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Uganda: Uncertain peace process impedes return in north while protection crisis looms in Karamoja region

An estimated 1.7 million people remain internally displaced in northern Uganda as a result of the conflict between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The conflict in the north has been exacerbated by incursions of Karamojong warriors and an ongoing government disarmament process which has resulted in new displacement in northeast Uganda. The overall security situation in northern Uganda remains fluid, as a landmark Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA), signed in August 2006 by the LRA and the Government of Uganda expired in late February 2007. A number of LRA groups are reported to have re-entered northern Uganda, causing fear amongst communities and hindering ongoing return and population movement. Despite improved security, illustrated by increased access to land and freedom of movement, the majority of IDPs in Uganda live in appalling conditions with limited access to basic services. In 2005, a Ministry of Health Survey revealed alarmingly high mortality rates in IDP camps.

Peace talks aimed at resolving the 21 year conflict between the LRA and the government, mediated by the Government of southern Sudan, are planned to soon resume again in the southern Sudanese town of Juba. A recently appointed UN Envoy on LRA-Affected areas made substantial efforts to revive the talks after they had stalled for three months.

Forceful disarmament operations in the north-eastern Karamoja region have sparked heavy clashes between Karamojong warriors and the Ugandan military, resulting in displacement both within the Karamoja region and in neighbouring areas. More than 100 persons have been reportedly killed during raids, battles or bombings. The disarmament process has been characterised by extreme brutality and serious rights abuses, including alleged extrajudicial executions and torture, committed with impunity by the Ugandan military – the same military which has just been deployed to Somalia as part of the African Union peacekeeping force.

Interest in the conflict and IDP situation in northern Uganda has grown considerably in 2006, not least due to resolutions passed on the conflict by the UN Security Council, the U.S. Senate, and the European Union. While improvements were made in the overall response to the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda, both the international and government response remains wholly inadequate compared to the magnitude of the crisis.

Background

The conflict in northern Uganda has lasted 21 years and caused the displacement of an estimated 1.7 million people, of whom approximately 1.5 million receive food assistance from the United Nations (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.5). Since 1986, after the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) led by current President Yoweri Museveni seized power, various groups in northern Uganda have fought the central government. As Museveni established his government in Kampala, soldiers of the previous deposed government fled to their homelands in northern Uganda and eventually formed the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA) in an effort to win back power from the NRM government. Members of the UPDA also included former Idi Amin troops, Acholi politicians, and others angered by Museveni's ascendance to power through force after breaking a power-sharing agreement he had signed in Nairobi with General Tito Okello, Uganda's former president and Acholi leader. Moreover, a long history of antagonism exists between the Acholi people of northern Uganda and southern-based elites who dominated the country before independence in 1962, and again since President Museveni's accession to power in 1986 (RLP, February 2004, p.5; LIU, 30 October 2003, p. 33; CSOPNU, December 2004, p.28, "Nowhere to hide").

As a result of a peace deal signed between the NRM government and the UPDA in 1988, an amnesty process allowed the majority of UPDA soldiers to join Uganda's national army or take positions within Uganda's ruling NRM party. Yet significant suspicion remained

amongst the Acholi regarding the central government in Kampala, and this suspicion and lack of trust contributed to the eventual forming of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (RLP, February 2004, p.5). The LRA, initially a popular uprising known as the Holy Spirit Movement led by Alice Lakwena, has fought a low level guerrilla war in an ostensible effort to overthrow President Museveni, restore order and legitimacy to Uganda, rebuild the Acholi nation and culture and generally provide a spiritual cleansing of the nation by ensuring that Uganda is ruled in accordance with the biblical ten commandments (CSOPNU, December 2004, p.28, "Nowhere to hide"). As Uganda's post-independence history lacks the experience of a peaceful political transition, many Ugandans believe violence was and continues to be the only way to address social and economic grievances, according to one human rights group (RLP, February 2004, p.5). Over the course of the conflict, however, the LRA has carried out a multitude of atrocities against the civilian population, including abduction, rape, torture and forced conscription. LRA crimes have been classified as crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court and the court has issued arrest warrants for five top LRA leaders.

