

# TESTIMONIES OF TERROR

This text will give you an understanding of what the people of Northern Uganda has been through. The testimonies and narratives will touch your heart as God ignites the natural compassion and love inside and you will understand the call of Pastor Onojobi, the task of project Gulu Child and your own call to express yourselves and emotions in this situation through partnership.

*The entire text and true stories contained herein are adopted.*

## THE CASE OF GODFREY

Godfrey lies in pain in the dressing room of St. Joseph's Hospital, in Kitgum Mission. I can see the terror in his eyes.



In the evening of May 30<sup>th</sup> [2003] the [LRA] rebels came to his home in Mucwini and subjected him to a most horrible mutilation which left him without ears, lips and fingers. It is the fourth such incident I have seen over the last month. His torturers wrapped his ears in a letter and put it in his pocket. The blood-stained piece of paper gave a strong warning to whoever wants to join the local defence



Master of terror

forces (LDU): "We shall do to you what we have done to him".

LRA abuses have mounted in 2003, and its practice of mutilating civilians as a warning appears to be making a tragic comeback.

The numbers and rates of its other abuses in northern Uganda have

increased from the late 2000-early 2002 period, in which the LRA stayed mostly in southern Sudan. According to the ARLPI, from June to December 2002 the LRA conducted 456 attacks and forty-three ambushes; killed 539 civilians and 122 UPDF soldiers; and seriously injured at least 114 civilians and twenty-five UPDF troops-in two of northern Uganda's three Acholi districts (Kitgum and Pader).

The ARLPI reported that at least 2,611 civilians were abducted in 2002 from Kitgum and Pader, of whom three-quarters were children. At least 870 people escaped or were released within several weeks. One of every two returnees was an adult, leaving most of the children remaining with the LRA. These numbers do not include Gulu district and cover only six months.

In addition, the LRA burned at least 1,946 houses and 1,600 storage granaries, looted at least 1,327 houses, 116 villages, and 307 shops; stole or



## *Face of sorrow*

looted 991 goats, 1,335 chicken, and burned or looted at least 130 bicycles, and attacked eighteen schools and five clinics in those two districts.

A number of attacks, including abductions, in Kitgum and Gulu municipalities illustrated the fragility of safety, even in towns. A local NGO representative told Human Rights Watch about an LRA attack on Pece, in Gulu municipality, on New Year's Eve 2002.

The rebels abducted children from this neighborhood. Thirty people were abducted and the adults returned. People raised the alarm at the nearby army barracks but there was no action taken by the UPDF. The children did not return. In most LRA attacks, the rebels did not appear to expect resistance or counterattacks by the UPDF, according to eyewitnesses from the Catholic Church of Uganda. This

suggested to these eyewitnesses and other residents that the LRA attackers were not afraid of being intercepted by the UPDF. It heightened the residents' sense of insecurity.

### **ABDUCTION AND ABUSES AGAINST ABDUCTEES**

*That night, the LRA came abducting people in our village, and some neighbors led them to our house. They abducted all five of us boys at the same time. I was the fifth one. . . . We were told by the LRA not to think about home, about our mother or father. If we did, then they would kill us. Better to think now that I am a soldier fighting to liberate the country. There were twenty-eight abducted from our village that night. . . . We were all tied up and attached to one another in a row. After we were tied up, they started to beat us randomly, they beat us up with sticks.*

Martin P., abducted in February 2002 at age twelve. *What did I do with the LRA during my time in captivity? Killed people, beat up people, and looted property. This was under order from the commanders.*

James K., abducted in May 2002 at age sixteen

Conservative estimates place the total number of children abducted by the LRA since the beginning of the conflict in 1986 at more than 20,000. The abducted children who survive deliberate killing and disease are



brutalized, are forced to serve the LRA army as conscripts and sex slaves, and are forced to commit crimes

themselves.

After the LRA's retreat to Sudan (and absence from northern Uganda) following the Ebola outbreak in Gulu in late 2000, abductions sharply decreased, but this was only temporary. The abductions increased dramatically when the LRA returned to Uganda in mid-2002 and since then have been at the highest rate ever. An estimated 8,400 children have been abducted in the year of June 2002-May 2003- more than any previous year of the conflict and a sharp increase from the less than one hundred children abducted in 2001. For the entire period of 1990-2001, UNICEF says that 12,000 children were registered as abducted, making more than 20,000 child abductees. Based on reports from local volunteers, the ARLPI reports that in the period starting in 2002, children account for approximately three of every four abductions. UNICEF states that in the year 2002, 3,927 children between ages five and seventeen were registered as abducted in Pader alone, one of the three districts in northern Uganda. Children are most vulnerable to abduction at night, when the LRA carries out raids on villages and camps, looting, burning, and abducting. Attacks on schools and boarding

schools have increased. In June 2003 the LRA attacked a Catholic mission boarding school, the Rwala Girls Secondary School, outside of Soroti, the capital of Soroti district in eastern Sudan. It kidnapped twenty-nine girls, the youngest age twelve. The LRA chopped off the fingers and toes of one girl who tried to escape, but the others were not deterred. Most girls escaped but six were still missing as of June 25.

There is a recognizable change in the system and consequences of abduction and abductees since the return of the LRA to Uganda in June 2002. The number of people abducted to carry loot is increasing, yet the majority of the adult abductees-some 2,000 from June 2002 to early 2003-are used as porters and released by the rebels. More children manage to escape than before, due to the forced mobility of the rebels-a result of encounters with the UPDF. Frequent movements also meant that the new recruits received less military training. Most captives were not taken to now-abandoned camps in Sudan (where they were trained before), but were kept with LRA units in Uganda-and the familiar surroundings made it easier for abductees to escape. UNICEF estimated, based on interviews with escaped children, that some 500 abductees were taken to Sudan in 2002-a far smaller proportion of the abductees than previously.

**M**ore boys than girls apparently have been abducted since June 2002, in a ratio of about two to one. The children who are abducted are

younger than before. A priest familiar with LRA abuses in the north referred to cases where children aged twelve and older were sent back home by the LRA. "They want younger children, those whose minds can be transformed in a matter of weeks

The director of the World Vision rehabilitation center for former LRA child soldiers in Gulu told Human Rights Watch, "Now, children of twelve and thirteen are being abducted. It used to be thirteen, fourteen or fifteen children of fifteen and sixteen being released. [The LRA is] more interested in the younger ones."

These abductions have a terrible impact even on those who are not abducted. Thousands of children still live at home, but fearing LRA abduction, travel into the towns, Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader, nightly from surrounding areas to sleep on verandas, in the bus park, on church grounds, and in local factories before returning home the next morning.

These children are known locally as "night commuters." In early February 2003, more than 1,000 children were sleeping each night in Gulu town, and about 3,000 people, the vast majority unaccompanied children, sought safety at Lacor hospital outside of Gulu. By May 2003, the number had tripled, to 13,400 children staying in six buildings in and around Gulu, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Gulu.

Adults usually stayed in their homes to protect their property during LRA raids. Adults abducted by the LRA are

generally kept for short periods to help carry the looted goods, and then released. For children who are abducted, captivity can last for years. Re-abduction is not uncommon, and the World Vision rehabilitation center for former LRA abducted child soldiers



in Gulu reported that since 2000, at least eighteen children who passed through the center were re-abducted and escaped for a second time.

Mark T., seventeen, from Pader district, has an older brother named Julius who had been abducted by the LRA several years ago. After Julius escaped in 1997, the LRA went to his village to look for him and when they failed to find him, killed his parents instead. Julius was re-abducted in August 2002.

