

Regional strategy to address the threat posed by the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army

**Conciliation Resources' comments on the Draft, 13 April 2012**  
**Annex – SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

Conciliation Resources and the Regional Civil Society Task Force, composed of civil society organisations, religious and traditional leaders from areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), welcome the development of a regional strategy to address the threat posed by the LRA.

This document is a contribution to the new strategy; we hope its content will support the development of a comprehensive approach combining political, mediation, security, humanitarian and developmental efforts.

*"This volatile place is not a project. It is our home. That is why we will never accept anyone closing the door to peace through dialogue."*

Norbert Mao, Politician, Uganda

**Part 1: Comments on the overall draft regional strategy**

1. **It is irresponsible to intensify military operations in a midst of a humanitarian crisis.** Every actor involved in the LRA-affected areas – be they military, humanitarian or human rights actors – agree they are unable to access most of the areas affected by the conflict, the delivery of aid is insufficient to respond to the needs of the population and the challenges are many.
  - a. Any strategy to address the LRA threat should start with a clear, specific and detailed civilian protection strategy.
  - b. The presence of military actors on the ground, with the support of UN peacekeeping troops must be focused on civilian protection through patrolling, engaging with communities, and preventing abuses through pro-active and strategic deployment. Increased CIMIC capacity is essential and using the Joint Protection Team (JPT) model could improve civilian protection.
  - c. The LRA is composed of forcibly recruited children, abducted women and girls, who make for a majority of civilians in their ranks. A military intervention cannot discriminate between civilians and combatant, the latter themselves being largely victims. Such action therefore will result in the loss of life of innocent victims and increasing the risk and therefore fear from LRA abductees to escape.

*"Anybody who knows anything about the LRA should have first planned for civilian protection. [...] This is because the pattern of their attacks is clear. When they are attacked, they strike against soft targets connected with those attacking, or to capture international media and divert attention."*

2011, County Commissioner, Western Equatoria State

2. **A comprehensive strategy to address the threat posed by the LRA needs to be two-fold: (a) A short term strategy to ensure civilian protection, humanitarian access and the provision of services to the population. (b) A mid-term strategy focused on political, development and peacebuilding c) Phased engagement of military action to coincide with peacebuilding activities may successfully link short term activities with longer term strategies.** The principal cause of the violence and civilian insecurity is the presence of the LRA. However, the LRA is not the only threat and a comprehensive strategy needs to incorporate all the dimensions of the conflict: the incapacity of the States to fill the security vacuum, the political tensions between the countries in the region, which fuel insecurity, resentment and create the conditions for LRA presence.

a. **In the short run.** Civilian protection can only be ensured through:

- (i) Prevention: The deployment of civilian and military patrols, building the capacity of local security forces to respond to civilian needs.
- (ii) Protection: Strengthening Civil Society Organisations' (CSO) responses and local government capacities to respond to civilian protection needs. JPTs and CIMIC community liaison.

b. **In the medium to long term.**

i) The political dimension of the conflict needs to be addressed, in order to encourage dialogue within the countries affected, prevent hostility and competition between their military forces (and in the case of DR Congo, within the military forces), encourage governments in the region to take the LRA threat seriously and engage pro-actively in seeking solutions.

ii) Dialogue with the LRA: Recognising that communication with protagonists to a conflict is never premature; Efforts should be made to open communication channels with the LRA should be kept open. This could, for example be carried out with LRA mid-level commanders and support the return of LRA abductees through DDR. The UN and AU should develop a strategy to re-establish informal contact with the LRA commanders through civil society actors and international peacebuilding NGOs.

iii) Establish a panel of experts or mandate the AU Panel of the Wise to investigate the LRA's support networks within and outside the region and recommend appropriate actions. The panel of experts should also establish and recommend actions that will reduce the outstanding bilateral political issues that fuel and sustain the conflict with the LRA as well as providing essential diplomatic and political clout with the key actors involved.

iv) Development of infrastructures in the LRA-affected areas, communications, road and service delivery will contribute to reduce the suffering and vulnerability of population living in remote areas; this will also increase humanitarian access and the provision of services including protecting the population through the deployment and patrolling of the army and peacekeeping forces.

3. **Intensifying the military operation will threaten the impact of the work done by the UN, civil society organisations (CSO), and international agencies and is likely to increase the distress of the population.** The United Nations has been innovative and responsive in developing non-military responses to the conflict despite a very challenging environment. The child protection focal points, the radio network, DDRRR programmes among others have contributed to pave the way for a peaceful end to the conflict and the reinsertion of victims. However, lessons need to be learnt from the challenges faced by each of these programmes.