In August 2006, the government of Uganda and the LRA signed a landmark Cessation of Hostilities Agreement which has resulted in improved security conditions and humanitarian access. However, insecurity in many areas continues as does the search for a comprehensive political and social solution to address the sustained marginalisation and underdevelopment endured by northern

Uganda for over two decades (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.1).

Causes of displacement

While the actual conflict in northern Uganda started in 1986, the current displacement crisis in northern Uganda began in 1996 when the government forced civilians into “protected villages” (RLP, February 2004, p.25; CSOPNU, December 2004, p.1, “Land Matters”; CSOPNU, December 2004, p.6, “Nowhere to hide”; HRW, September 2005, p.10). As rebel activity increased, the Ugandan government sought to separate civilians from the rebels in order to reduce the LRA’s ability to benefit from suspected collaborators and to clear the territory in northern Uganda for unimpeded military operations (CSOPNU, December 2004, p.6, “Nowhere to hide”). Yet in its efforts to isolate the LRA, the policy of forced encampment has dramatically increased the vulnerability of the population in northern Uganda and entrenched sentiments of political and social marginalisation felt by the Acholi community (CSOPNU, December 2004, p.2, “Nowhere to hide”; RLP, December 2004, p.25). On occasion, the government indiscriminately used mortars and helicopter gunships as a means to force civilians into protected villages (HURIFO, February 2002, p.2-3). A portion of those currently displaced, mainly in Kitgum and Pader, also fled their villages as a direct result of LRA attacks (Weeks, March 2002, p.2).

Over the course of the conflict, the LRA has succeeded in attacking IDP camps despite the deployment of the military to provide protection. The most glaring evidence of this came in 2004 when 200 displaced persons were massacred by LRA

rebels in Barlonyo camp, located in Lira district (IRIN, 24 February 2004). In addition, major protection concerns are also evident as a result of the appalling humanitarian conditions in the camps and an almost total lack of government assistance to IDPs, constituting a failure of the state to protect those living in the north from physical harm and human rights abuses (ODI, December 2006, p.5). Due to the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement, as well as an increase in military and civilian personal in and around camps, physical protection has recently improved and many IDPs are able to access their land, or in eastern Uganda, return to their original homes (RLP/IDMC, March 2006, p.22; UNOCHA, January 2007, p. 9.).

In October 2002 the displacement crisis was exacerbated due to an order issued by the Ugandan military stating that all those civilians remaining in “abandoned villages” had 48 hours to move to government camps. During this time the IDP population nearly doubled from 500,000 in early 2002 to almost 800,000 by the end of the 2002 (HRW, September 2005, p.9). The order came as a result of the Ugandan military’s large-scale military offensive entitled “Operation Iron Fist”. With consent of the Sudanese government, the operation targeted the LRA’s rear bases in southern Sudan. The LRA responded by returning to northern Uganda where it carried out an increased amount of abductions, killings and lootings. The area of displacement also expanded during this period as the LRA moved eastwards into the Teso sub-region of eastern Uganda, areas where mainly the Langi and Iteso peoples reside. Due to the failure of the first large-scale military operation, in March 2004

with renewed support from the Sudanese government, the Ugandan military launched “Operation Iron Fist II”. This operation may have proved to weaken the LRA. Yet other factors such as the LRA’s lack of food and the impact of a radio programme which broadcast messages urging members of the LRA to apply for amnesty all may have contributed to decreasing the membership and strength of the LRA (CSOPNU, December 2004, p.31, “Nowhere to hide”).

IDP estimates

Over 90 per cent of the population of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts’ are IDPs (UNICEF, June 2006, p.1). In these districts, as well as Amuru, Oyam and northern Apac, more than one million people are expected to remain in camps in 2007, awaiting a more definitive resolution of the conflict (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.1). Due to improvements in security, however, in these same districts UNOCHA estimates that more than 150,000 persons have moved out of IDP camps and are returning to their parishes of origin. UNHCR, however, indicates that 175,000 people have moved out of camps in these same locations (UNHCR, December 2006, p.4). The difference in estimated figures is evidence of the continued lack of an effective IDP registration system and the challenges of consistent data collection mechanisms.