Preadolescent girls are among the favorite LRA abduction targets; the LRA believes these girls are free of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). They are subjected to continual beatings as servants of LRA officers and soldiers after capture. When they are deemed sexually mature, they are "given" to LRA officers as "wives." (See below)

Susan A. was abducted in October 2002 when she was twelve. She was returning from her grandmother's house with her older sister at about four in the afternoon when they met a group of eight LRA men. They beat her older sister badly and left her on the roadside. "They wanted to know where the gumboots (rubber boots)

were, but she wouldn't tell them," Susan A. said. As they moved through the bush with Susan A., the LRA abducted more children, including an eleven-year old girl whom Susan A. knew.

Janet W. was also twelve when she was abducted in late November 2002 together with two of her sisters. At another house, the LRA abducted four boys, perhaps thirteen or fourteen years old, and then proceeded to the home of Janet W.'s uncle. There, Janet W. and her sisters found that their father had also been abducted. The LRA tied the young abductees together and gave them loot to carry. Janet W. reported, "Thirty-two were abducted from the village, both children and adults. I was the youngest, at age twelve."

The following day the LRA beat the adult captives, among them Janet W.'s father, whom they left for dead. They "told the old people, including my father, to lie down on the ground. They started beating them with a machete. They cut him badly and left him there." Later, she heard that her father managed to survive and reach home. Of her two sisters, one was eventually released; the other is still in captivity.

Children are often taken in large numbers. John W. reported that thirty-eight children, mostly boys and girls in primary school, were taken when he was abducted in July 2002. Martin P. was taken with twenty-eight boys from his village in February 2002. Grace T. said that in July 2002, she was abducted with seven other

children, but soon joined a larger group of at least seventy new abductees.

Children and adult abductees are repeatedly told they will be killed if they try to run away. When Edward T. was abducted from his home in July 2002, he was tied to other abductees and forced to carry a large bag of *posho* (maize meal) on his head. "I kept thinking that I would run away as soon as I could, but then I saw someone who tried to run, was captured and killed. He was shot. After I saw that, I was afraid and realized I may never be able to run away."

A day or two after their abduction, the adults and children not released or killed by the LRA are initiated. First they are beaten, purportedly to



"harden" them to life as soldiers.

Thirteen-year-old Martin P. was told by the LRA that

"they were beating us to give us strength, so not to fear what would lie in store for us in the future."

Children were warned not to cry during the beatings or they would be killed. Sixteen-year-old John W. was beaten together with fourteen others; a fifteen-year-old boy in his group cried out. That boy was clubbed on the back of the head and killed.

Seventeen-year-old Mark T. described how the LRA soldiers beat the group of twenty-three new recruits:

They gave us 150 strokes of the cane, and eight slaps with the machete on the back. . . . For the cane

we were made to lie on the stomach and then the soldiers would beat us on the buttocks. . . .



*Kony's Child Warrior*

For the machete, we were made to bend over at the waist, and then the soldiers would use the blunt end of it to beat us on the back.

Grace T. told Human Rights Watch that after she was abducted in July 2002, the LRA told her and the other abductees, "Now we want to train you to be soldiers, but first we must harden you by beating you twenty strokes." This sixteen-year-old was abducted with two of her sisters and a younger brother, age fourteen. She said they were all stripped naked in preparation for beating.

One of Grace's sisters asked to put on her clothes before being beaten. The LRA threatened to kill her. Grace T. and her other sister and brother pleaded for her life, offering to serve as LRA soldiers willingly. All were then beaten on the back repeatedly (not just the twenty strokes promised), first with a stick, and then with a machete.

After the beatings, a ritual usually took place. Children were smeared with shea nut oil. The oil was placed on each child's forehead, chest, back, hands, and feet in the sign of the cross. Brenda O. explained what this meant: after being smeared with oil, "then you are no longer with your

mother and father, but for the LRA. If you leave, they will kill you." Some abductees were told or believed that the shea nut oil would make it easier for the LRA to find them should they try to escape. Samuel B. said that when he was anointed with shea nut oil, he was told "that it would make us not escape, for if we would try, this would help them track us down and find us."

### **BRUTALITY**

*Early on when we were captured, the LRA explained to us that all five brothers couldn't serve in the LRA because we would not perform well. So they tied up my two younger brothers and invited us to watch. Then they beat them with sticks until the two of them died. They told us it would give us strength to fight. My youngest brother was nine years old.*

Martin P., age thirteen

Many of the abducted children and



adults interviewed for this report were forced to assist in the killing of others, often children and

even relatives. Those made to participate in the beating or trampling of fellow abductees received a powerful message about their fate if they attempted escape.

The practice of using the recently abducted children and adults to

collectively kill fosters guilt and fear among them and acts as a deterrent from attempting escape. These brutal and dehumanizing tactics-used to control the children especially-make their personal rehabilitation and reintegration into their home communities that much more difficult. Many former captives interviewed by Human Rights Watch, if not forced to participate in crimes, were forced to watch helplessly the beatings, tying of abductees, killings, abductions and slaughtering of others, their closest relatives.

Robert O., a twelve-year-old Opit camp-who was in early staying in Gulu town for safe abducted in July 2002 and forced to watch the LRA kill his mother in front of him. A fourteen-year-old boy and his younger brother abducted on August 19, 2002 were forced to watch when the LRA killed their father. "We were forced to watch other captives to be killed with bayonets. You were not allowed to turn your head [away]." A twenty-year-old woman, abducted in March 1996 by the LRA from Pabbo in Kilak County, was held by -or "stayed with," as the ex-captives describe it-the LRA for more than six years. She was forced to kill four people with sticks, and was threatened that if she refused to kill them, she would be killed herself.

Some of the children, while too afraid to refuse the orders of the LRA, nevertheless spoke later with difficulty about performing these killings. They feared the spirits of the dead children and possible revenge.



They had recurring memories of the brutality they were forced to perform. James K. told Human Rights Watch:

[A] group of children escaped. Two girls, aged fourteen, were [re]captured. They were given to the group of child abductees and we were told that we must kill them with clubs. Every one of the new recruits was made to participate. We were warned that if we ever tried to escape, we would be killed in the same manner.

According to seventeen-year-old Samuel B., he was spared from killing personally-but he was forced commit another reprehensible act: to mutilate the corpse of a boy beaten to death by other child abductees, because the boy had tried to escape. "One time I was ordered to cut up a dead body with a knife. I was then forced to pick up the pieces of flesh and throw them down on the ground to show my loyalty."

Mark T., also seventeen years old, spoke of one death by trampling, also administered by new recruits under orders, which occurred when the abductees were marching towards Pajule in Pader district. The eighteen-year-old male victim had tried to escape. Mark T. said, "Soldiers laid him on the ground and told us to step on him. All the new recruits participated-we trampled him to death."

During his time with the LRA, other children escaped, and seven of these

were caught. They were all killed, either by or in front of the other young abductees: "Two were hacked to death with machetes and five were clubbed or trampled. We were either made to participate or watch the killings. The youngest recruit killed was maybe nine or ten years old."

Edward T., age eighteen, was with the LRA for six months and during this time "many abductees escaped." Not all succeeded. One boy tried to escape and was caught, tied up, and marched back to camp, Edward T. remembered. All the recruits from the various companies were told that they were never going home, that they were fighting with the LRA, "so as a symbol of our pledge to fight on, this boy would be killed and we would help."

The LRA soldiers who gave the orders then laid the boy on the ground. The soldiers stabbed him three times with a bayonet until the blood began seeping from the wounds. Then we new recruits approached the boy and beat him on the chest, each one had a turn and could only stop once the blood from the body splashed up on to you. This boy was sixteen years old. We were beating him with sticks, each recruit was given a stick.

