

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

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INSIDE this issue:

Defecting from the LRA; Uganda reinstates Amnesty Act; missed chances in DR Congo; six ways to escape; plus the latest on the crisis in CAR.



REGIONAL SITUATION REPORT April-June 2013: LRA activities have been reduced in CAR and DRC

Central African Republic

On 24 May 2013 Obo town was attacked by an unknown group suspected to come from the counties of Tambura in Western Equatorial State and Wau in Western Bar-al-Ghazal state in South Sudan. They were defeated by a combination of the Central African Armed Forces (FACA) and homeguards in CAR with the support of the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) and US advisers. Of the unknown number of attackers from South Sudan, 7 were confirmed dead while 35

were captured and reportedly tortured. The reported human rights abuses violations of those captured by FACA led the US advisers to dissociate themselves from the FACA. This new crisis in the LRA-affected area will further complicate the security and humanitarian situation of the civilian population. Regional forces based in Obo now face multiple challenges. Their primary mission was to track down the LRA and secure the area of Upper Mbomou.

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Month	DRC			CAR			SOUTH SUDAN			UGANDA			Total
	Apr	May	Jun	Apr	May	Jun	Apr	May	Jun	Apr	May	Jun	
Attacks	6	6	6	2	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	24
Abducted	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Killed	2	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
Newly displaced	0	0	0	50	80	49	0	0	0	0	0	0	179
Return/rescued	0	2	0	11	9	13	0	3	0	0	7	0	42

Editorial-Opinion: Father Ernest Sugule

First the good news: in Uganda the Amnesty Act has been fully reinstated. This came about as result of lobbying and pressure by various stakeholders so that this can help play a big role in the defection strategy. We take heart from the outcome of this persistent teamwork.

are the challenges these strategies are facing on the ground? When defectors finally escape how are they received and reintegrated into the community especially in Uganda? These are the themes running through this edition.



"We ask ourselves what can be done to make defection possible in DRC, CAR and S. Sudan, and to not just military operations?"

Elsewhere, the LRA continues to abduct children and youth to make them LRA fighters. These children are most of the times trained to kill their own relatives, neighbours and take part in atrocities. This is the LRA process of integrating new fighters and discouraging the children from defecting, escaping home, because they are told if they defect the surviving community members will kill them. As an additional deterrent, the LRA kills those who attempt to defect.

The regional outlook for defections is bleak. The situation in Central African Republic is far from stable. The new Seleka government has difficulty in managing and controlling the whole territory of CAR and doesn't prioritize the LRA issue. The African Union military initiative has slowed down despite some promises from presidents Michel Dlotodia of CAR and Joseph Kabila of DRC to chase the LRA from the region.

The biggest question we ask is, rather than just focusing on military operations, what can be done to make defection possible in DRC, CAR and South Sudan?

Thus, the articles in this 6th edition of the *Voice of Peace* explore the difficulties in trying to defect from LRA. What opportunities do defectors have? What strategies are in place to help them escape safely into the community? What

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Amnesty Act reinstated after campaign by religious leaders



Returnees in front of the Amnesty Commission in Uganda

Religious leaders from the Acholi region have successfully led a campaign to persuade the Ugandan parliament to reinstate an Amnesty law which is crucial in encouraging LRA fighters to defect and return home.

operations in neighboring countries.

The law originally came into effect in July 2000 as a result of lobbying by the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI). It offered immunity from prosecution for people who had taken part in armed rebellion against the government since 1986. Over the following 13 years more than 26,000 ex-combatants were demobilized, amnestied and reintegrated into civilian life. This number included fighters both from the LRA, the Allied Democratic Front and other smaller rebel groups.

Without the Amnesty law, anyone abducted by the LRA suddenly faced prosecution if they managed to escape and return home to Uganda. Activists called this a "cruel double punishment" by a government which they said had already failed to protect its own people from abduction. Such a situation was "grossly unfair", the activists said.

In May 2012 this process was abruptly brought to a halt when the Government effectively suspended the law, saying that it was no longer needed because the war was over. The move prompted protests from religious and cultural leaders and civil society groups who all made the case that while the LRA was no longer active in Uganda, it was still very much involved in

In August 2012 religious leaders from Acholi led calls for parliament to reinstate the Amnesty law. Their efforts were successful and in May 2013 the act was fully reinstated and extended for a further two years until May 2015.