In the Teso and Lango sub-regions of eastern Uganda, significant movement of IDPs to their parishes of origin has taken place. In November 2006 UNOCHA estimated that 300,000 IDPs had returned in all of northern Uganda, including Lango and Teso (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.1), whereas UNHCR the fol-

lowing month estimated 450,000 returns in Lango and Teso and 200,000 in central and northern Lira (UNHCR, December 2006, p.4).

In eastern Teso, displacement has continued due to violent cattle raids and human rights abuses perpetrated by Karamojong warriors. Forceful disarmament operations conducted by the Ugandan army have also resulted in abuses against civilians (see below, ‘Crisis in Karamoja’). Over 130,000 IDPs remain in camps in Katakwi and Amuria districts, with little prospect of return due to ongoing insecurity (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.1). There are no reliable IDP estimates for the districts most heavily affected by insecurity in Karamoja, such as Kotido and Moroto, as the displacement that does take place is cyclical in relation to both raiding and disarmament and occurs within communities, from village to village. The population of a number of villages has grown considerably, reflecting the need for increased protection in these locations (Representative of humanitarian community, email correspondence, 30 January 2007).

Background and main causes of displacement in the Teso region

The north-eastern Teso region, which comprises Amuria, Soroti, Katakwi, Kaberamaido and Kumi Districts, has also been affected by large-scale internal displacement, mainly caused by cattle-rustling Karamojong warriors originating from a minority of an estimated 100,000 semi-nomadic pastoralists. This minority is made up of a multitude of clans that traditionally fought each other with spears, sticks, bows and arrows; in the post-colonial period these have been re-

placed with small automatic weapons. Inter-clan fighting is still rampant, but the violence has increasingly been deployed outwards against clans living across the border in neighbouring Kenya, as well as the national army, local defence units and civilians in the Teso region (GoU, 15 June 2005; UHC, September 2004). The conflict in Karamoja is closely entangled in a history of colonial and post-colonial neglect, shrinking access to pasture and grazing land for cattle, multiple years of drought, and the proliferation of small arms. Commercialisation of cattle-rustling has further fuelled incentives to raid and cause havoc. The result is a self-destructive circle of violence in which victims of the raids, particularly rival Karamojong clans, acquire weapons to protect themselves and/or retaliate against attacking clans. The IDMC has also received reports that elements in the Ugandan army are allegedly involved in stealing cattle and committing other abuses in the region while blaming such abuses on Karamojong warriors or LRA rebels (IDMC interviews, Soroti, Uganda, May 2005).

As noted above, the displacement situation within the Karamoja region remains unclear. Although currently not characterised as an emergency, Karamoja is aggravated by drought, poverty and neglect by consecutive governments. Karamoja displays dire development indicators, such as the lowest primary school enrolment (35 per cent), highest maternal and infant mortality and the lowest life expectancy in all of Uganda. Government services, such as social, medical and judicial institutions, remain inadequate, contributing to an overall break down in the rule of law. The lack of social support and economic opportu-

nities has contributed to “negative coping mechanisms”, such as the outward movement of women and children in search of resources. Such movement has increased vulnerabilities and contributed to a protection crisis (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.1; OHCHR, 24 November 2006).

Crisis in Karamoja

As a result of continuing insecurity and the proliferation of small arms in Karamoja, the government renewed a disarmament campaign in May 2006 which has disrupted traditional movement patterns and caused limited displacement within Karamoja. While in the past the government had combined the use of voluntary and military campaigns to disarm the population, due to persistent violent raids, revenge killings and ambushes by Karamojong warriors, currently the government is employing a ‘cordon, search and disarm’ operation, whereby the army, using tanks and helicopter gunships, surrounds villages and searches for weapons (GoU, January 2007, p.12; OHCHR, 24 November 2006, p.3; IRIN, 13 November 2006). The operation has been characterised by human rights abuses and excessive use of force by the Ugandan military, including large numbers of civilian fatalities, alleged arbitrary executions, detentions, and reported incidents of torture (OHCHR, 24 November 2006; OCHA, 7 November 2006).