Murder was not the only crime the abducted children and adults were forced to commit. Alet O., a fourteen-year-old boy abducted in July 2001 with three other children from his household, was tortured and forced to show the rebels the way to other children to be abducted. He was forced

to burn people in their houses in retaliation when the children of the area escaped from the rebels. The LRA suspected that residents reported them to the UPDF.

In addition to caning at the time of initiation, LRA commanders and soldiers beat the children, often severely, for minor infractions committed while under their orders. The LRA also beat children to encourage them to march faster, including those wounded in the fighting, and sometimes killed those who could not keep up the pace. Others also spoke of the long marches and the hunger, thirst, injuries, and punishment that they suffered during those marches.

Sondra O. said that children who could not continue to march, or who stopped to rest, were killed. Three children in her group tried to stop because their legs were swollen and they had difficulty walking. "The LRA tied the children's hands behind their backs and ordered the others to beat them to death with sticks as big as my arm," she said. Later the LRA soldiers removed the victims' clothing and threw their bodies into a swamp. This happened as well to weaker and older adults who could not keep up the pace set by the LRA.

Christopher W., age fifteen, marched on bare feet, got bad blisters and an infection from thorns embedded in the soles of his feet. In addition to that, he was beaten when he fell behind. "Eventually, I could no longer keep up and the commander who had initially abducted me told me I was 'useless' as

I could not walk," he said. "Two soldiers, in full uniform, approached and started beating me with the end of their RPG's [rocket propelled grenade launchers]. I was repeatedly beaten on the head and body as if for dead. Two days later, a local farmer found me."

John W. confirmed that the LRA soldiers themselves would sometimes kill children who got blisters and could no longer walk. "Other times, the leaders would make the new abductees come and help with the clubbing. Those who refused, risked death themselves," he said.

In addition to killing those who attempted escape, abducted children and adults were also made to kill and beat civilians in the raided villages and displaced persons camps. Some expressed confusion as to why this was done and how some victims were chosen. James K. explained, "When we approached a village, some persons would be singled out. We were never told why these people and not others we were simply told that this one had to be killed."

Edward T. spent some of his time stealing from homes as well. When his LRA unit arrived at a village or camp, the soldiers would break into small groups. The officers would stay outside and send the recruits like eighteen-year-old year old Edward T. and fifteen-year-old Christopher into the houses to steal and bring the goods outside. "We would loot as much as we could carry and then move off together in a group." Sometimes LRA soldiers would attack the army detachments; if

the attack was successful, "when the shooting abated, we recruits would be given the all-clear sign and then break into the houses and shops."

According to children interviewed for this report, the weapons used for the beatings include sticks made from branches of trees, the butts of weapons,

and other instruments. Sixteen-year-old John W. explained that in addition to the cane, a piece of wire normally used for locking a bicycle was the LRA instrument used to punish him. Other times, the wooden end or the blunt side of a machete was used to beat the buttocks of a child. Soldiers beat John with both during his seven months with the LRA.

Bonifatius O., a seventeen-year-old boy from Koro Abili in Koro sub county, explained that he was kept tied with ropes to several other children after LRA Commander Opio's forces abducted them on September 4, 2002: "You have to do everything together, when one needs to pee, all need to go with him. They always tied five of us together. When we were attacked they told us to lie down." He was injured in a UPDF helicopter gunship attack on Lalogi on November 18, 2002. The LRA abandoned him in the bush because he could not walk any more. He managed to make himself known to villagers and was rescued. Children are often assigned as servants to individual commanders or soldiers and are charged with caring for their personal items. Any



lost or broken personal effect can mean a caning.

Charles M., only thirteen years old,



described the severe beating he received: I was nearly beaten to

death by my commander, Bukot, because of another officer in the LRA. Commander Bukot cut a branch from the [Cwaa] tree [that is good for poles for building houses], and shaved it down to a smooth pole, about two feet long. He then ordered me to keep it well for him to use.

The boy ran into trouble, however, when an officer from a different company ordered him to hand over the stick. "I could not refuse an officer," he said.

When Commander Bukot found out that I had given away his stick, he charged me with negligence and ordered 250 strokes of the cane. About half way through the beating, the pain became so great, I thought I was going to die. I lost count of the beatings and lost consciousness. Following the caning, I was forced to stand on my feet and had my arms tied behind my back, bound just above the elbows. I was told that I was going to be taken and clubbed to death.

Evidently, the commander felt that the caning was enough and the punishment stopped for the day.

Jules O., a sixteen-year-old boy from Pacong, was abducted by the LRA in June 2002, and was nearly killed after he accidentally got a tape wet in the river.

I had to carry a radio tape when we crossed the river in Kitgum. The tape got wet because the river was deep. When we reached shore, [the soldiers] shouted at me: "Why is the tape wet? We will kill you." They tied me with a rope and called other abducted children to kill me. Only because Commander Odiambo came and told them not to kill me, I was spared.

#### **LIFE IN CAPTIVITY**

*As we moved from place to place, we would have to sleep on the grass, under trees or in the sand. I had to fetch water, wash clothes and cook the meals. The "wives" would sometimes beat me or make me carry heavy loads. If I walked slowly, I was beaten. I was beaten practically every day.*

Susan A., age twelve

The LRA uses Joseph Kony's alleged spiritual power to keep its young captives in permanent fear. Kony, the LRA soldiers and officers say, is possessed by a strong spirit and his decisions are unpredictable. When he appears to switch personalities, it often has a traumatizing effect on abductees, who attribute this to his

omnipotence.

An abducted boy who "stayed with the LRA" for several years, mostly in Joseph Kony's headquarters in Lubanga-tek, southern Sudan, recalled with awe and fear:

He (Kony) is not a Muslim, or a Christian, he is his own religion. He can sit and then talk from very far away and give orders. And then he look at you and tell you. Everybody knows what you are talking about. Everybody is afraid of him. We all admired him. He promised us that he would take over the government and we would be able to live in houses and drive cars. We were forced to watch those who wanted to escape being killed.

Nobody wanted to escape then.

Another former LRA child soldier described his meeting with Kony and the LRA's promises: "We were told that the LRA will capture the country and Joseph Kony will become the president. We will by then be with him and become big people. I saw Kony once and we all knew that his spirit is very powerful, and we feared his power."

Phillip Lutara, head of the Concerned Parents Association, told Human Rights Watch about a Sunday religious service in a local church in Gulu district that reflected the fear not only of children but also of adults in northern Uganda:

The priest asked the congregation: "Who rules the world? The United States? God?

The rebels?"

The congregation answered in unison: "It is the rebels."

"When they are coming everybody, even the soldiers, are running. Everybody is helpless and in fear when the rebels come."

Children's main duties during their time in captivity are to perform domestic chores, often acting as servants. Children who were taken across the border into Sudan typically spent many hours in one place and were ordered to plant, harvest, and perform domestic chores for commanders' and soldiers' children.



Christine A. spent several years at a camp in Sudan. It seemed that most of the time she spent looking for water:

There was a big water problem, more of a problem than food. We would wake up around four in the morning and go out to search for water, sometimes returning home at mid-day. Some children became so thirsty they would drink their own urine for relief. Other times, we were unable to urinate our thirst was so great.

Fifteen-year-old Josephine M. said that in Sudan, "we worked from six in the morning until sundown in the fields of the commanders. We weren't given food from those fields, it went to the commanders and their `wives.'" Abductees who were taken in 2002 or 2003 and remained in Uganda led a much more nomadic life than they would have in Sudan. The children

held inside Uganda were tasked with portering goods, cooking, looting fields and homes, and abducting other children. Often moving to a new location daily, children described breaking into small groups during the day and often joining up with their larger units at night. Those interviewed for this report expressed their worry about being detected and attacked by Uganda government troops and complained about their exhausting, mobile lifestyle.