Campaigners have welcomed this move, which they say not only weakens the overall strength of the LRA by encouraging defections, but equally importantly helps promote reconciliation and healing through the symbolic gesture of mercy and forgiveness.

Regional situation report: *continued from page 1*

Central African Republic

However following the coup of March 2013, securing the area has become more complicated with the emergence of the new rebellions and the resistance of the regime in Bangui to engage fully with the African Union (AU) initiative.

Part of the problem lies with the FACA; the national army during Bozize's regime. Since the overthrow of Bozize the status of FACA soldiers that were part of AU-led initiative remains unclear. Seleka, which forms the Government, is not recognized by the AU and therefore cannot take part in the AU-led initiative. The new CAR government armed forces are not even allowed to come to the areas where the AU-led initiative operates.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Since 2008 the DRC has never been at peace. In the last three months alone, 18 attacks have taken place, with 2 people killed, 8 lootings, and 6 kidnappings. However, it would not be correct to attribute all these attacks solely to LRA as other armed groups operate in the same area. In early April most attacks occurred in villages in environs of Faradje, Nagero, Djibir and Aba. It is important to note that it was on 23 April that a letter was collected in the vicinity of Djibir from a suspected LRA writer who wanted to surrender. Local leaders of Faradje, Djibir and Aba were wholeheartedly ready to welcome LRA defectors into their community. Unfortunately, without much knowledge on defection strategy, this good opportunity became a missed opportunity (see page 4).

In May alone there were 6 attacks and 3 lootings in Faradje area and Doruma area as well. In Doruma area it was not only food stuffs which were looted but also machetes, hammers and basic agricultural tools; suggesting that the LRA may start cultivating to become self sufficient. In June there have been 6 attacks mostly around of Sambia. The last attack on this area happened on 17 June when over 20 men, women and children looted three houses. On a positive note, 25 local leaders from DRC, 8 local leaders from CAR, 38 local leaders from Uganda met in Gulu from 27–29 June to understand better the

history of the LRA conflict and create cohesion between all local leaders from the affected countries. Thus helping local leaders across affected areas participate more actively in the defection process.

South Sudan

In Western Equatoria State, in the counties of Yambio, Nzara, Ezo, Tambura and Nagero, there has been relative peace since the beginning of 2013. There are no registered attacks and killings reported since the beginning this year, while 3 returnees were rescued from the LRA by the Home Guards (Arrow Boys).

With a few concerns, the security situation is relatively good. Serious incidents are few and far between. Concerns remain with infrequent border crossings by unknown armed actors. For example between 5–7 April, 7 armed men were seen in Source Yubu Payam from Baria bande. They were moving through the villages and went back the same day to CAR, from where it was believed they came from. Then on 7 April, they were seen again crossing between Source Yubu and Bariguna. The home guards followed this group but to no avail.

There are reports that on 15 May the home guards crossed into Obo in CAR, and 7 home guards were tortured to death by the CAR Army. Their reason for crossing to Obo is yet to be established. This has given chances for speculations that the home guards can be lured and duped into committing crimes, hence posing a lot of fear among the people. From 18–19 May, Ambororo appeared at Ndoromo Boma: their cattle destroyed crops and plantations of the locals. This causes tensions and insecurity in the region.

Uganda

Peace has returned to northern Uganda.. Although the LRA changed their focus to neighbouring countries, it is sad to note that they also went with many innocent children they captured in Uganda. In light of this, efforts have been put in place by regional governments under the leadership of AU and civil society organizations to encourage defections. Some Ugandan abductees are still waiting to return as was seen in April when the UPDF 4th Division received 7 returnees, who are yet to return to their home communities.

How DR Congo is missing chances to encourage LRA defections



Defectors with their family members

“Encouraging LRA defections without putting in place a proper civilian protection strategy, with the full knowledge, understanding and consent from host and relevant communities, civil society and government offices, will not encourage significant defections”

The 23 April 2013, should have been a turning point in the struggle against the LRA in Haut and Bas Uélé districts in DRC. This was the date a letter was dropped in the vicinity of Djabir by somebody claiming to be from the LRA. The letter was written in both Luo and Lingala to a radio journalist asking him to direct the writer to a safe defection site. The writer insisted that he/she did not want to be lied to and that he trusted only the journalist who broadcasts “Come Back Home”, a radio programme encouraging defections. The letter also mentioned that there were many others wanting to defect. Upon receiving the letter, local leaders mobilized NGOs to plan for the defections. Later, MONUSCO DDR spearheaded the coordination of local leadership and NGOs in mobilizing for this group. Despite their efforts the long awaited defection did not happen.