The overall situation in Karamoja continues to rapidly deteriorate. In recent weeks humanitarian vehicles have been attacked, and reports of Karamojong raids, clashes, and Ugandan military abuses continue to emerge. In two recent inci-

dents, one vehicle was ambushed and looted and 11 women, two of whom were pregnant, were killed by unknown attackers in Nakapiririt district (OCHA, January 2007, p.1; OCHA, 21 February 2007). In numerous incidents, Karamojong have also been subject to forced evictions. In Katakwi, for example, a group of Karamojong women and children were evicted on the grounds that they were providing intelligence information to warriors (OCHA, January 2007, p.1). In the capital Kampala, the government removed up to 1,500 Karamojong women and children from the streets, returning them to Karamoja. The extent to which this movement included registration or was voluntary remains an area of concern and further investigation. Continued actions to 'clean up' Kampala are expected to continue in the run-up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting scheduled to take place in Kampala in November.

Due to increased levels of insecurity, humanitarian access in Karamoja is severely limited and humanitarian vehicles require military escort. The government has insisted that the disarmament operation continue, despite calls from the international community, including from the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, that the operation immediately halt until measures are put into place to protect civilians (OHCHR, 23 November 2006). Considering the economic and political marginalisation of Karamoja and the few alternative livelihood activities available, the forced disarmament process is not expected to produce a sustainable solution to the ongoing insecurity. A comprehensive government response plan for Karamoja has not yet been launched and its future re-

mains unclear (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.10). Ensuring protection of civilians in Karamoja requires a more robust presence of humanitarian agencies; an ongoing protection monitoring system is also urgently required as reports thus far are ad-hoc and incident-specific. In addition, while the UN and the diplomatic community in Uganda are closely following the situation in Karamoja, increased attention to this issue from the international community, including from the UN in New York and Geneva and donor country capitals, is also required.

An uncertain peace process for northern Uganda

The landmark Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) was signed in August 2006 and expired on 28 February 2007. Despite its expiration, the fact that an agreement was signed by the government and the LRA as a step towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict surprised most observers and was seen as indicative of how the viability of a peaceful resolution had gained acceptance by both parties and the international community. The CHA resulted from high-level peace talks, mediated by the government of southern Sudan, and took place in the southern Sudanese city of Juba. Currently, the talks are set to resume in Juba after being stalled for months due to LRA concerns regarding the neutrality of the chief mediator, southern Sudanese Vice-President Riek Machar. The LRA also raised concerns regarding their security, as both the Sudanese and Ugandan governments' publicly threatened to use force against the LRA. In addition, the Ugandan army maintains a presence in southern Sudan which has intimidated the LRA on a number of occasions. The UN

Envoy for LRA-Affected Areas, former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano, recently held direct talks with the LRA after which they expressed a willingness to return to Juba. In addition, Chissano's visit to the region also resulted in an expansion of the mediation team, which now plans to include representatives from a number of African countries (Reuters, 16 March 2007).

Despite pledges from both the LRA and the government that they would not renew hostilities, small groups of LRA fighters have been sighted in Pader and northern parts of Gulu district, and two abductions have been reported in Pader, raising concerns of possible renewed conflict (OCHA, 7 January 2007). As a result, aid agencies have begun the process of contingency planning for renewed conflict (IRIN, 2 March 2007).

The peace talks in Juba are widely supported by the international community. The UN Security Council issued a presidential statement welcoming the CHA (UNSC, 16 November 2006), and the UN established the Juba Initiative Fund, aimed at facilitating the basic necessities of the peace talks and supporting the Cessation of Hostilities Monitoring Team (UN, 5 October 2006).

