together with the difficulties for carrying out a new campaign of insurgency and the end of the support the LRA had received from the government of Sudan and its armed forces, at least officially, to counteract the support the government of Uganda was providing to the SPLA. Although the LRA does not involve a threat to the governments in the region, it does continue to pose a threat to the civilian population, as pointed out by the International Crisis Group (2007a). Other elements to be highlighted are the improvement in the effectiveness of the Ugandan armed forces, the LRA's loss of its sanctuary in southern Sudan, where it received support from

13 The LRA delegation was made up of 12 people (10 men and two women) some of whom came from the diaspora to Nairobi, the United Kingdom and the US, with little knowledge of the conflict according to various people interviewed and observers who were important in the negotiation process. The delegation was directed by Martin Ojul, and, later, by David Nyekorach Matsanga. The number three in the delegation, Santa Okot, had been an MP for the government NRM party between 2001 and 2006 and between 2003 and 2004 he had been a member of the Presidential Peace Team. Another member of the delegation, Ayena Odongo, had stood for parliament as an NRM candidate at the 2006 election and, after losing, appeared in the LRA delegation. Martin Ojul himself had formed part of the Ugandan Ministry of the Interior for two years.

14 As stated by the spokesman of the LRA delegation, Godfrey Ayoo, to IRIN, on 16 July 2007.

Khartoum, something that has contributed to the interruption of its supply lines.

However, LRA units went to the Central African Republic several times to receive military support from Khartoum and from its local allies, as various reports suggest that the LRA is linked to the Central African armed group the Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement (UFDR), which does have the support of Khartoum.¹⁵ Other elements contributed to aggravating the situation. Although, as has been mentioned, there were no serious breaches of the ceasefire, the LRA was only briefly billeted at Ri-Kwangba. In fact, for a large part of the period, the LRA remained established in the Congolese national park of Garamba, near the intersection of three fragile states with porous borders (Central African Republic, Sudan, DR Congo), a place that became an ideal refuge, although part of the group is on Sudanese territory, in the state of Western Ectoria and another part of the group has recently established itself in the south-eastern Central African R. There were some attacks against the civilian population in southern Sudan, which could have been committed either by the LRA or by militias supported by Khartoum to destabilise southern Sudan, or by the Ugandan armed forces themselves. The peace process was deteriorating as the signing of the Final Peace Agreement moved closer, as in February and March the LRA committed several violations of the ceasefire in southern Sudan and eastern DR Congo, which, although they did not lead to the suspension of the process, did bring greater tension to the situation. The outstanding issue was the flight to the Central African Republic of the group together with its leader, where they plundered villages and kidnapped about a hundred children, a figure that had risen to 500-1,000 children kidnapped between February and April 2008. With the signing of the final agreement coming closer, the international community and the Ugandan government did not attribute too much importance to these events, which could also have been seen as the LRA's way of increasing the group's apparent number of members with a view to the benefits of the DDR process deriving from the signing of the agreement.

On 23 February, the parties reached the permanent ceasefire agreement, which was to come into force the day after the signing of the Final Peace Agreement, and, a week later, on 29 February, they signed the agreement on DDR. This process was to culminate with the signing of the Final Peace Agreement on 28 March, which would have ratified all the previous agreements. However, this date was postponed several times, first to 5 April, then to 10 April and then without a definite date.

So, when the 10 April arrived, Joseph Kony did not appear to sign the final agreement at Ri-Kwangba. Officially, he had sought clarification on two matters: his personal security and the relationship between the Mato Oput and the Special Division of the Supreme Court, as confirmed by the leader of the mediation team and Vice-President of southern Sudan Riek Machar. Meanwhile, in Juba, President Yoweri Museveni, accompanied by leaders from the region, also should have signed the agreement. In this uncertain situation, the replacement of the LRA negotiation leader David Matsanga (supposedly for having personally enriched himself) went ahead, and Joseph Kony appointed the man who had been number two in the delegation, James Obita, as its leader. Despite the collapse of the process, the efforts by the mediation team led by Riek Machar and the traditional leaders continued to re-establish contact with the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony, to bring him back into the peace process and prevent its final collapse, although these have not succeeded.