So what went wrong? And is there anything we can learn here to make future attempts more successful? The strategy to encourage defections has been in operation in Uganda since early 2000s and has been adopted by the AU, UN and the US. But in DRC the willingness of some LRA to defect caught people unaware. The above example is not an isolated incident. Five women working on their farm were approached by a group of 3 armed men on 25 April. The women were about to run away when the men laid down their arms and waved the women over. They wanted cassava because they were hungry and would buy it if necessary. The women gave them the cassava. The men requested they ask their husbands to come and help them defect from the LRA. The men said there were “hundreds” of starving LRA fighters who wished to come out of the bush but feared retaliation from FARDC. Communities didn’t follow up this lead and the men disappeared back into the bush.

Lack of correct knowledge and quick response initiatives in aiding defectors by the local population is still a major obstacle in the struggle to encourage defections. This is a critical shortcoming. Since 2008, when DDR established their office in Dungu, local people have never correctly understood the mission, mandate and DDR defection strategy. Other partners who are also key in the

defection strategy are: the administrator of territories, paramount chiefs, local civil society leaders etc. However, they too have not been effectively informed so they can play their role properly. This has led to reluctance by some local leaders to encourage defections. Local leaders were suspicious of the leading agencies and were at first reluctant to even participate in the radio programmes. The DRC Government, the biggest partner in encouraging defections has also been slow to respond. The local field FARDC commanders, Park Rangers and National Police who were supposed to be implementing the defection strategy have never been trained or sensitized and are unsure of their roles in encouraging defections. As a result, some individual attempts to defect have been done in haste and led to failure.

A further challenge is MONUSCO, which is slow in responding to emergency and defection issues. It took them a month to respond to the letter by starting radio messaging, dropping leaflets, training some FARDC in Faradje, or even sending DDR personnel there. There is a lack of clear communication and coordination between different departments within MONUSCO and between MONUSCO and the DRC Government and Congolese civil society, further impeding the implementation of the defection strategy. A final challenge is the variety of attempts to either encourage defections and/or stop LRA attacks by force.

This sends an extremely confusing signal to local people, who wonder why “we are sensitized to welcome LRA defectors but yet they are still attacking us”. For example, MONUSCO DDR Dungu was implementing the defection strategy and at the same time MONUSCO Ituri Brigade wanted to launch military operations in the same area. Unless these initiatives are effectively communicated to the key stakeholders,, future defection attempts may again fail.

Encouraging LRA defections without putting in place a proper civilian protection strategy, with the full knowledge, understanding and consent from host and relevant communities, civil society and government offices, will not encourage significant defections. This is the central challenge that all stakeholders should consider while designing any defection strategy for the future.

6 ways to escape from the LRA – Interview with former LRA Fighter ‘Paul’

Can you tell us briefly about your abduction?

I was abducted in February 2008 at Source Yubu, Tambura County, Western Equatoria State in the Republic of South Sudan. I spent 20 months in the bush with the LRA, and then I escaped in November 2009.

When you were in the bush with the LRA were there many opportunities to leave or escape?

I saw some opportunities to escape but not many. I used one of these chances myself to escape.

These openings are: firstly at night in the bush one can escape because the LRA after a long tiresome trek in the forests or after looting or moving from one destination to another, they normally fall deeply asleep. Abductees who have the will to escape can do so during that time.

Secondly, at observation points in the LRA camp, one can also escape while working as a security guard after spending about two months in the bush. The guards are placed at a distance of one or two kilometres from the base to keep watch. On that occasion one can sneak off and escape.

Thirdly, one can escape while fetching water; especially if the river or stream is far off then one can escape from such areas. By the time the LRA realize you are taking too long to come back, one would have gone some distance away.

Fourthly, sometimes opportunities come when there is an attack on LRA positions. When the LRA is attacked everyone runs for his/her own life and in this frenzy one can run far and escape or give oneself to the attackers. But sometimes also it may not be possible as some LRA tend to use abductees as human shields when such events occur.

Fifthly, some defectors come out during looting, here the LRA combatants come together with the abductees who have spent longer with them in the bush, to loot the villages. If there is an army

nearby or if the army hears of the looting and begins to follow the LRA then there is a possibility of the army launching a counter-attack against the LRA. And as they exchange fire one can come out and surrender to security agencies.