The Juba process has also experienced many challenges, such as how peace would be achieved while also complying with the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants issued against the LRA's five top commanders, including leader, Joseph Kony. In recognition of this challenge, recently retired Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland, urged the Security Council to back the peace process rather than seeking to secure arrest war-

rants for the LRA leaders (RLP/IDMC, October 2006, p.iv). Concerns have also been raised regarding the legitimacy of the LRA delegation as it is primarily drawn from outside Uganda and its direct connection with the LRA leadership remains uncertain. The framework for the peace talks includes agenda items relating to accountability and reconciliation, as well as comprehensive solutions to the conflict. Thus when the talks resume, the need for broader civil society inclusion is needed as well as an enhanced role for IDP women. Moreover, should any peace process resume, it must be accompanied by a broader national process which addresses the marginalisation of the Acholi sub-region and establishes a framework for reconciliation (RLP, December 2006; ICG, 13 September 2006).

A regional crisis

The LRA presence in southern Sudan and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to destabilise the region. In southern Sudan, the security situation continued to deteriorate due to reports of violence committed by both the LRA and other armed groups in the region (UNMIS, 6 March 2007; OCHA, 21 February 2007). In January 2006, the LRA killed eight UN peacekeepers in the eastern DRC as they were performing a reconnaissance mission in Garamba National Park, an area near the Sudanese border where the LRA have allegedly maintained positions (Reuters, 31 January 2006).

The UN Security Council in 2006 passed two resolutions which highlighted the regional nature of the conflict, through expressing deep concern about LRA atrocities committed in both the DRC and

Sudan. The Security Council also stressed the primary responsibility of governments in the region to protect their civilians and ensure unhindered humanitarian access in accordance with international law (UNSC, 27 January 2006; UNSC, 24 March 2006).

Complicating the situation in the region, recent reports also indicate that members of the LRA may have crossed into Central African Republic (CAR) (Reuters, 23 February 2007). The LRA denies such reports, but should they be confirmed it could indicate that the LRA is seeking a new safe haven as the southern Sudanese government has thus far been unable to guarantee their security. A recent statement by the Congolese Interior Minister threatening the LRA presence in the eastern DRC may have also caused the group to look for a safer location to base its fighters (DPA, 26 February 2007).

Protection concerns

The current security situation in northern Uganda has improved steadily, however the uncertain outcome of peace talks and the possible movement of LRA groups back into Uganda has caused widespread concern amongst communities. Thus the situation remains fluid and unpredictable. Abuses perpetuated by the Ugandan military also continue to be a source of insecurity, indicating that aside from the threat of LRA violence the most common occurrences of violence can be attributed to government security forces. Recently, in Pader district, a government vehicle was ambushed by an allegedly drunken member of a local defence unit (LDU). The vehicle drove through the ambush and no injuries were reported (UN, 2 March 2007). The lack of professional

conduct of LDUs and their role in instigating abuses is well documented and is a cause for continued concern (RLP/IDMC, March 2006, p.23; HRW, September 2005, p.70). In a number of cases LDUs have been drawn directly from the displaced population itself, a practice which is contrary to the National IDP Policy and raises concerns regarding the militarisation of IDP camps (RLP/IDMC, March 2006, p.23; UNICEF, May 2005, p.5). Illustrating the overall lack of security, increased criminal activity and banditry also continue to be reported throughout northern Uganda.

On a positive note, 600 Special Police Constables (SPCs) were recently deployed to Gulu and Amuru district in an effort to improve enforcement of the rule of law. SPCs have also been deployed in Lira district. To support the deployment, UNHCR has provided bicycles and communication equipment (OCHA, 7 January 2007, p.9). These deployments require careful monitoring as most SPCs were drawn from LDU units and they were provided with inadequate training (OCHA, 30 November 2006, p.12). Moreover, there have been unconfirmed reports of SPCs engaging in extortion of the local population.