6.3. Is it possible to save the peace process? Challenges and opportunities in an uncertain future

The peace talks have certainly contributed to the current situation of stability in northern Uganda, where there have been no breaches of the cessation of hostilities since the beginning of the peace talks. As a result of this situation, around half a million people of the 1.7 million who had been displaced have returned to their places of origin from the start of negotiations to date, according to local sources. However, conditions concerning access to food health and education in the displaced persons camps continue to be very grave, as they are in the transit camps. The rates of alcoholism and gender violence in the camps (rape and sexual abuse) are very high. In addition, this situation of the return of the displaced population is reversible, depending on the progress of the process.

The general opinion of the population is a desire for reconciliation and forgiveness for the crimes committed by the LRA and also by the government. The Acholis' innate capacity for forgiveness and reconciliation has even been raised as an issue.¹⁶ Weariness after more than 20 years of war and at least a large part of the population having lived a considerable proportion of this period in displaced persons camps without the slightest resources for survival contributes towards this feeling. The Mato Oput¹⁷ solution could be a valid mechanism – culturally it is a good approach because the idea of this mechanism from traditional justice is to restore broken relations and get the parties to accept one

15 Interview in March 2008, and International Crisis Group (2007). Northern Uganda: Seizing the Opportunity for Peace. Crisis Group Africa Report N°124. Kampala/Nairobi/Brussels: ICG, 26 April.

another. In this sense, the ICC is seen as an obstacle to the peace process according to the religious and traditional leaders and even by members of the government, although, on the other hand, the very existence of the ICC's orders has encouraged the LRA's involvement in the peace process.

However, the non-existence of real pressure from the international community beyond the ICC warrants to force Joseph Kony to sign the peace agreement, and the lack of a direct negotiating channel with Joseph Kony himself has meant an added difficulty. The LRA, according to various sources, has used this process to capture funds supplied by the mediators and donors, and to gain time to abduct, train and equip new fighters, as has been seen with the absence of the LRA, from the meeting prepared for 10 May by regional mediators and political, social and traditional representatives from northern Uganda. In addition, the LRA's lack of confidence in the process has been demonstrated with the execution of its deputy commander, Vincent Otti, the increase in military activity in the region and the creation of a new sanctuary in south-eastern Central African Republic, where the government of that country has no capacity to prevent actions by the LRA. Another issue demonstrated in recent months is the role of the diaspora of the LRA and the opposition to Yoweri Museveni, supposedly representing the interests of Joseph Kony but, in fact, contributing to impeding the progress of the process by becoming intermediaries in the negotiations and using the existence of the armed group for their own interests.

As a result, the positive elements of the process must be rescued so that they are consolidated regardless of the progress of the peace negotiations. Firstly, the Ugandan government must strengthen security and guarantee the position of the population of the north of the country, given the history of violence and abuse in which the Ugandan security forces have also taken part. Secondly, in October 2007 the Ugandan government presented a three-year plan, the Peace, Reconstruction and Development Plan for the North, costing 600 million dollars, but various problems have impeded its implementation. The population of the north is waiting for this plan which is essential to tackle, on one hand, the roots of the armed conflict related to underdevelopment, poverty and the serious humanitarian situation in the north of the country and, on the other and linked to the previous point, to re-establish the confidence of the population of the north in the government from the south. However, post-war development and rehabilitation must be accompanied by means to promote accountability and reconciliation, as the Final Peace Agreement does not establish any kind

of mechanism to tackle the serious human rights violations committed by the Ugandan armed forces in the north of the country, so these crimes should also be uncovered and dealt with using mechanisms of traditional justice, including traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms.

Meanwhile, as well as the role the Ugandan government could play in the security and development of the Acholi region, the international community must speak with one voice and make Joseph Kony see that the possible breakdown of the peace process could have serious consequences for the armed group. In this sense, it is essential to draw up a regional military strategy that would serve to threaten the group, as the governments of Uganda, southern Sudan and DR Congo have already done, as well as the UN peacekeeping mission in DR Congo, MONUC, at the beginning of June in Kampala, which is added to the agreement signed in September 2007 between the governments of DR Congo and Uganda. However, other countries in the region must be added to this process, such as Central African Republic, the other regional peacekeeping missions such as UNMIS in Sudan and EUFOR RCA/CHAD, with the support of key agents from the international community such as the US, United Kingdom and France. The idea of this would be to force the LRA and the diaspora of the group, as highlighted by the Enough Project (2008), to choose between the peace process, and agreed exile in a third country if they do not want to submit to the means of transitional justice established by the peace agreement, or the final abandonment of the peace process and harassment by the various peacekeeping forces and the armed forces of the countries of the region with the support of the international community in order to isolate them, interrupt support from Khartoum and the diaspora of the LRA, and to force their surrender or capture.

