

## CHAPTER 7

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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This study has sought to show the extent to which there are three distinctive but interlinked issues that need to be addressed in resolving the war in northern Uganda: the wider issue of grievances in northern Uganda in relation to root causes, the LRA conflict itself, and the consequences of the war that, in turn, have fed into secondary causes. Also clear is the extent to which civilians on the ground view dialogue and the military approaches used to date as being antithetical. For the majority of civilians in Gulu, Kitgum and Paderu, there is little support for a military solution. Furthermore, not only is the UPDF seen to be inadequate in defending the communities, but it is also seen as compromising the potential for dialogue. In the final analysis, people do not want their children to be killed in the name of “resolution”, and there is overwhelming support for a peaceful end to the conflict. Not one informant in Gulu or Kitgum expressed a desire to see Kony meet a brutal end: this was not because they support him in any way, but because they see such revenge as continuing a cycle of violence that so desperately needs to be broken.

In the light of this, we submit the following ideas towards resolution:

Priority must be given to ending the LRA conflict. Information from LRA ex-combatants suggests that Kony perceives the problem in northern Uganda in terms of collective failure, and an evil that must be eradicated by visiting horror on the people to cleanse them and affect change. Thus, within his worldview, violence is a legitimate means of enforcing that change. The military approach to combating the LRA has simply served to support Kony’s agenda by supplying the very violence that his apocalyptic vision demands. Therefore it is recommended that the government alter its strategic focus from one of seeking to destroy Kony to one of defending communities and maximising the protection of civilians. Such a change in military strategy, acknowledging that it is a state’s legal responsibility to defend communities within its borders, would support rather than work against the possibility for negotiations with Kony. This shift in strategy may serve to open the political and social space needed to address the wider unresolved conflicts and perceived injustices that lie at the root of the historic northern conflict.

Until now, negotiations have emphasised the need to function within a political framework. However, rather than approaching negotiation by demanding lists of grievances, it is recommended that a more open-ended approach be adopted, one that allows a better understanding of Kony's worldview to emerge. In particular, it is vital that he is approached with a desire to understand him (which is not the same as endorsing his actions) rather than destroying him.

From an analysis of the root causes of the conflict, it is clear that Uganda is a country deeply wounded by injustice, fear, war, prejudice, hatred, and deliberate falsification of its history by successive regimes. In order to begin to address these issues, it is recommended that allowance for some form of Truth and Reconciliation process be set up that will allow Ugandans to come and speak out objectively about what happened in the Luwero Triangle, northern Uganda, West Nile, western Uganda and other areas that have been plagued by conflict in the past.

Communication difficulties have been paramount in blocking progress towards ending the conflict. Therefore, a new public relations strategy from the government is a crucial component of the peace process. The government must keep a tight control on the language its ministers use regarding the LRA. Phrases such as "annihilate the terrorists within weeks" or "finish off the bandits" only enrage Kony and could derail a peace process. In addition, a few conciliatory statements from the president and key government ministers would contribute substantially to building confidence to end the war.

Our findings have demonstrated the extent to which there is both anger and sympathy towards the UPDF in northern Uganda. First, corruption in the UPDF has greatly undermined its capacity to protect the people. It is recommended that: (a) the GoU genuinely purge the corrupt elements within the UPDF. The ongoing investigation of "ghost soldiers" is a step in the right direction but more needs to be done; (b) those found guilty should make full restitution for the monies and other resources they embezzled. Second, the government and the UPDF need to pay particular attention to reaching out to the communities to build confidence among civilians. This outreach would benefit the UPDF strategy by enhancing its intelligence gathering capacity, and would reduce fear and distrust among civilians. Third, and related to the first two issues, morale is low among the foot soldiers in the north. Therefore, tighter controls need to be put on individuals who have been documented as abusing their authority, and concrete steps must be taken to ensure that all UPDF soldiers are adequately and consistently paid.

The increasing number of armed militias poses long-term threats to the security of Uganda. Once there is adequate defence of the communities, it is recommended that the militias should be either disarmed or integrated into the national army. In the meantime, it is recommended that there be tighter control of all militia activities, that militias are properly trained, that all weapons are accounted for, that militias be used solely for defence of civilians rather than pursuit of the rebels, and that operations are closely grafted onto the UPDF hierarchy.

The majority of interviewees caught up in the conflict perceive the war in the north as a deliberate ploy by the government to destroy the Acholi people, in particular. At the same time, some government officials have accused the Acholi of supporting the LRA and preventing the conflict from ending. Given such mutual suspicion, it is recommended that confidence-building measures be taken, such as an end to the hostile and conflicting rhetoric of the national government towards the LRA, a genuine apology from the government on some of its failings, and ending the wholesale condemnation of the Acholi.

While poverty is not identified as a root cause of the conflict, the effects of the conflict, in particular displacement, have had serious economic and social consequences throughout northern Uganda. Thus post-conflict reconstruction planning should be a priority. In addition, given that money in previous reconstruction efforts such as the Northern Uganda Reconstruction Programme was often misused, the process should be open to public debate and scrutiny.

The conflict clearly has an international dimension involving neighbouring countries. The current Sudan peace talks provide a glimmer of hope, but they might not bring an end to the LRA conflict. Therefore it is recommended that the Ugandan government structure its foreign policy to reflect good neighbourliness that ensures long-term economic and political security, rather than mutual suspicion.

The Amnesty is popular with people living in the conflict zone, and is seen as a vital and positive element to ending the war. Thus it is recommended that the Act be extended for the duration of the present conflict. In addition, attempts at amending the Amnesty to exclude top LRA commanders are counterproductive to peaceful endeavours to end the conflict.

A lack of consistent and visionary leadership, both locally and at the national level, has been a primary factor exacerbating the conflict and working against building a lasting peace. This lack has made it difficult to engender real public

investment in national politics and ensured that most Ugandans do not see the war as a national issue. Therefore the government must redouble its efforts for a genuine democratisation process that is transparent and honest, and moves away from the politics of blame, as this divides rather than unites people. Such steps would go far in the furtherance of President Museveni's stated goal of building a unified Uganda.

The war is increasing ethnic tensions, and some politicians have made inflammatory remarks that have contributed to this. The political leadership – both local and national – should endeavour to desist from making inflammatory statements about the conflict along ethnic lines, and should play a more active and vocal role in promoting dialogue and reconciliation. Instead, the political leadership should dissociate the rebels from the Acholi people and build a national consensus on how to end the war.