Sondra O. spent four months with the LRA in Uganda, marching many kilometers daily with a heavy load on her head: "I was given one and a half basins of beans to carry plus an empty water container, all on my head. It was very heavy and my neck caused me great pain, it still aches today." Christopher W., aged fifteen, explained that his main job with the LRA was cooking and watching the fires-and beating the women, girls and boys who let the fires grow too large. "The leaders would get very angry if too much smoke was coming from the fires as this could attract enemy aircraft," he explained. "If I didn't do my job well, I risked being beaten myself."

Thomas O., fourteen, was made to carry a crate of soda that belonged to the officer to whom he was assigned. He accidentally broke a soda bottle. "I was tired from the long marches with the heavy crate of drinks on my head and at one point I slipped," he said. "It was very hot, I was thirsty, and we had marched for many kilometers. I lost my balance and the crate fell to

the ground." One of the bottles broke. The commander forced the fourteen-year-old to lie down, and caned him severely for the accident.

The children serving in Uganda had the additional responsibility of abducting new recruits, often while looting villages and camps. Thomas O., who was with the LRA from August until December 2002, never went to Sudan but stayed in Uganda, mostly moving around Pader district. "During our time, we abducted more people, even girls were abducted in Lira district. We abducted them during a looting raid on a village there." He added that a few days later, three of these girls were released. Fifteen-year-old Matthew A., who spent four years with the LRA, said while in Uganda he had to abduct children. In four months, he abducted four girls and seven boys during raids. When he was responsible for choosing new recruits, he would ask questions, he said. One time he released some children. "I didn't like to take two children from the same house, so one time, I took one sister and left the other."

### **TRAINING AND BATTLE**

*I was scared. There were many bullets fired. I dropped down for safety, but could see the tree leaves falling from the bullets. . . I didn't shoot, but six rebel soldiers and many abducted children were killed. Over twenty children died. I was running for safety and had to jump over many of the bodies. The youngest was about twelve.*

- Grace T., age sixteen

Antonio E., a fourteen-year-old boy, told Human Rights Watch, "There was promotion for killing in the LRA, if you killed somebody you would gain status." To gain further status in the LRA children were encouraged to go to the frontline in exposed positions.

Like their other responsibilities, the nature and duration of the military tasks assigned to children changed

once the LRA moved back into Uganda. Most children who were abducted before 2002 and spent time in Sudan were given a longer, more formalized training program and fought in the front lines, in Uganda against the Ugandan army and in Sudan against the Sudanese resistance movement, the SPLM/A.

Since mid-2002, training for new recruits has been more sporadic, although the numbers of new recruits increased dramatically to 8,400 abductees in the year from the time when the LRA returned to Uganda, June 2002. Some of the youngest were not trained at all. Others were given minimal training but no weapons or uniforms.

While only a few of the former child soldiers interviewed admitted active participation in hostilities against the UPDF, the majority faced battle conditions and some were wounded due to their proximity to the fighting.

Matthew A. recalled that during his military training, the recruits/abductees were divided into groups of fifty children, both boys and girls, the youngest in the group being age eight or nine. In training lasting

several weeks, they learned to march in formation and parade and were taught to shoot, clean, and assemble and disassemble sub machine guns that held a magazine of thirty rounds. These weapons were large, heavy to carry and not easy for the children to use at first. "If you made a mistake, you were severely beaten," he said.

Edward T., during his six months with the LRA in 2002, received hasty training while the troops were on the move inside Uganda. The training was in "foot drill" and "how to fire, but I never shot a weapon in the training," he said. "[W]e would get one lesson here and another at the next place we marched to. We were drilled to work faster to load and dismantle the



guns as quickly as possible." Stephen A., age ten, was shown how to load, assemble, and clean a wooden-handled gun that could shoot many bullets at a time. He carried the gun for an adult soldier but did not use it in battle himself. Nevertheless, he reported, "it felt nice to have the gun. I felt safe." He was given a gun for purposes of looting, however. During a raid on a village, he was sent into one of the houses to loot. When he saw a man hiding inside, the youngster became confused and shot his gun in the air to warn the others. The LRA shot back at him before discovering the problem. "The LRA soldiers were angry and beat me with a machete."

Although Sondra O. received neither a

gun nor arms training, she was wounded in battle, as were so many LRA children. One morning, as the LRA with its captives crossed a road, the UPDF opened fire on them; they fought for several hours. "I saw seven people killed and I was shot in the leg. . . . Many LRA soldiers and captives alike were killed." James K. was wounded by a UPDF helicopter gunship attack only a few weeks after his abduction in 2002. He was among the lucky survivors: "Many abductees were killed as well as LRA soldiers. We were a group of 500 before the attack, with 400 of those abducted children and adults. Hours later only 200 had survived."

Most of those abducted prior to 2002 also were exposed to the dangers of battle inside Sudan—with the SPLM/A, the enemy of their patron the Sudanese government. Antonio E., who was abducted on January 20, 2000 with his brother and five other children, was based close to Nimule, Sudan, on the Nile near the Uganda border. "Our main problem in Sudan was fighting against the Dinkas [SPLM/A]," Antonio E. said. Peter O., abducted in the 1990s in Amoro County, Gulu district, was taken to the LRA camp at Luban tek inside Sudan, where "there were Arab soldiers of [Sudanese president Omar] Bashir. They came from Sudan to help us." He was wounded in the leg when on December 24, 2000, the SPLA fired at the camp. He received medical care in the Sudanese government garrison town of Juba and in the capital, Khartoum. His treatment was

"not so bad, but it was difficult since we were losing our friends and feared attacks by the SPLA, and they told us the UPDF would kill us if we would try to escape and run back to Uganda."

When Uganda started Operation Iron Fist, "Kony told us that we are on our own now and that we should fear the UPDF since they came to finish us," sixteen-year-old Peter O. said. He was one of 1,000 LRA troops and soldiers crossing back into Uganda via Agar on the Sudan border in mid-2002. "We did not face any resistance on returning. Commander Odhiambo was crossing with us. We stayed in Kitgum district in Palukal at the border to Karamojong."

The 1,000 split into five groups, and he ended up in one of the two groups under Commander Odiombo which moved into Gulu district while the other three remained in Kitgum district. When he saw his chance, he escaped and surrendered to the UPDF.



### ***Vives," and Mothers: The ce of Girls***

is only ten when she was abducted by the LRA. At age fifteen, she was forced to become a "wife" to an LRA commander. She gave birth to a child in the bush. The first, a girl named *Komakech*, which means "I am unfortunate." The second, a girl, she named *Can-Oroma*, meaning "I have suffered a lot." Girls have been abducted in large numbers by the LRA, although fewer girls than boys have been taken overall. Some girls are given military

training and forced to fight, to carry out raids on villages, and to help abduct other children. Most are virtual slaves, forced to work long hours carrying heavy loads, to walk long distances to fetch water and firewood, and to perform other tasks, including cooking and field work. At age fourteen or fifteen, many are sexually enslaved as "wives" of commanders and subjected to rape, unwanted pregnancies, and the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

After abduction, younger girls are assigned to commanders as *ting ting* (servants). They often begin work before dawn and continue until evening. Janet W. explained, "You must work all of the time. The moment you refuse to work, they will kill you or beat you to death." She, like other girls, was forced to carry heavy loads, fetch water and firewood, cook, wash, "dig" (farm), and tend the commanders' children.

