

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

Conciliation Resources and RCSTF's comments on the Draft 13 April 2012

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 document includes an *EXECUTIVE SUMMARY* comprised of three comments on the overall *Regional strategy to address the LRA threat*. A set of *RECOMMENDATIONS* to the UN and AU and a summary of *INPUTS* on the strategic goals and objectives (1 to 5 + VI) from the Draft strategy.

Detailed comments on the *STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES* will be found in the annex.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is irresponsible to intensify military operations in the midst of a humanitarian crisis: Every actor involved in the LRA-affected areas – be they military, humanitarian or human rights actors – agrees 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.

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, DRRR 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 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 engagement.** 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 and resentment, and create the conditions for LRA presence.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO UNOCA AND THE AU

While we welcome the purpose of the strategy and the proposed objectives some issues for consideration can be drawn out from the general and specific comments above.

1. **CLARIFY HOW THE AU RTF WILL WORK.** Although issues of information gathering, training resources and air capacity are highlighted as severe shortfall, no overview of a plan, including addressing the lack of accountability mechanisms to address the profound problems of lack of professional behaviour on the part of the national security forces, structure of the force (including

command and reporting lines) has been produced. Furthermore no strategy for engaging with CSO's has been articulated.

2. **PHASE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY:** Despite the repeated use of civilian protection mechanisms, past regional strategies including the US LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009 have prioritised US LRA bill have always prioritize the military intervention and lacked concrete planning and objectives for the civilian protection, humanitarian and peacebuilding part. Before considering the further use of military force, prioritize civilian protections mandate and the deployment of troops and mixed patrols with a mandate to protect the population, abductees and open humanitarian access.
3. **INVOLVE THE AU's PANNEL OF THE WISE TO MONITOR THE STRATEGY.** To improve accountability and learning lessons from the past, we recommend involving civil society organisations in monitoring the impact of the regional strategy and reviewing its objectives and goals on a regular basis. This task could be given to the African Union's Panel of the Wise who are better placed to evaluate the impact of the strategy, engage with political and civil society actors in the region and formulate a report on progress made in the strategy. They could also be involved in addressing the shortcomings and providing support to the special envoy in its political mandate.
4. **INCREASE NON-MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF THE RTF:** Non-military activities such as CIMIC, DDRRR and community liaison should be prioritised. Civilian protection can be reinforced along the lines of MONUSCO's Joint Protection Teams (JPTs), with engagement with CSO's and community leaders and organisations to improve accountability and monitoring of the impact of the strategy.

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON THE STRATEGIC GOALS

- The **Special Envoy** 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 where possible. He should also have particular responsibility to engage, routinely, with civil society actors and community leaders, to ensure his mandate is implemented with accountability towards affected communities.
- 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.
- 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. Intermediaries (host communities, local authorities, radio staff, NGOs...) need to be included in the legal framework to protect those returning from the bush and those involved in the process.
- While military deployment and attention on the issue may increase **defection** (as is the case in DRC at the moment), a military intervention alone will reduce the impact of DDRRR and increase fear among LRA defectors, receptions 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. 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. 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- While the draft strategy highlight the importance of child protection mechanisms, very few mention are made of the experience of **women who are the primary victims of the conflict** and deserve to play a more prominent 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 and engagement at several levels as well as high quality evaluation.

The Regional Civil Society TaskForce (RCSTF) is an initiative created in 2009, which includes 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.