- a. Recognise the challenges met in current programming (child protection, DDR, radio programmes). Principally access, information, sustainability and develop an inclusive strategy to enhance the impact of current projects through the involvement of local actors, capacity building and improving access to remote areas through working with local and regional networks.
- b. The current military strategy and the absence of a legal framework and mechanisms for a safe return in the LRA affected areas reduces the likelihood of voluntary return, increases the control of the LRA leadership on their members, and increase fears of return.

*“What will happen if the military intervention does not succeed? What will happen if there is another massacre and mass kidnapping? Who is responsible?”*

31 March 2012, Father Ernest Sugule, community leader, Dungu, DR Congo

## Part 2: **Comments on the draft strategic goals and objectives**

The special envoy to coordinate the AU Regional Cooperation Initiative (RCI) against the LRA has an important role to play to understand and address the root causes that sustain the conflict system and improve the engagement of States actors in the Regional Strategy. His role and mandate should be clear and include political dialogue at several levels including with mid-level LRA commanders.

While the LRA is a primary cause of instability in the region it is unfortunately not the only cause. More emphasis should be put on recognising the nature of the issue and therefore develop a multi-pronged approach to addressing it, including working on governance issues, building the capacity and the professionalism (including training, logistics support, pay and conditions) of local security forces to insure the protection of the population and promote dialogue between the affected countries.

Despite the international attention on the issue caused by media coverage, it is crucial to learn from past strategies, be accountable (with civilian oversight) to the population of the affected areas and prevent further violence. A timeframe of the strategy would be useful to ensure civilian protection is the priority, give space for DDR programmes and make sure all components of the strategy are put in place before further use of military force.

While the draft strategy highlight the importance of child protection mechanism, very few mention are made of the experience of **women who are the primary victims of the conflict** and deserve to play a more important role in the design and implementation of the regional strategy along the lines of SC resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

The inclusion of a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to the strategy is very relevant and will prove useful to review its impact. It provides an opportunity to include local communities and their representatives (i.e. CSO and local authorities) in review and monitoring of the strategies in order to improve accountability and civilian protection. The Panel of the wise of the African Union is well placed to provide support, engagement at several level and high quality evaluations.

### **Special envoy**

1. It is encouraging to see that the RCI-LRA and more particularly the Special Envoy will engage politically at the highest level on issues related to humanitarian and child protection response (OBJ 4.3).
2. However, the role should also include; leading on the political and governance aspects of the strategy, in particular: (i) engaging at a political level with the governments of the countries affected to obtain commitment on civilian protection and recognise the importance of the conflict. The DRC government is still refusing to recognise the presence of the LRA on its soil despite regular attacks and documentation about it. (ii) Engage with civil society in the region, with a view of working with them to establish channels of communication with LRA. OBJ 1.1.
3. (ii) A sustainable and peaceful end to the conflict can only be viable through reception of ex-abductees, their reintegration into communities and reconciliation. Establishing channels of communication and engaging in dialogue with LRA members, particularly mid-level commanders should also be included in the mandate of the Special envoy. OBJ 2.3.
4. (iii) Engage at high political level to support SSR initiatives and improve the accountability of the army to the local population – on the progress of the strategy especially on civilian protection.

5. There needs to be more clarity regarding the role of the special envoy as it is still unclear what level of engagement he will have with the armies in the region, the UN country teams, the various UN missions, the head of States and International governments involved on the ground. The role of the special envoy and its mandate will be instrumental in the success of the RCI-LRA. OBJ 1.2.

### **National armies**

6. We welcome the special attention paid to engaging with armed forces in the country affected and recognising the threat they can represent on the ground when not well trained, equipped and accompanied. OBJ 2.1.
7. While particular emphasis is put on the need for communication devices to improve coordination between the armies involved, it needs to be acknowledged that the biggest challenge to overcome for a regional strategy is the hostility of armies between each other and to some extent within themselves. This will require political dialogue within the institutions and between their governments with the involvement of the Special Envoy. OBJ 1.2.
8. Addressing the insecurity caused by national armies cannot be solely resolved by training but needs to include: national level reform (i.e. Security Sector Reform), bottom-up approach to SSR (i.e. community/CSO dialogue with the army, improving civil-military relations) to improve responses and accountability, understanding of expectations and communication. The UN/International actors to support systematic civil-military dialogue to improve the protection of civilians. OBJ 2.1.