Lastly, a real chance for some abductees to escape from the LRA captivity happens during new abductions. When the LRA is in areas where they think they can be traced, they do everything so fast and in fear. This tendency minimizes their concentration on the control of current abductees. In this situation one can sometimes sneak out of the group and disappear.

During your stay what were the major challenges to defection?

The major challenge that scared most abductees in the bush was the threat of death. Anybody who is caught trying to escape or suspected of trying to escape is killed immediately on the spot!

What opportunity did you use to come out of the bush?

I was put as a security guard. The first day I worked and then went back to the camp. Then the second day, before leaving for my duty I saw from my commander Brigadier Dominic Ongwen's GPS that we were just 15 kilometres from Ariwara. I decided to flee, though I had no food.

I escaped and spent three days without eating, as there were no fruits in the forest. I got lost and I could no longer know exactly where to go but thanks be to God I got suddenly to the main road. And this is how I managed to escape.

After getting to the main road I hid the gun and followed the road for a distance. I hid myself too and when I saw the UPDF I surrendered to them. They took me to where I had hidden the gun and took me to their camp.

I spent six months with the UPDF helping them in their search for the LRA before they brought me back here to South Sudan.

"The major challenge that scared most abductees in the bush was the threat of death. Anybody who is caught trying to escape or suspected of trying to escape is killed immediately on the spot!"

For the people of CAR the crisis continues...

“Although the worst violence and abuses seem to be over, at least in the capital Bangui, sporadic lootings, rapes and killings still occur.”



Some of the Seleka rebels

The multifaceted crisis in the Central African Republic (CAR) is the most recent episode in a recurrent cycle of *coup d'états*, mutinies, armed rebellions and increasingly dictatorial regimes, which plunge the country into chaos around every ten years. The latest takeover, by the Seleka coalition of armed rebel groups on 24 March 2013, has left the country with a number of acute challenges and risks, in terms of security, politics, public finance and economics, as well as social and humanitarian threats.

The most pressing issue is day to day **security**. Although the worst violence and abuses seem to be over, at least in the capital Bangui, sporadic lootings, rapes and killings still occur. After three months in power, it is unclear whether the new authorities can effectively control their own troops and if are they able to establish law and order, both in the capital and in the rural areas.

An estimated 260,000 people are still displaced due to abuses by elements of Seleka. In the south-east of the country, there are elements of the LRA and other unidentified armed groups. On 24 May, an unknown armed group attacked the town of Obo in the south east. Obo town is the operational base for the AU led anti-LRA initiative. The attackers were suspected to come mainly from South Sudan. In the same area, LRA attacks, abductions and looting continued, indicating that LRA is still a threat to the local population. Unfortunately, while these attacks are still occurring, most humanitarian organizations have been relocated to Cameroon or elsewhere.

Seleka's takeover of Bangui in March 2013 exacerbated community and religious tensions that have been part of the undercurrent of recent events in the CAR. Allegations and rumours that Seleka fighters, who are in the majority Muslims (including some elements from Chad and Sudan), targeted non-Muslim areas and businesses during their

advance to Bangui contributed to raising community mistrust and fear of religious tensions.

Meanwhile, salaries to civil servants and security forces are not being paid and the economy has been severely hit. Some elements in the Seleka and an overall rise in criminality has resulted in looting. Displacement, destruction, lack of food and basic services all contribute to the threat of a major humanitarian crisis for the country's estimated 4.6 million inhabitants. The operating bases of NGOs, both national and international, and other humanitarian agencies have been favourite targets for looting and destruction, while some international bodies such as the World Bank parts of the UN-system and the AU either closed their offices or sent their staffs away, further complicating a quick and adequate response to the looming humanitarian crisis.

This military and security situation is worrying, and despite the presence of regional and international armed forces, the disarmament of armed groups has not been successful and the country still serves as a sanctuary for foreign rebel groups (notably the LRA in the south-east, and the FPR of the *Chadian warlord* Baba Laddé in the centre-north of the country).

Today, Central Africans have become hostages in their own country. It is unsafe to walk beyond one's community. Movement in and out of Bangui, which was hard enough during peacetime, has worsened. Out of Bangui, communities are concerned and the security situation has greatly deteriorated.

These combined factors have significantly reduced the usual coping mechanisms of the population, thus making them extremely vulnerable to further stresses.