The overall impact of the conflict on children in northern Uganda has been especially acute. The LRA largely consists of abducted children who have been forced to become child soldiers or sex slaves to commanding officers. Since the beginning of the conflict in 1986, an estimated 25,000 children have been abducted; 7,500 are girls with 1,000 having conceived children during captivity (UNICEF, January 2007). Estimates of the current size and composition of the

LRA vary between 800 and 3,000 members.

A changing humanitarian environment

While humanitarian conditions across northern Uganda vary, the majority of IDPs continue to live in deplorable conditions and lack safe and sustainable access to clean water, health care, food, education and shelter. A study conducted by the Ugandan Ministry of Health in 2005, the findings of which the government disputes, revealed that over 1,000 deaths occur each week in northern Uganda with the majority of deaths attributed to malaria/fever and HIV/AIDS (the findings are based on a crude mortality rate of 1.54 people per 10,000 per day, compared with 0.46 nationally). The study also found that the majority of deaths occur outside health facilities, highlighting a serious deficiency in accessing adequate healthcare. Overcrowding in camps has a direct effect on human health by increasing transmission of both endemic and epidemic diseases (Ugandan MoH, July 2005, p.ii; CSOSPU, March 2006, p. 15). As the government disputes the findings of this study, many health-related agencies have discontinued using these findings, and as no mortality survey was conducted in 2006, it remains unclear what data health-related humanitarian interventions are based on (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.6; IDMC Interview, 21 June 2006).

In a number of humanitarian sectors, such as access to land, nutrition and water and sanitation, slight improvements were reported by the UN. In early 2006 relief food rations were reduced from 74 per cent to 40-60 per cent, after which

household food access for IDPs continued to improve. Improvements are largely due to greater access to land which has allowed for increased agricultural activity, all of which has resulted from improved security. Still, extremely vulnerable households will continue to need targeted food assistance. Safe access to water also improved, as did the availability of latrines (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p. 6, 22).

Except for the Karamoja region, access in northern Uganda improved. By October 2006, only 29 camps in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader still required escort. All of Lira can now be accessed without military escort. Improvements are again due to the historic signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement which has dramatically improved the security situation (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p. 10). Yet in some areas, such as Pader, restrictions on movement and curfews remain in place.

Return and movement outside camps

In the Teso and Lango sub-regions of eastern Uganda, significant numbers of IDPs have returned to their home parishes and many to their farms, and many more are expected to return depending on security. In Soroti and Kaberamaido districts, more than 90 per cent of IDPs have returned to their villages of origin. In Lira district, emergency assistance has been phased out, though the challenge of enabling a sustainable return remains as there has been no corresponding support to transitional projects. However, UN agencies are stepping up efforts to begin early recovery programmes. Civilian police have also been deployed in return

areas as well as anti-stock theft units to counter raids by Karamojong warriors. Such deployments have had limited success due to inadequate training of security units, limited resources, and the lack of a functioning judiciary system in a number of areas, such as Pader (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p. 8, 12)

In the Acholi districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader, population movement has continued with a cautious overtone. The number of new sites developing where IDPs are locating continues to increase. Many of these new sites retain the appearances of camps and people access their own land on a commuting basis. Lack of schools and health facilities in new settlement sites is dividing families, as many choose to leave women and children in camps where basic services are available while men work in fields or return to their villages. Such division of families constitutes a new protection challenge (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.1). In Gulu, local authorities continue to inform IDPs via the radio that certain sub-counties are safe for return. UNHCR also reported in January 2007 that the number of people moving out of camps had increased (UNOCHA, 7 January 2007, p.5).

While the movement described above is indeed positive, its full realisation as return is still dependent on a number of key factors such as the uncertain peace talks, the security situation on the ground, the agricultural calendar, availability of building materials (bricks and thatch), as well as access to basic services. It should also be remembered that more than one million IDPs are expected to remain in camps awaiting a final confirmation of an

end to insecurity (UNOCHA, 30 November, p.1).