### **DDR**

9. We welcome the particular focus made on DDR in the strategy, in particular the regional approach taken and the development of in-country provisions for a legal framework for returnees OBJ 1.3 and 3.1.
10. The harmonisation of the DDR strategy is a very welcome step toward a more regional and coherent approach. OBJ 3.3.
11. Intermediaries (host communities, local authorities, radio staff...) need to be included in the legal framework to protect those returning from the bush and those involved in the process. Inspiration can be taken from the initiative launched by the government of Western Equatoria to develop a legal framework. OBJ 1.3.
12. While military deployment and attention on the issue may increase defection, a military intervention will reduce the impact of DDR and increase fear among LRA defectors, reception communities and armed actors involved. During military operations, LRA tightened their security therefore making it extremely difficult for anyone to escape with all the risks of being killed. OBJ 1.3 and 3.1.
13. According to sources in DR Congo there is currently willingness to disengage and leave amongst LRA mid-level commanders, this may be jeopardised by another military intervention.
14. It is necessary to involve CSO, religious and traditional authorities and their leaders in welcoming back returnees into communities, sensitise communities on the experience lived by abductees in order to prevent violence and revenge at reception. 3.1
15. Assembly points are a very good idea and could contribute actively to support return. They should not only be considered in the wake of a military intervention. 3.1

16. The development of SOP and a particular focus on the role of national armies in the reception and repatriation of former abductees is encouraging. On the ground, in areas where there is no UN presence or humanitarian access, it relies on the will of local army commanders, and training received by soldiers. More emphasis could be put on involving local CSO engaged in child protection to monitor and play a role at the local level, particularly, in areas where there is difficult access. 3.1
17. UN contingents also need to be systematically trained and sensitised on reception and repatriation of former abductees, as they sometimes are the only force in presence with the capacities to respond to protection needs. 3.1
18. The sustainability of DDR programme in an economic environment under stress largely relies on providing economic opportunities to ex-combatant and reduces their vulnerability to re-enrol. This should be the particular focus of DD3R programmes. 3.1.
19. The last point of OBJ 3.1. Is unclear. What does non-indicted means? Why making this distinction? Does the sentence imply a regional or international or country specific legislation? Will it cover all armed groups or only the LRA?
20. An assessment or mapping of the recruitment cycle is essential. Understanding how the LRA recruits and abducts must inform DDRRR strategies. Little or no attention has been spent on this issue, clouding the effectiveness of DDRRR

### **Working with Civil Society Organisations (CSO)**

In each objective, a particular attention should be paid to the role played by CSOs, local authorities and local actors. They are closer to the communities, understand the local dynamics, and have a deeper understanding and analysis of the conflict. Engaging with them is the only way to develop a sustainable and locally owned strategy. The UN/AU through the special envoy should create mechanisms for regular dialogue with civil society from the LRA affected areas.

21. We appreciate the focus onto civilian protection. However, to increase access to remote areas, improve the impact of the programs (Child protection focal points, DDR, SGBV), it is necessary to rely on local CSO, national and regional networks. 2.2
22. Also inform people on the ground, primarily affected by the conflict. OBJ 1.4.
23. The website should also include local voices such as the Regional Civil Society Task Force's (RCSTF) quarterly newsletter (available on <http://www.c-r.org/resources/voice-peace-1>) OBJ 1.4.
24. Include of CSOs in risk management strategies to reflect the knowledge of the people affected and benefit from their understanding of the contexts and vulnerabilities. 2.1
25. Liaising with local actors is important, however, the strategy should be clear on what needs to be done is include them in a systematic way into planning, assessment, coordination and implementation. OBJ. 2.2
26. While coordination is central to responding to the needs of the affected population, it can also be perceived as civilians taking part in military strategies. In order to clarify this point, you may want to mention the LRA working group focus is to enhance civilian protection and respond to the needs of the people. 2.2