The LRA appears to have a practice of not raping the prepubescent girls. This practice reportedly "saves" the girls from exposure to STD's so that when they are assigned to their "husbands" they are not infected. Age does not protect any girl from frequent beatings by LRA commanders or their "wives," however. Brenda O. was assigned to Commander Ochang. She said, in an understatement, "He didn't treat me very well." Daily he called her and two of the other *ting ting* to lie down and would say, "Do you know why I am beating you?" The girls never knew, so

"the soldiers caned us, fifty strokes. This happened every day. They beat us on the buttocks, but if you cry, they will beat every part of your body and not count the strokes."

Other girls described being mistreated by the commander's "wives," who are often abductees themselves who had been similarly brutalized. Charlotte W. told Human Rights Watch that Commander Okeny did not mistreat her, but that two of his six "wives" "would beat me every day for small mistakes, or for no reason. . . . Not a single day passed when I wasn't beaten."

After reaching puberty, girls are forced to become "wives" to commanders, often subjected to rituals beforehand to underline their subservient status. Angela P. said, "When I became a 'wife' I was smeared with shea nut butter and told my loyalty was to Commander Okello."

Forced into sexual relationships, many girls become pregnant and give birth in the bush, with only other young girls to assist them. According to one child mother, by the late 1990's, more than 800 children had been born to LRA "wives," and were concentrated at Jebelain camp in southern Sudan where she stayed for a year and a half from April 1997 until late 1998.

Many "wives" contracted STDs. A nurse at World Vision rehabilitation center reported that of the children entering the Gulu center in 2002-03, about 50 percent had STDs, including syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and pelvic infections. Two years earlier,

when returnees were more likely to have been in captivity for longer periods, the rate was much higher - nearly 85 percent. Children (girls) who are in captivity for shorter periods (which is the case for many recent returnees) are less likely to have been made into "wives" of commanders, and therefore less likely to be infected with STDs.

The prevalence of HIV among abductees is unknown but can be estimated based on tests given in World Vision and Gulu Save Our Children Organisation (GUSCO) rehabilitation centers for former abductees that offer HIV testing to children in their centers. Former abductees are given HIV/AIDS education and counseling and then may choose to be tested or not.

At World Vision, eighty-three children have been tested, and thirteen seven boys and six girls.

The youngest of the girls were one has since GUSCO, of eleven between June



two were HIV positive. It was noted that those who choose to be tested are more likely to be at high risk of HIV infection than those who are not tested. Based on counseling they have received, most have assessed themselves to be at high risk, often because of repeated rapes by LRA commanders.

For many girls, becoming a "wife" brings some privileges. "Wives" often work fewer hours and receive better food. Once they have children, they no

longer participate in raids or fighting. Christine A. was given as a "wife" to Commander Okello when she was sixteen. She said that when she became pregnant, he was "very happy" and took good care of her. After he was killed in battle, however, life became more difficult. She said:

[T]hey start to treat you like a girl again and beat you. I was beaten severely and given less food. Sometimes I didn't have food for my baby. I had to work in the garden like a slave, beginning at 5:00 a.m. and coming back late in the evening. Unless you get another man, you suffer.

For Angela P., however, life was better as a ting ting or servant. She said, "As a 'wife,' I was beaten and sexually abused. As a ting ting, I was beaten twice; as a 'wife' I was beaten so many times I couldn't count."

In June 2002, as the LRA was crossing over from its former safe haven in southern Sudan into Uganda to elude the UPDF, the LRA released more than one hundred persons, including "child mothers" with their children, the elderly, and the sick. Christine A., released then with her two children, was told by the LRA that it "was coming (to Uganda) for battle, for real war." Local NGOs believe that mothers were released because their young children hindered the LRA's movements.

When Christine A. learned that she was being released after nearly ten years of captivity, she said, "I was happy because I knew I would come

back home and not suffer any more." The child mothers were sent to rehabilitation centers in Gulu with the LRA message that they should be "well taken care of." At least twenty of the child mothers were "widows"; their commander "husbands" had been killed in battle or died from disease. Many commanders did not want to release their "wives," however. During Operation Iron Fist, the LRA sent many of these child mothers to Alar, an LRA camp southwest of Gulu, which also tended many of the sick and wounded LRA soldiers. Christine A. heard from children who escaped the LRA later that the LRA leadership regretted the decision to release the child mothers, especially those with boy children. She was released with her two sons, who were ages three years and seven months at the time of interview, and was fearful that the LRA would come back for her. She had no relatives in "safe" towns so she felt she had no choice but to return to the village from which she was abducted. Although abduction is a traumatizing experience for all abductees, abducted women and girls suffer unique abuses and consequent problems. Whereas beating, torture, and maltreatment are the experiences for most people abducted by the LRA, rape and forced sexual slavery is inflicted on women and girls. While there seems to be a higher rate of acceptance back into the community for long-term female abductees as opposed to male returnees who spend several years with the LRA, the pattern is different

for mothers who have LRA-born children.

According to several Ugandan NGOs in Gulu working with returnees, the children born in captivity as a result of rape by one or several LRA soldiers are sometimes seen as unacceptable outsiders. According to the custom and kinship structure found amongst the Acholi people, the child belongs to the father and his family. Since the father in cases of gang rape is not known, or the father is an LRA rebel, the child may not be accepted by the mother's kin. Women who were married before being abducted are rarely accepted back by their husbands, who often fear their wives are infected with sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

Another factor that makes it difficult for women to return from captivity is that they are expected to conform to certain stereotypes of female behavior. Women captive with the LRA for years have become used to war, fighting, rough bush life, harsh conditions, and living with other fighters. At times they may have difficulty adjusting to traditional expectations of women. The twenty-two-year old former "wife" of LRA Commander Tabuley is one case in point, according to a woman responsible for following women's issues at Caritas: "She is a convinced LRA fighter and does not want to be here." Many women and girls find it hard to adjust to the life back home. "They know they are a burden for their relatives, they will not be able to go to school if they return with children, and they don't see any future

for themselves here."

### **ESCAPE/RELEASE**

*One night I was beaten terribly and then sent to sleep outside in the cold and rain. The next morning, at 5 a.m., I was beaten again and then sent to fetch water. My hands were swollen so I wasn't able to lift the jerry can onto my head. No one came to help, so I decided to pour out the water and throw the can away. I went into the bush. It was raining heavily so I stayed under a tree. When it stopped, I stayed in the wilderness, eating leaves. I spent three weeks there. One day I saw a road. I had no strength left and collapsed by the road. A hunter came and found me and carried me on his bicycle.*

- Ruth K., age twelve  
Despite the risk of death if caught, some children manage to escape from the LRA. Others surrender to the UPDF, or are released or abandoned when they become sick or injured. The number of children returning from the LRA has increased dramatically since early 2002. This is because the number of abductees was high during the period starting with June 2002, combined with the fact that the LRA stayed in Uganda where recent abductees have a better chance of escape; in Sudan the escape possibilities are limited. In 2002, more than 1,700 returnees, mostly children, passed through the



World Vision and GUSCO rehabilitation centers based in Gulu after escaping LRA captivity. More than 1,000 returnees (both adults and children) were assisted by the World Vision Children of War program in 2002, up from 263 returnees in 2001. GUSCO assisted 745 children between June and December of 2002, with the largest number of children -185- being brought to the center in December. Other children have undoubtedly gone directly home, without passing through the centers.

The ARLPI reported that 2,611 abductions were documented in Kitgum and Pader districts from June through December of 2002. At least 870, or one-third of those abducted, escaped or were released within several weeks of abduction. The ARLPI report also found that although children make up three-quarters of abductions, half of those returning are adults. It concluded, "A larger portion of children are remaining with the LRA." The children interviewed by Human Rights Watch escaped or were released from the LRA between May 2002 and February 2003. Half left captivity in December 2002 and January 2003. Some were released or abandoned after they were injured in battle or developed physical problems from the hardships of LRA life; the majority had to escape. Children look for opportunities to escape when they may not be watched, or during the confusion of battle.