National response

On 4 May 2006, the government launched a new Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) and an Emergency Plan for Humanitarian Interventions for the North. Chaired by the Prime Minister, and comprising various government ministries, donors and two civil society groups, the JMC will monitor and discuss issues related to implementation of the Emergency Plan. The Plan aims to improve and enhance government responses in a number of key areas, namely cessation of hostilities and regional security, peace building, protection and assistance of IDPs, and return and reintegration (GoU, May 2006). At the national level, the JMC has substituted the coordinating bodies outlined in Uganda's National IDP Policy. The JMC and its Emergency Action Plan are to be phased out and replaced by the government's National Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). However, since its launch the JMC has been extended on numerous occasions and at the time of writing the status of the PRDP remains unclear.

While the UN and the EU welcomed the JMC and the corresponding Emergency Plan (UN, 4 May 2006; EU, 15 May 2006), civil society and local government representatives in northern Uganda greeted the plan with scepticism. Members of Parliament from the war-affected districts maintained they had not been adequately consulted, and it remains unclear to what extent local government officials in the north were included in the formulation of the Plan (IRIN, 21 April 2006).

In December 2006, the JMC issued a statement which attempts to harmonise approaches to population movement. The statement is welcome as it provides a framework in which district authorities should operationalise support to population movements, and includes provisions for District Security Committees to undertake consultations with IDPs in determining if areas are safe for return and that messaging on movement and return should be clear, consistent and coherent (UNOCHA, 7 January 2007, p.4). The national response, however, continues to be characterised by numerous challenges. For example, return and resettlement officers deployed by the central government to affected districts superseded actions in relation to population movement so far taken by district authorities and District Disaster Management Committees (DDMCs). Moreover, the lack of local government structures and services, especially at the sub-county level, is a primary impediment to return and substantiates a claim that the government lacks the political will to provide northern Uganda with the resources and attention it deserves.

International humanitarian response

The international response to the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda remains largely inadequate. High mortality rates and continued human rights abuses are evidence of the fact that the majority of the displaced are unable to meet their basic needs and remain exposed to abuse. The lack of response is most evident in Karamoja, where civilians have endured serious rights abuses in an environment

of total impunity and human development indicators remain unacceptably low.

The humanitarian community continued to struggle with the collection of baseline data and determining if improvements have actually been made. Funding is also uneven, with the majority of funds going to the Acholi region, neglecting the appalling situation in Karamoja (UNOCHA, 30 November 2006, p.8). However, funds for the Acholi region may also be in jeopardy as the World Food Programme recently announced it may be forced to cut food rations by 50 per cent due to funding gaps (WFP, 16 March 2007).

The UN is currently implementing the new “cluster” approach in Uganda. As part of the broader humanitarian reform process, through assigning UN agencies responsibilities for certain sectors, or clusters, the UN hopes to increase the accountability and predictability of overall humanitarian response. In Uganda, the cluster approach is applied in four areas where significant gaps in humanitarian response exist; protection, early recovery, health, and water and sanitation. The overall protection cluster implementation falls under the leadership of the UN’s refugee agency, UNHCR. Early recovery is led by UNDP in coordination with UNHCR, and health and nutrition and water and sanitation by UNICEF (UNOCHA, 4 May 2006, 5-12).

The role of the clusters, and in particular of UNHCR as protection cluster lead, has contributed to ensuring a greater awareness of the assistance and protection needs of IDPs. With increased funding UNHCR’s presence in northern Uganda has slowly grown and so have their ac-

tivities. NGOs and donors, however, have continued to raise concerns about the protection cluster's focus on return and lack of attention to other protection needs where return is not taking place. To address these concerns, the protection cluster recently held a workshop in which the protection strategy was reviewed, where it was decided to establish a camp management cluster. However, clarity is still lacking in regards to the protection cluster and its role in the evolving situation in Karamoja. Considering the acute protection challenges currently existing in Karamoja, it remains unclear why the protection cluster is not actively engaged in responding to the situation.

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Uganda. The full country profile is available online [here](#).

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Note: All documents used in this overview are directly accessible on the Uganda [List of Sources](#) page of our website.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org

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