

## KEY MESSAGE: PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE

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- Two decades of conflict have perpetuated a severe humanitarian crisis marked by varying degrees of insecurity; the massive internal displacement of approximately 1.7 million people into more than 200 camps in the Acholi (Amuru, Gulu, Kitgum, Pader Districts) and Lango sub-regions (Apac, Amolatar, Dokolo, Lira, Oyam Districts); and violence affecting the lives of the most vulnerable populations including children and women.
- In close collaboration with local, national and international partners, we have continued to respond to the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable populations in the most disadvantaged districts. In addition to HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, the focus has been on the delivery of high-impact assistance in emergency health and nutrition, basic education, clean water, child protection and shelter.
- There is a need to provide a multi-sectoral envelope of security and protection to the most vulnerable children and women – physical security that would sustain a climate of confidence to allow boys and girls to stay with their families rather than be continuously exposed to the risk of violence and exploitation. It is the Government's responsibility to protect civilians, in particular children, against all forms of violence (including sexual violence) and to build a protective environment for children. The Government needs to ensure that schools are protected, health facilities are accessible and functioning, and communities are protected.
- The vulnerability of children and women is also exacerbated by conflict and poverty, and it is clear that any assistance provided to a population that is – for the most part – unable to return to the community of origin will be limited. It is our wish, and indeed the wish of the entire humanitarian community, that the situation of internal displacement is resolved as soon as possible, based on voluntary movement in an environment of peace and security. We are encouraged by the returns that are happening in Lira and Apac, and by the prospects for improving security as linked to the ongoing Juba talks, and hope that these will afford the opportunity for durable solutions to the situation of displacement.

## FAST FACTS

- Children and women comprise 80% of IDPs, and have been direct targets of attacks, sexual violence and abductions perpetuated by the LRA and others.
- Of the nearly 25,000 children abducted since the late-1980s, 7,500 are girls of whom 1,000 returned from LRA captivity having conceived and borne children of their own.
- At the height of the conflict (2003-2005), up to 35,000 children “night commuters” would walk to urban areas and centres of larger IDP camps each night. The period since February 2006 has seen a downward trend – currently at some 7,200 – due to improved security and ongoing efforts by humanitarian assistance organisations to shift the delivery of services from shelter sites to community-based support structures.

## QUOTABLE QUOTES

- ❖ “The conflict in northern Uganda again shows that tragically, children and women are the first casualties.”
- ❖ “All who strive for peace, tolerance and justice in northern Uganda must never lose sight of the best interests of the child. Whether it is a camp leader, a health worker, a teacher, a police officer, a district government official, a religious leader, a community leader, or a humanitarian worker – and yes, a Goodwill Ambassador – we as duty-bearers have a collective responsibility to the children. We must all be at the frontline of the effort to build a protective environment for all children in northern Uganda, and must recommit to our moral and legal responsibilities to all children in Uganda.”

- ❖ “We as humanitarians need to assist all those who want to go home by listening to the IDPs themselves, and to ensure that those who return will find the basic services they need once they reach home.”

## BACKGROUND: NORTHERN UGANDA

### THE CONFLICT

For 20 years, northern Uganda has been the scene of one of the most brutal civil wars in the world.

The conflict has displaced approximately 1.7 million, 80% of whom are children and women (935,000 children).

The conflict has been described as a ‘silent’ and ‘forgotten’ emergency.

### LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY (LRA)

The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) is led by Joseph Kony.

The LRA says it is fighting for the establishment of a government based on the biblical Ten Commandments.

The LRA is dominated by the Acholi ethnic group. When rebels initially began their quest to overthrow the Ugandan government in 1987, they had the tacit support from many Acholis, who complained of economic and political marginalization by the government. But as the violent armed conflict continued, civilian support waned. Then the LRA turned on villagers, raiding their houses for recruits and food – and killing or maiming resisters.

The LRA, has committed numerous, serious abuses and atrocities, including the abduction, rape, maiming, and killing of civilians, including children.

### IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN

Since the start of the 20 year conflict, the LRA has abducted an estimated 25,000 children, including some 7,500 girls, to serve as porters, child soldiers or sex slaves.

Many children who were abducted by the LRA were forced to become ‘kill or be killed’ combatants.

Children and young people in camps have been deprived of educational, recreational and livelihood opportunities.

### CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES AGREEMENT (CHA)

On August 25, 2006, the LRA and the Government of Uganda signed a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) as part of milestone negotiations mediated by the Government of South Sudan. Many Ugandans believe that these peace talks offer a real chance to end the war for the first time in 20 years.

The talks, brokered by South Sudan President Riek Machar, opened in Juba, Sudan in July 2006, but have gained new traction since the truce announcement. Substantial differences between the two sides' agendas remain, however, notably including outstanding International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrants for Joseph Kony and other LRA commanders.

On November 1, The Ugandan Government and the LRA renewed the August truce. This recent agreement gives the LRA an additional month to assemble in the designated areas. It guarantees security at the Assembly Points of Ri-Kwangba and Owiny-Ki-Bul in South Sudan. It also re-invites the African Union (AU) to participate in the peace talks.

## IMPACT OF CHA

Nearly 300,000 people have returned home and hundreds and thousands are preparing to do so, particularly in Lira District. 2006 has seen the highest levels of security in northern Uganda in recent years.

## JOSEPH KONY

Joseph Kony and four of his top lieutenants are wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. They are charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the 20 year conflict in which rebels hacked off lips, ears and breasts of their victims. Kony is reportedly hiding out in the jungles of the northeastern DRC.

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