Thirteen-year-old Martin P. escaped in

December 2002, when he and three others were looking for food.

I saw some *sim sim* (sesame) and told the others to go and collect it. They ran off and left me alone. So then I took off the gumboots I was wearing and left my gun and ran. I ran until I got to Amuru camp. I ran because life was bad with the LRA. I couldn't stand it anymore. I couldn't stop thinking about my brothers (whom the LRA killed).

Charles M., age thirteen, escaped during a battle with the UPDF. When a UPDF armored vehicle began firing, "the LRA fled in all directions. I fled then and fell into a swamp. I lay among the papyrus reeds. I could hear the fighting still going on, but I kept calm and didn't move at all."

He slept overnight in the bush and the next day went to the UPDF. Another young recruit said that his group returned from Sudan to Kitgum district in October 2002. He saw his chance and escaped: "When we were back in Uganda we killed daily, we attacked camps and villages all the time. Just after Christmas, they left me alone for a while and I recognized Guna Mountain, so I ran."

Mark T., seventeen, decided to run

after his unit carried out an ambush and killed the brother of an uncle with whom he had stayed in Kampala. "I realized that I had to get out. Killing all my relatives was bad. Better to try [and escape] and die than not try at all."

Some children are "rescued" by the UPDF during military operations. Often these are children who surrender to the UPDF or who are wounded in battle and left behind by the LRA, according to local NGOs critical of the UPDF for the way it has reported its military operations during Operation Iron Fist. "Those killed are called terrorists or rebels, and those who survive are 'rescued abductees,'" said one Ugandan NGO representative.

Some injured children are simply abandoned or left for dead by the LRA. James K., seventeen, was injured in an UPDF air attack near Lira in which many new recruits were killed and many left for dead, including older



LRA soldiers.

James K's legs were hit and there was no medical aid. At first he was made to retreat with

the LRA: This consisted in LRA soldiers beating him with a stick when he limped, and threatening to kill him if he did not move along. After they settled in one position, his swollen leg wounds began to ooze yellow pus. Still he received no medical aid. "I didn't know what to do and if I was going to live because my legs were hurting me

so badly. . . Finally, my wounds got so bad that they abandoned me in the bush. I was left there to die."

He crawled on his knees until he came to a dirt road where a cyclist passed and gave him a lift.

Thirteen-year-old Janet M. developed swollen legs from walking and was left at a woman's house. The woman was told to take care of Janet and that the LRA would come back for her. "They told her not to allow me to go home. If they found that I was taken home, they said they would either kill the woman or her family." The woman nevertheless gave the girl food and medicine, washed her clothes, and took her to the army barracks. Janet M. worried about LRA retaliation against this woman.

Julius Tiboa, director of the GUSCO rehabilitation center, said that children released by the LRA "are mostly sick and malnourished, children who could not be of help or significance to their efforts."

Children who are released, rescued, or escaped are usually brought to the nearest army detachment, transported to the Fourth Division army barracks in Gulu, and then to a special Child Protection Unit (CPU) managed by the army, where they are held for debriefing by army intelligence. If injured, the children might receive treatment at the local army hospital. Most children, particularly those only briefly in LRA captivity, are held at the CPU for periods of one to three days. Children with the LRA for longer periods, particularly as combatants, might be held several

weeks or more. In one case reported to Human Rights Watch, two children were kept for more than two months, reportedly because they were receiving medical treatment at the army hospital.

After debriefing, children are taken from the CPU to nongovernmental rehabilitation centers in Gulu, Kitgum, or Pader. Other children are brought to the centers directly by community members. At these centers, children receive medical care, including testing for STDs, counseling, vocational training, and other assistance. The centers help trace the families of abducted children and work with both the children and their families to reintegrate the children into their communities.

#### *THE FUTURE*

I'm not happy at all because they ruined me. I had to cut short my studies. I have no hope that I will one day be somebody. I gave birth to two children and was not prepared. I have two children and no means of survival. I worry about what will happen next.  
- Christine A., twenty, released in June 2002

For most abductees, release or escape does not end their ordeal. Most are fearful of re-abduction and few are able to return to their original homes because of the increased LRA activity in 2002-03. Many have siblings or other family members still in captivity. Girls and young women with children born in captivity fear they will not be able to support their children. Many bear physical or psychological scars.

Former LRA captives report that the LRA is registering all abducted children. Those who managed to escape greatly feared that the LRA would conduct revenge attacks on their families and communities, and that if they returned home, the LRA would come for them, abduct them again, and possibly kill them. This fear is reflected in a study by the ARLPI, the Peace and Reconciliation Commission Committee, and the Gulu Women's Desk. They found a strong correlation between length of time spent in captivity and fearing for one's life. Some 61 percent of those held by the LRA more than two years feared for their lives, while only 29 percent of those in captivity less than a year voiced that fear. That relationship was reversed on the issue of fear of re-abduction.



More than 50 percent of those fearing re-abduction had been in captivity less than one year, as opposed to 24 percent of those inducted more than two years. After escaping from the LRA in January 2003 Angela P. discovered that the LRA had killed her mother during a raid. Others find that their families have relocated to IDP camps or even other districts seeking safety from the LRA. Ruth K., age twelve, was abducted from Purongo, a "protected" village, in July 2002. Her family left the camp after her abduction and moved to Masindi district. Unable to join them, she planned to stay near Gulu and live with a cousin.

Many of the children worry about

brothers and sisters still in LRA captivity. One-third of the returned children interviewed by Human Rights Watch were abducted with siblings who are still missing. As described above, Grace T., age 12, was abducted in July 2002 with two of her sisters and one sister and the other two are still in captivity. Janet M., age twelve, was abducted in July 2002 with two sisters, ages ten and seventeen. One was released, but the other remains missing. Thirteen-year-old Martin P. was abducted with four brothers; two were killed by the LRA, one was killed by the UPDF, and one is still missing.

Most of the children want to return to school, but many do not feel it is safe at home. Charlotte W. said, "I want to go back to school, but I will stay with my uncle in town. In my home area, rebels are moving freely, so I could easily be re-abducted." Similarly, Janet M. said, "I want to go back to school, but I'm afraid the rebels will come for me." Because of these fears, she lives and studies in town with her uncle. Matthew A. feared that if he returned home, he would not be able to run fast enough if the LRA attacked his village: his leg was amputated after he was shot in a battle with the UPDF.

Representatives of Save the Children Denmark, which supports the GUSCO center, said that:

[T]he insurgency made reintegration difficult. Initially the idea was to have social

workers go out first and contact family members and the community, and then go back a week later. Then send the child out for one day, and then have the child come back for a longer period, a gradual reintegration period. But this has been disrupted. There is insecurity to the child, the family, and the social workers . . . The majority of returned children stayed in and around the municipality, or were sent to other districts.

Some children joined the "night commuters," the children who live outside Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader towns, and travel into town nightly, seeking to avoid abduction. Grace T. was abducted from Agwe, two kilometers from Gulu town. She planned to return to her family in Agwe, but then said she and her formerly abducted sister would go to Gulu nightly for safety. Grace T. said she was "afraid when I hear about the LRA, because now that I have been abducted, they might kill me." Returnees also suffer on-going physical and psychological problems. A nurse at World Vision identified gunshot wounds, skin problems from walking long distances, and sexually transmitted diseases as the major physical problems affecting returnees. She estimated that about 15 percent returned with gunshot wounds, and another 5 percent had shrapnel injuries. Fifteen children assisted by the center since 1996 have had limbs amputated. Another counselor at the center said that girls who had spent

long periods in LRA captivity were often missing hair on the tops of their heads from portering supplies. The same nurse also reported, "Almost all of them suffer from nightmares and flashbacks, especially those that were long in the bush. Some are quiet, withdrawn and don't want to talk." Susan A. told Human Rights Watch that she dreams that she is staying with her mother and that the LRA comes and abducts her. Many wonder about their future. Sixteen-year-old John W., now an orphan, said, "What disappoints me most is the future. Some seem to have things to do here, and a place to go, but for me, the future is blank. . . . What am I going to do?"

