

Briefing to the Security Council on the Humanitarian Situation in the Areas Affected by the Lord's Resistance Army

**Statement by John Holmes,
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator**

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Thank you, Mr. President, for this opportunity to brief the Council on the humanitarian situation in the areas affected by the Lord's Resistance Army in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Southern Sudan, Uganda and the Central African Republic.

Mr. President, for over twenty years, the LRA have spread their unique brand of terror across communities in northern Uganda and southern Sudan and more recently in DRC and CAR. They are responsible for massive violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Thousands have been killed, tens of thousands more forcibly abducted and millions displaced. Attempts to negotiate a peaceful end to the conflict have not yet borne fruit. Previous military operations against the LRA have also failed, leaving them to continue to attack across a vast region of central Africa.

The Government of Uganda referred the situation in Northern Uganda to the International Criminal Court in 2003. In 2005, five arrest warrants were issued for the senior leadership – including Chairman Joseph Kony - charging them with War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity. These warrants have not been executed, although up to three of the five are thought to have been killed or died since.

Despite every effort from my predecessor and from the Secretary-General's Special Envoy, former President Chissano, Joseph Kony has repeatedly refused to sign the Final Peace Agreement that his own delegation negotiated through the Juba Peace Talks, mediated by the Government of Southern Sudan. Following his most recent refusal, at the start of December, the forces of Uganda, DRC and Southern Sudan launched joint military operations against the LRA in their hide-out in the Garamba National Park in DRC. These are continuing, but meanwhile fleeing groups of LRA fighters, perhaps up to six of them, have stepped up further their attacks against civilians in this region, with horrifying consequences.

MONUC is not participating in the joint UPDF-FARDC-SPLA operation, and was not involved in its planning. However, the Mission continues to provide limited logistical support to FARDC in keeping with its mandate, including the airlift of FARDC forces to Faradje, Doruma and Nagero and other locations. MONUC is also redeploying some quick reaction capabilities. In addition, MONUC has held regular meetings with the local command of the joint operations, and separately with FARDC, to impress on them the need to take necessary measures to protect civilians.

In the DRC's Northern Province Orientale, between September of this year and late December, there had already been attacks on 20 locations. Since late December and the start of the military campaign against them, there have been 16 more. **The map you can see**

displayed shows the locations of these attacks and the resulting displacement. The brutal assaults bear all the hallmarks of the LRA, including killings, abductions, rape, torture, looting and destruction of property. The total estimated number of civilian deaths is 569. 427 civilians have been abducted. Among the dead, wounded and abducted are women and children. UNHCR also reports approximately 8,000 Congolese refugees in Southern Sudan, 2,000 of whom arrived after the December attacks.

Mr President, on the basis of rapid assessments during relief aid distributions by UN and NGO partners operating out of Dungu and information received and confirmed from a variety of sources including UN agencies, NGOs, the local populations, churches, and Congolese local authorities, UNHCR estimates that about 104,000 people are internally displaced in 16 to 20 different locations in the affected area.

The humanitarian response in the DRC itself is now focusing on providing immediate life-saving assistance to the survivors and the displaced, particularly food and medical care, and establishing areas safe enough for the people to receive assistance and care.

But humanitarian access to these areas remains a major challenge. In addition to the lack of passable roads and usable air strips, security threats to humanitarian staff hinder our ability to reach the affected population and meet their needs. The sparsely populated areas of this border region provide ample cover for armed groups like the LRA to operate. When attacked the population scatter, often requiring several days to determine their new locations. There is always a fear that aid provision may attract LRA groups, themselves hungry.

A UN-NGO inter-agency assessment of the LRA attack on the village of Faradje underscores these challenges. Information from local sources and NGOs indicated that Faradje had been attacked around 25 December and that its population had fled to the nearby village of Tadu. **The images now displayed** show the burnt houses of the people of Faradje, their destroyed marketplace which on the day of the attack was crowded in preparation for Christmas celebrations, and the way in which the assailants wounded many. We estimate that 40 civilians were killed, 225 abducted including 120 children, and approximately 25,000 displaced.