## **Protection**

27. The deployment of UN staffs, particularly in DR Congo and Central African Republic (CAR) but also in South Sudan, is still very limited in term of coverage. What resources will be allocated to increase the level of coverage and access to remote communities, the most vulnerable? 2.2
28. The level of engagement of national armies toward civilian protection is very influenced by the behaviour of UN contingents. However, their lack of engagement with the communities (for various reasons including language, training), their sometimes-inefficient deployment and lack of response (i.a. 2011 LRA attacks in Faradje centre and Doruma) needs to be investigated and acted upon in order to improve civilian protection. OBJ 2.2
29. While these are unfortunate but isolated cases, what mechanism can be put in place to increase outreach, improve contacts between UN military and civilian personnel with communities and improve their efficiency to prevent violence. 2.2
30. The picture given in the Regional Strategy of current UN involvement is not accurate and under-emphasize the challenges faced on the ground. For example, while the UNICEF and UN focal point system for child protection is innovative, its implementation on the ground shows many challenges: access to remote areas, the most vulnerable, verification of data accuracy, building the capacities and training of those involved regularly, involving a wide range of actors to respond regularly and sustainably to the need for information, coordinated from Uganda while the conflict is now far away from its base. More resources, including human resources need to be mobilized particularly in a context where child protection actors monitor several conflicts (particularly in the case of DRC, but also CAR and South Sudan. OBJ. 2.2
31. The current review of the MRM by the UN will be very useful in revising the methodology and improving it in this challenging environment.
32. The LRA focal point system developed by UNICEF is responding to the regional nature of the conflict and addressing the need to collect data. However, more deployment of UN staff on the ground, better coordination with other actors including local CSOs will improve access and therefore a more accurate caseload. Capacity building and more resources invested in local actors will be crucial. 2.2

## **Regional Analysis**

33. The JIOC relies on the involvement and trust of actors working in the region (i.e. UPDF, FARDC, SPLA, AFRICOM...). Tensions between the armies have prevented it at times to have access to accurate information and analysis. OBJ 3.2.
34. In Dungu, the JIOC has benefited from including at times, local analysts who have a better understanding of local dynamics, the concerns of the population and the geography. This can prove a very useful and concrete contribution to joint analysis. OBJ 3.2
35. The last point highlights an important element, liaising with local actors. However, what needs to be done is include them in a systematic way into planning, assessment, coordination and implementation. OBJ 3.2

36. Cross border issues are on the increase. There are for example, lots of tensions in the area between Faradje (DRC), Aru (UG) and Yei (SS) territories and Uganda/South Sudan border area. These conflicts contributes to political tension between the governments of the region, undermines trust between the armies and need to be addressed. Current initiatives to deal with conflict arising from the LRA presence (land, natural resources, cross border, community, displaced/host communities) but also reflecting the complex nature of the issue (governance, development, security void) are underfunded are often the primary cause of suffering of the population in the LRA affected areas. 3.2
37. While human right is an important element to address, peacebuilding and long term recovery needs to be more comprehensive and include:
- Conflict prevention (between communities, cross-border, IDP/host communities, resources, criminality), which have aroused as a result of the violence.
  - The reintegration of former abductees, more particularly women and young girls into their communities and addressing the stigmatization they experience.
  - The need to build the capacity of local CSO to address the long-term impact of the conflict: psychosocial, development, protection, conflict prevention. OBJ 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4
38. Multi-actors approach is required to respond to the root causes of the conflict as well as its impact by involving CSO actors and International organisations with expertise on peacebuilding and recovery? OBJ 5.1.

### **Humanitarian response**

39. We welcome the plan to increase deployment in Haut and Bas Uele. It would be important to specify the nature of the deployment, peacekeeping troops, UN civilian personnel, and humanitarian access? OBJ 4.1.
40. If the UN steps in as regional coordinator of the humanitarian activities, more involvement with CSOs and local authorities will be needed in order to increase outreach to remote areas, access to information, information sharing and analysis. OBJ 4.1.
41. Discussion and strengthening, to include CSOs. OBJ 4.1.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and reporting (Section VI)**

42. Monitoring and evaluation is a very important component of the strategy and we welcome its inclusion in the strategic paper. However, monitoring and evaluation needs to be done separately from implementation and be inclusive of the communities affected by the violence. We recommend including CSOs in monitoring the impact of the strategy and contributing to responding to the challenges met and improves its outreach.
43. Regional CSO networks can contribute to inform the UN/AU on achievements on the ground, gaps and perception of communities at a regional level.

**The Regional Civil Society Task** (RCSTF) force is an initiative created in 2009 which regroup religious and traditional leaders and civil society organisations from South Sudan, DR Congo, CAR and Northern Uganda. They meet regularly to share information and experience on the LRA affected area, learn lessons from their programmes and formulate recommendations for policy makers. They publish a quarterly Newsletter, the voice of peace, to share their analysis on the conflict and give perspective to policy makers.



**Conciliation Resources** (CR) is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. Our East and Central Africa Programme has been engaged in LRA affected areas for 15 years. Conciliation Resources works with Civil Society Organisations in South Sudan, CAR, DRC and Northern Uganda.