Despite everything, and making clear the volatility and fragility of the process, at the beginning of July the negotiation leader of the LRA David Nyekorach Matsanga, made a new announcement from Nairobi mentioning that he had instructions from Joseph Kony for the LRA's team of negotiators to reinstate the process to try to sign the final peace agreement between 13 and 14 July. Will this be the definitive step? Despite the many challenges still remaining, a new opportunity is opening up to achieve peace in northern Uganda, a region weary after 22 years of war, displacement and humanitarian crisis and with a clear desire for reconciliation with this recent past and keen to move forward towards a peaceful future.

16 Everyone interviewed coincides on this and there are many studies confirming this issue.

17 Traditional mechanism for resolving conflicts consisting of "Drinking the juice of the roots of the Oput tree" as a principal part of the reconciliation process, alongside financial compensation.

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School for a Culture of Peace

The School for a Culture of Peace (*Escola de Cultura de Pau*) was founded in 1999 with the objective of organising a variety of academic and research activities related to the culture of peace, the prevention and transformation of conflicts, disarmament and the promotion of human rights.

The School for a Culture of Peace is principally financed by the Generalitat de Catalunya [autonomous government of Catalonia] via the Catalan Development Cooperation Agency, part of the Secretariat for Foreign Cooperation, and the Department for Universities, Research and the Information Society. It also receives support from other departments within the Generalitat and from local councils, foundations and other entities. The School for a Culture of Peace is run by Vicenç Fisas, who holds the UNESCO Chair on Peace and Human Rights at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

The main activities run by the School for a Culture of Peace include:

- A **Post-graduate Course on Culture of Peace** (post-graduate programme consisting of 230 classroom hours and 70 places).
- **Elective subjects:** "Peace culture and conflict management" and "Educating for peace and in conflicts".
- **Awareness-raising and conflict intervention initiatives** to facilitate dialogue amongst the parties involved in a conflict.
- The **Human Rights Programme**, which monitors the international status of human rights, and especially the thematic fields currently setting the world agenda, such as the influence of terrorism on the enjoyment of individual rights and corporate social responsibility.
- The **Programme on Education for Peace**, which strives to promote and develop knowledge, values and skills for education for peace.
- The **Programme on Music, Arts and Peace**, which focuses on research into the contribution made to peacebuilding by the arts.
- The **Disarmament Programme**, which works on various issues in the area of disarmament, with special emphasis on micro-disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes for combatants, and is also monitoring weapons exports.
- The **Conflicts and Peacebuilding Programme**, which undertakes daily monitoring of the international situation in the realms of armed conflicts, situations of tension, humanitarian crises, development and gender, in order to issue its annual report "Alert!", plus fortnightly, monthly and quarterly reports.
- The **Peace Processes Programme**, which monitors and analyses the different countries with peace processes or formalised negotiations underway and also those with negotiations still in the exploratory phase. This programme includes the "Colombia Project", devoted to giving greater visibility to the peace initiatives in Colombia.
- The **Post-war Rehabilitation Programme**, which monitors and analyses international aid in terms of peacebuilding in wartime and post-war situations.

School for a Culture of Peace (Escola de Cultura de Pau)

Edifici MRA (Mòdul Recerca A),
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
08193 Bellaterra (Spain)

Tel.: (+34) 93 586 88 42; Fax: (+34) 93 581 32 94

Email: alerta.escolapau@pangea.org

Web: www.escolapau.org

êçp escola de
cultura de pau

Edifici MRA (Mòdul Recerca A)
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona,
08193 Bellaterra, España
Tel. (+34) 93 586 88 42
Fax (+34) 93 581 32 94
escolapau@pangea.org
www.escolapau.org