Mr. President,

In **southern Sudan**, the situation is equally troubling. Last February and March, the LRA attacked twice near Yambio, in Western Equatoria, abducting eight people including five children. There have been recent reports of fresh LRA attacks across Central and Western Equatoria. Local media have reported that 40 people were killed in attacks in late December near Miridi. Since 14 December, we believe there have been 13 attacks on civilians and 26 abductions. More than 13,500 Sudanese have been internally displaced, with numbers rising rapidly. We have increased monitoring and assessment missions to ensure a rapid humanitarian response to the affected communities. Refugees and IDPs in areas close to the border have been assisted since mid-September with food and non-food items.

In the **Central African Republic**, last February and March, elements of the LRA attacked four villages in the southern Haute Mbomou prefecture, abducting 157, of whom 55 were children. Survivors of these attacks reported grave human rights abuses including rape of young girls. There is unfortunately a high risk that the LRA will return to this area. Although the Government of CAR has now deployed additional security elements to the

border region, their limited capacity to provide adequate security makes for a convenient safe haven for armed groups like the LRA. Humanitarian organizations in CAR have designed a contingency plan should the LRA threat trigger massive displacement of population along the border or the arrival of refugees from DRC.

Mr. President, fortunately, since August 2006, and the conclusion of a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, there has been considerable improvement in the humanitarian and security situation in northern **Uganda**. There have been no reports for some time of LRA attacks in the Acholi sub-region, where they had operated for 20 years, leading to the displacement of over 2 million Ugandans. 1.3 million of the displaced have already returned to their homes, or areas nearby since 2006, in a very positive development. The population in these northern districts is nevertheless concerned that as long as the LRA continues to exist, they could return, tragically forcing them back into displacement camps, and setting back the promise of social and economic recovery in the North. The Government of Uganda has increased security along its borders accordingly. All efforts are continuing meanwhile to consolidate these successes through the implementation of comprehensive relief and reconstruction assistance in previously affected areas under the Ugandan Government's own Peace Recovery and Development Plan. The humanitarian community in Uganda is meanwhile reviewing and updating its contingency plans.

More generally, a regional plan coordinated by UNICEF to reintegrate women and children who escaped the LRA during the military offensive in the Garamba National Park is ready for implementation. However, because of fear that the areas of reintegration of these former LRA members might become themselves specific targets for the LRA, this plan is currently on hold.

Mr. President, the repeated refusal by the LRA to sign the Final Peace Agreement is deeply disappointing and worrying. But as you have heard in the past from former President Chissano, the door has not yet been finally closed. President Museveni of Uganda has encouraged SESG Chissano to continue his efforts for a political settlement of the conflict. And although he has launched military operations, President Museveni has indicated that the door should remain open for the LRA to assemble in the Ri-Kwangba Assembly Area and for Kony to sign the agreement. With this in mind, the mandate of the SESG has been renewed for a further year. His tasks will continue to include pushing for a final signature to the peace agreement by the parties, as well as providing political support to the Government of Uganda in implementing those aspects of the Final Peace Agreement that can already be implemented without Kony's signature, particularly in terms of relief and reconstruction.

I understand that the LRA sent a delegation to Maputo over the weekend to deliver a letter to SESG Chissano, in which the movement's leadership intensified its call for a return to the peace process and for a negotiated political settlement to the conflict. I profoundly hope that even at this late stage the LRA leadership will see sense and sign.

Mr. President, next month I am planning to visit the DRC, including Dungen and Faradje, to see the situation at first hand. On return, I would be happy to brief the Council again. Meanwhile, given the appalling brutality of the recent attacks, let me conclude by calling once again on the LRA to cease hostilities, sign the Final Peace Agreement, begin assembly and demobilization without delay, and immediately release all abductees, particularly women and children, within their ranks. Finally, let me remind the national armed forces of Sudan, the DRC and Uganda which are engaging the LRA of the continuing

requirement to conduct their operations in strict compliance with international humanitarian law and to take all feasible precautions to spare civilians from the effects of hostilities, including non-combatant women and children who are among the LRA fighters.

Thank you, Mr. President