Uganda: worries for LRA returnees as reception centres close

At the height of the LRA crisis in Uganda a series of reception centres were set up in the north of the country to help people who had managed to escape from the LRA.

They offered a safe space, plus basic supplies and counselling to enable former abductees to return to their community. They also provided an avenue for orientation back into society, and to reduce the signs and symptoms of war.

From the early 1990s until 2006 there were about seven of these centres operating. To give just one example, the World Vision Rehabilitation Centre, rehabilitated over 15,000 formerly abducted persons.

But with relative peace now restored in Uganda, the reception centres have reduced in number. There are now only three still open.

This is a serious problem considering how many young people are still in need of the services they provide. Hundreds remain unaccounted for and, as of today, are still returning from the bush.

“We [recently] received 11 returnees -- 7 men, 3 women and 1 child,” says Lt. Isaac Oware a Public Relations Officer with the Ugandan army’s 4th Division. “They were flown into Uganda from the Central African Republic. We received these people and took them to the 4th Division headquarters to carry out an assessment of their physical and psychological state. Together with other civil society actors like World Vision and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), we will reunite them with their families.”

Concerns are being raised in many sections of the community about the way the Ugandan army and organizations like World Vision now handle the process of reintegrating former abductees back into the community.

In the past the standard practice was to settle returnees into reception centres where they were given psychological and physical support before being reunited with their families. But this approach is now being replaced by something called “Direct reintegration” where returnees are just sent straight back home without the vital support given by reception centres.

“It is an unimaginable situation where someone is taken from captivity and before their psychological needs are addressed they are taken back to the community where their behaviour does not conform to that community,” says Alal Susan, the programme manager of World Vision rehabilitation centre Gulu. She told *Voice of Peace* that direct reintegration doesn’t give the abductees’ time for counselling, or allow for a follow up to check on their progress.

With the guns having fallen silent in northern Uganda and LRA leader Joseph Kony now operating in CAR, DR Congo and South Sudan, donor support to northern Uganda has also reduced.

Susan admits that most donors are now turning their focus to areas where Kony attacks are more prevalent, such as CAR, and thus creating a big gap in funding.

“Most organizations nowadays working with former abductees find it more convenient to directly reintegrate the former abductees because there is little or no funding, and direct reintegration is much cheaper,” Susan acknowledges with regret.

Hundreds still remain in the bush and hundreds are yet to return; but with most of these reception centres closed or on the brink of closure, we can only pray that the community doesn’t shun those former combatants on their return home, as they struggle with memories of conflict and fears for the future.



World Vision reception centre

“Direct reintegration doesn’t give the abductees’ time for counselling or allow for a follow up to check on their progress.”

Making connections through training

Got information to share?

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UGANDA: A joint learning event for Conciliation Resources' partners in Uganda was organized jointly by JPC-Gulu and ARLPI from the 4–9 May, 2013. The event was attended by 38 participants.

SOUTH SUDAN: From 30 April to 2 May 2013 The Inter-Church Peace Committee (ICPC) organized a three days Peace Building and Reconciliation Workshop in Sakure. It was attended by 60 participants: 32 females and 28 Males. On 6 May, the ICPC organized a one day Engagement meeting with the government officials of Western Equatoria State. It was attended by 37 high profile government officials, Church leaders representatives, NGO representatives and community leaders. There were 31 men and 6 women. The participants brought forth 9 categories of areas of potential conflict and conflict:

LRA Issues, Border issues, Cattle influx, Media Abuses, Economic issues, Revival of Kingdom, Social relationships, Wealth and resources, and Recruitment.

DRC: From 18–22 June, SAIPED and CDJPR-ARU organized a joint training on conflict resolution and conflict mediation. It was attended by 15 participants.

CAR: 10–11 June, Conciliation Resources working with Mercy Corps organized a training of religious leaders.

BRUSSELS: Between 28 September and 5 October, representatives of the Regional Civil Society Task Force will be in Brussels to attend a joint advocacy event organized in collaboration with Pax Christi, Resolve, Invisible Children and EURAC to support EU engagement in the LRA affected region.

About our network...

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

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 developpement Communautaire*, CAR

SAIPED – *Solidarité et Assistance Intégrale aux Personnes Démunies*, , Dungu 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 in support of local partners since 1997.

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Next Edition: Understanding grassroots resilience – civil-society experiences in LRA affected states



SAIPED-RDC



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