### Attacks on Schools

The Lord's Resistance Army established a routine of attacking schools throughout the 1990's and continued to do so after its 2002 return from Sudan. Many schools have been closed or displaced, and many families are reluctant to send their children to school, for fear of abduction. Because of the insecurity, many schools that are still open have reduced their hours of instruction so that pupils can travel to school after 10:00 am in the morning and return home before 3:00 pm, times considered safe.

In Kitgum and Pader districts, the ARLPI received reports of eighteen schools attacked between June and December of 2002. Schools have been looted and books and supplies burned. Teachers have been beaten, abducted, and killed during LRA attacks, and

children have been abducted. In August and September of 2002, children were abducted from schools in Lapole, and Akwang and Lukolu sub counties.

On July 12, 2002 the LRA raided Pader district. A U.N. assessment in Kalongo alone, 55 percent of registered by the not attending school. o sites hosting thirty schools, "all of due to insecurity." The ing the assessment believed that this "could be the tip of the iceberg in Pader district," where there were at least twelve camps for IDPs.

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minyai displaced primary school children. On July 12, 2002 the LRA abducted nine pupils and burnt down forty-five huts. On December 2002 the LRA abducted forty-two children at schools in Palenga Gudu, Gulu county, together with more than 100 other people. Again, on February 2003, the LRA abducted thirty children from Abung Primary School in Koch Ongako, and another eleven secondary pupils from Oxford School in Kitgum town. On the same day, another LRA group attempted to abduct pupils at Wii-Awor Primary School near Lacor Hospital in Gulu municipality. In early June 2003, the LRA abducted forty-one persons from a Catholic seminary school.



According to the Gulu District Inspector of Schools, nearly half of the district's schools - 116 of 234 - have been displaced due to the conflict and only 56 percent of primary school-aged children are currently attending school. He commented that education suffers in the absence of political stability:

Some parents are not sending children to school because they fear abduction. Some people are moving away from Gulu to go to safer areas, including teachers. In some areas, school instructional materials have been destroyed. The general management of education

becomes very difficult. Teachers complain that they are not effectively teaching.

Education took an even heavier blow from LRA-caused insecurity in the Pader district. A U.N. assessment in Kalongo alone, 55 percent of registered by the not attending school. o sites hosting thirty schools, "all of due to insecurity." The ing the assessment believed that this "could be the tip of the iceberg in Pader district," where there were at least twelve camps for IDPs.

### *LRA Abuses of Internally Displaced Persons: Attacks on IDP Camps and Food Convoys*

The LRA suspected those who moved to internally displaced camps, or "protected villages," of being against the LRA and for the government. It has at various times demanded they leave and has targeted these camps to punish people who remain. Targeting civilians is a gross abuse of customary international humanitarian law (rules of war) governing internal armed conflict.

The LRA communicated these threats to the camp population through letters left after attacks on the camps. In one communication of January 2003 to IDPs in Kora camp the LRA stated, "We know now that the people of Acholi want to stay in the [IDP] camps. We will come [to the camps] and kill you."

During an attack on Purongo IDP camp in Anaka sub county, Gulu district on June 29, 2002, the LRA killed seven civilians and abducted an unknown number of persons. LRA Commander Matata left a letter addressed to the sub county chief, to the local commissioner, and to the camp population, stating:

- (1) Don't stay in the camp. Museveni has put you in the camps to finish you and take over the land in Acholi.
- (2) We will kill everybody in the camp
- (3) There will be nobody left to bury the death (Golgotha) [sic].
- (4) Cdr. Matata is coming to



pick [up] 15.000.000 Ush [fifteen million Uganda n

shillings or U.S. \$ 9,000] from Olunya. Olunya is in hiding but we will collect the money.

- (5) We want peace talks. Traditional leaders (*Rwot Moo*), religious leaders of local council V, and other elders should be present.

A former abductee told Human Rights Watch that the LRA did not hesitate to kill people as a warning of what would happen to those who did not obey the LRA. Christopher W., age fifteen, said,

At one time, we went to a displaced persons camp and immediately killed three people.

This was done to warn people not to stay in the camps but to move back to their villages. I don't know why these three were selected. We later abducted many children from that camp.

Although the LRA warned people not to stay in the IDP camps, it ironically continues to kill people who have stayed in the villages as well. And it has spread fear and forced people to abstain from any movement by conducting ambushes on commercial and civilian vehicles. It has also ordered people not to use bicycles and not to travel along main roads, especially on Fridays and Sundays. One result of these attacks is the crippling of the northern Ugandan economy.

### LRA Attacks on Food Convoys and Malnutrition of IDPs

In response to the crippled economy, humanitarian agencies have undertaken to provide relief to the afflicted area of northern Uganda. But

LRA abuses against internally displaced persons extend to its attacks on humanitarian relief convoys. A crisis of great proportions has developed: the level of malnutrition of children in IDP camps is very high.

The World Food Programme has become the principal source of food assistance in northern Uganda-and its trucks and stores and delivery points are therefore frequently attacked and its beneficiaries way laid by the LRA. In Gulu and Kitgum districts, WFP relief food is subject to LRA looting after it is delivered.

In Pader district conditions are so unstable and insecure that the WFP (which has become the only provider of relief food for the district's needy population) can barely operate there. The U.N. OCHA reported in January 2003 that "Humanitarian organizations cannot access almost all IDPs in Pader District" as a result of insecurity. LRA military activity aimed at civilians and civilian transport and movement is not the sole cause of the desperate lack of food in northern Uganda. The UPDF has come in for its share of criticism by the agencies attempting to provide relief to the stricken population, for failure to provide adequate protection (including sufficient armed escorts for the relief trucks) and for limiting access of farmers to their fields. After a February 2003 assessment mission to isolated and congested camps in Pader district that had been cut off without any tangible humanitarian assistance due to fighting in the district, the WFP noted other factors that compounded the blockage of food deliveries: "inadequate coping mechanisms and a lack of access to the fields."

The child malnutrition rates among the IDP camp population of Acholiland-where 70 percent of the population is internally displaced were described as "alarming" by the WFP in early 2003. Its analysis of Ugandan ministry of health data showed that the global acute malnutrition rate for children under 5 years of age was unusually high: it

was assessed . . . to be between

16 and 23% (of the median) based on findings from 2 [IDP] camps in Gulu district. These figures are extremely concerning given that under WFP and UNICEF international standards, any situation where over 15 percent of children under five are acutely malnourished, blanket supplementary feeding should be immediately put in place to address the crisis and prevent an increase in the number of children affected.

The WFP put the findings in an



African context, noting that "above 10% is alarming for an African in-camp population" and

beyond 15% warrants a blanket supplementary feeding of the children according to the U.N. framework. A later survey by Action Against Hunger-USA (ACF-USA) conducted in April and May 2003 in two IDP camps near Gulu concluded that the chronic malnutrition rates for children under five was 41.4 percent, which represents a steady increase over the last six years for which comparable data is available. Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) for under five's was found to be 6.2 percent, not as high as in the January study, but for children between six and twenty-nine months, the GAM was 10.2 percent. Even more troubling was the Respective Mortality Rate (for three months in 2003): for the under five's,

it was 5.67/1,000, where 4/1,000 is considered an emergency for that group. This rate was the highest recorded in five years, and three times the usual observed rate in comparable figures. ACF-USA concluded, There has been no noteworthy epidemic in Gulu area that could justify the spike in mortality. There is thus a very serious possibility that children have simply died of hunger.

### LRA Abuses in Sudan and Sudanese Refugee Camps in Uganda

Since 1994, the LRA has been helping the Sudan government fight against the Sudanese rebel force, the SPLM/A, near the areas of Sudan south of Juba where the LRA was encamped at Sudanese government expense. The Sudanese government, pressured by the U.S. State Department's 2001 listing of the LRA as a "terrorist organization," reduced assistance to the LRA in 2001-02. Angered by the reduction of support by the Sudanese government and in need of food, the LRA attacked villages, killed civilians, raped, looted and burned property and displaced southern Sudanese-not only those believed aligned with the SPLM/A, as before, but also those living in the territory of the government.

With the beginning of UPDF Operation Iron Fist inside Sudan, LRA abuses against their southern Sudanese hosts increased. The LRA was forced to become more mobile as UPDF forces moved by the thousands into the mountainous and sometimes dense terrain near the Ugandan border in Eastern Equatoria. The LRA

attacked government-held villages southeast of Juba, and in the area between the Nile and the River Kit. Hundreds of people therefore fled north toward Juba, the largest town in southern Sudan, heavily garrisoned by the Sudanese government.

In April and May 2002, or perhaps as early as the alleged post-9/11 assistance cutoff, numerous units of the LRA also moved eastwards towards the Imatong Hills, south of Torit, looting, killing, and displacing civilians along the way. In April 2002 the LRA attacked Sudanese civilians living in the Imatong Mountains, reportedly committing abuses against women and children as well as men. The LRA destroyed the crops in the ground. The frightened civilians fled to Ikotos, some three hours away, and three IDP camps were created for this human flood. Many people returned to Imatong and rebuilt their destroyed homes, still leaving a large population in the IDP camps at Ikotos.

According to an OCHA report, the LRA displaced 1,800 southern Sudanese in July 2002 alone. Despite the displacement and insecurity of the population in Eastern Equatoria, however, the government of Sudan did not lift the flight ban, which it had imposed on the area in 1999, preventing the international relief operation, U.N.-led Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), from having any access to this area or its needy population. Reports of LRA attacks inside southern Sudan indicate that the LRA continued to be an active threat to Sudanese civilians in 2003, attacking

and displacing Sudanese families, killing civilians, abducting children, looting food, and destroying houses. On February 20, 2003 the LRA attacked the compound of Norwegian Church Aid in Parajok, a mostly



Acholi area of Eastern Equatoria, Sudan, killing one civilian male, injuring one child, and looting

the NGO compound. The attack occurred less than two days after a large delivery of medicines was made to this medical NGO.

### *LRA Attacks on Sudanese Refugee Camps in Uganda*

Sudanese refugees in Uganda continue to be targeted by the LRA, with three major attacks in 2002.

Many of these United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps for Sudanese are in the Adjumani district, west of Acholiland and near the Sudanese border.

The worst LRA attack of 2002 on refugee camps was the brutal onslaught on Achol-pii refugee camp in Pader district on August 5, 2002, where the LRA killed more than sixty people, and the more than 24,000 Sudanese refugees there dispersed into the bush and elsewhere, in fear. The LRA took hostage four aid workers from the International Rescue Committee (IRC), a humanitarian NGO, during the attack, although they were later released.

In other attacks upon returning to northern Uganda, the LRA killed five

Sudanese refugees and burned 126 houses in Maaji refugee camp in Adjumani on July 8, 2002, then returned for a second attack on the same camp three months later, on October 3, 2002, when LRA fighters killed several UPDF soldiers and burned another sixty-five homes. According to the March 2003 report on Sudan prepared by the Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict, the situation for Sudanese refugees in Uganda is problematic: the majority of Sudanese refugees in Uganda live in twenty-five designated settlements. The LRA has subjected them to many of the same abuses to which Ugandans are subjected:

The LRA and other rebels regularly attack [Sudanese] refugee sites. During raids the LRA injures, abducts and kills children and adolescents. . . .

Attacks have increased dramatically in 2002, since the LRA scattered in northern Uganda as a result of Uganda's Operation Iron Fist.

A large number of Sudanese refugees who fled the attack on Achol-pii refugee camp were relocated to Kiryandongo refugee camp in Masindi district in central Uganda, far from the Sudan border. The Kiryandongo refugee camp was established in 1996 for 13,000 Sudanese refugees fleeing Achol-pii camp after a 1996 raid by the LRA, in which one hundred refugees were killed, according to a Sudanese refugee leader interviewed by the press.

Following the next large LRA raid on Achol-pii, in 2002, some 16,000 Sudanese refugees from that camp

were relocated to the Kiryandongo refugee camp. This produced extreme overcrowding and deterioration of sanitary conditions. The Ugandan government, through its minister for disaster preparedness Moses Ali of the West Nile region, identified two locations in West Nile region to which it wanted the Achol-pii refugees moved. The UNHCR assessed the locations and sought to defer the decision to move the refugees, then said it thought the new locations in northwestern Uganda were too close to conflict zones and therefore not safe for the refugees.

The Ugandan government in April 2003 apparently expelled the resident representative of the UNHCR as a result of this disagreement, although Uganda and the UNHCR later denied that the UNHCR representatives had been expelled. The UNHCR's chief Ruud Lubbers told a news conference that the country representative would be "replaced" and the Sudanese refugees would be transferred to two locations in Uganda's West Nile region considered safe from rebel activity. In a letter of May 12, 2003, to the Ugandan government, Achol-pii refugee representatives reiterated that they could not move to West Nile because it is unsafe, citing an LRA warning to them not to cross the Nile again (the refugees have been on the East Bank of the Nile). They also cited a clash on May 8, 2003, between Sudanese refugees and locals at Koboko in northwestern Uganda, in which two refugees were killed and seventeen others were seriously

injured. The refugees also referred to ethnic animosity between them (most are Sudanese Acholi and Latuko) and the residents of West Nile as another reason they considered the locations unsafe. The refugees said they would rather walk back to Sudan than go to West Nile.

The UNHCR noted that the two existing Sudanese refugee camps in that northwestern region, Rhino and Mvepi, have never been attacked by the LRA, and have not been attacked by rebels since 1996, when the West Nile Bank Front (since disbanded) attacked. The UNHCR further said that the Ugandan government believes that the Nile, which is very



*Angella Atim at back hugs a friend*

wide in that area, is a barrier to the LRA entering northwestern Uganda, and that the Ugandan government also signed a

peace agreement on December 24, 2002 with the local rebel Ugandan National Rescue Force II.

On May 28, 2003, the LRA attacked a bus convoy going to Sudan on the western road from Karumba to Arua, via Pakuach, at Pajok II, a frequent

LRA target, to the south of the proposed refugee camps. Fifteen were killed and thirty-five were captured and taken away. This road, the main land route from West Nile to Kampala, is often disrupted by LRA ambushes and attacks. On June 17, 2003, the LRA attacked an orphanage run by the Catholic Church in northern Uganda, abducting fifteen children, twelve of whom were Sudanese refugee orphans. The UNHCR stated that the Ugandan government is firm on its insistence that the more than 15,000 Achol-pii refugees not already relocated from Kiryandongo-8,500 were moved to a camp in central Uganda, Kyangwalle- be relocated to the two sites in Icafe, Yumbe district, and Madi Okollo, Arua district in West Nile.

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