

A Memo to U.S. Policymakers:

Crucial Window of Opportunity Must Not Be Missed

After more than two decades of war, northern Uganda has reached a critical crossroads. An atmosphere of relative calm, created by the recent Juba negotiations process and the flight of the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) from Uganda, has created a fleeting window of opportunity in which the actions of U.S. leaders may be decisive in determining whether the region enters a new era of peace and prosperity, or remains caught in a cycle of violence and impoverishment.

The challenges are immense. For twenty-two years, war between the LRA and Government of Uganda has engulfed the region. The conflict has resulted in widespread forced displacement and the abduction of tens of thousands of children into rebel ranks. Effective leadership can help affected communities overcome the destruction wrought by the war and provide a catalyst for stability in one of the world's most volatile regions.

Real Recovery for Northern Uganda

Despite improved security, nearly half of the two million people forced from their homes remain in displacement camps. They now face the difficult decision of whether to leave these crowded and disease-ridden camps for the uncertainty of life back home, where basic services such as schools, clean water, and health clinics have yet to be restored. Many families have responded by keeping a foot in both worlds, with parents returning home to work in the fields and children left in the camps to attend school, where they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Police and judicial infrastructures, crippled during the war, are unable to address high rates of sexual violence or emerging disputes over land. Combined with the massive levels of trauma caused by the war,¹ these challenges are preventing the people of northern Uganda from emerging from the shadow of this two-decade crisis.

A comprehensive post-conflict recovery process is needed to counteract the devastating toll of the war and ensure that security is sustained. The process should aim to bring northern Uganda's quality of life indicators, such as poverty rates and access to basic services, on par with the rest of the country. It should also provide comprehensive protection for affected communities and help them to cope with the crimes committed during the war. Though the Ugandan government has already taken some steps through its Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP), poor leadership from Ugandan officials and donor countries is impeding recovery and perpetuating the marginalization of the war-affected region. Unless fundamental issues are urgently addressed, the recovery process will not succeed. Three issues in particular require immediate attention.

First, while the PRDP identified priority areas of need for the recovery process, there is no clear strategy for how the government, UN, donors, and non-governmental organizations should work together to address those needs. Existing funding and coordination structures were developed to meet the demands of a humanitarian emergency, and have not yet been adapted to reflect the priorities of recovery. Consequently, a high degree of confusion has prevented an immediate peace dividend from reaching war-affected communities and slowed the development of local government capacity to deliver basic services. A recent UN report notes "an appalling lack of basic services in transit sites and return areas."² Mechanisms must be developed that can align government and international activities and priorities, identify gaps in programming, and channel funds where they are most needed.

¹ A recent survey conducted in northern Uganda reported 54% of the population suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, while over two thirds showed symptoms of depression, amongst the highest rates ever recorded globally. Published in the journal *BMC Psychiatry*, available at www.biomedcentral.com/1471-244X/8/38.

² Uganda Consolidated Appeals Process Mid-Year Review 2008, available at <http://ochaonline.un.org/humanitarianappeal/>

Second, a dire lack of funding threatens the viability of existing recovery efforts. Current allocations are inadequate to confront the dual challenges of continuing to provide humanitarian assistance while also rebuilding areas of return for displaced people. A surge of flexible funding from the donors is required immediately, along with contributions from the Ugandan government above its standard budget allocations. The U.S. should take the lead in convening a donor conference as soon as possible to ensure that these needs are met.

Finally, given that past government plans have produced little tangible impact on the ground, effective monitoring at the national and local levels is needed to ensure funds for the PRDP and subsequent government plans are well spent and that recovery efforts continue until the desired outcomes have been reached. This will likely require planning beyond the three-year mandate of the PRDP. Both direct U.S. leverage with the Ugandan government and forums such as the nascent PRDP Monitoring Committee should be used to hold the government accountable to its responsibilities.

Addressing these three challenges will not only lead to major improvements in the lives of war-affected communities, but also greatly improve prospects for long-term national stability. Historical divisions between Uganda's North and South are a source of past and potential future conflict. Sustained investment in the North, where poverty rates are twice the national average,³ can address existing disparities. Moreover, it can help reduce the deep-seated resentment many northerners harbor toward the central government, which has been responsible for the forced displacement of over a million of people and widespread human rights abuses in the war-torn region.

Safeguarding the Security

In order to be sustainable, recovery efforts must occur hand-in-hand with the development of a viable strategy to ensure peace is permanent. A resumption of violence in northern Uganda would reverse all humanitarian gains that have been made. Though the LRA has exited Uganda and is unlikely to return in the immediate future, it is expanding its ranks with new abductions from areas surrounding its bases in DR Congo, Central African Republic, and South Sudan. Up to 300 abductions have been reported in recent months. Given time to rebuild its depleted forces and renew sources of support—including possibly the Government of Sudan ahead of Sudan's 2009 elections—the LRA could return to Uganda.

The option for rebel leader Joseph Kony to sign the Final Peace Agreement negotiated in Juba and peacefully demobilize his forces should continue to be pursued, but alternative plans must also be made to ensure the violence is ended. A viable strategy to apprehend Kony should be developed and carried out by capable forces, with strong precautions to avoid casualties. If he is removed from the helm of the rebel group, it will likely be possible to disarm and demobilize remaining LRA forces. An arrest strategy must be complemented by efforts to induce defections from the LRA's ranks, as well as the responsible deployment of national militaries to protect vulnerable civilians near LRA bases. However, all-out offensives must be avoided, as they pose too great a threat to both abductees in LRA ranks and the surrounding civilian population.

If Kony signs the agreement, the LRA leader should be given a full opportunity to implement its terms and disarm. However, an arrest strategy that could be rapidly executed if implementation does not occur is still needed. This precautionary measure would both pressure the rebel leader to respect the agreement, and can be used as a safeguard if the LRA abandons the peace process and continues committing atrocities.

Ultimately, serious investment is needed to improve security and governance structures in the region, as the LRA and other armed groups exploit porous borders and ungoverned spaces to carry out their heinous crimes. But immediate action from policymakers can consolidate recent humanitarian gains and contribute significantly to regional stability, an opportunity that must not be missed.

³ According to the Northern Uganda Public Expenditure Review (NUPER), published in January 2007, poverty rates in the North are 61%, versus 31% nationally. Available at [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/5437097842A2DD80C12572CF0047288E/\\$file/NUPER+final+report.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/5437097842A2DD80C12572CF0047288E/$file/NUPER+final+report.pdf)



Recommendations for U.S. Policymakers

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U.S. leadership in ensuring peace and effective recovery in northern Uganda is crucial to long-term stability in the country and region. Moderate gains made in U.S. policy toward the crisis in recent years—most notably the 2007 appointment of a diplomat to support regional peace efforts—must be built upon by the next Congress and Administration.

U.S. Congress:

1. Pass legislation aimed at ensuring long-term U.S. support for the comprehensive reconstruction of northern Uganda, authorizing at least \$35 million in new funds for each of the next five years; and
2. Ensure the Administration leads multilateral efforts to rebuild northern Uganda and address the continued threat posed by the LRA.

U.S. Administration:

1. Hold the Ugandan government accountable to its responsibilities to coordinate the recovery process and bring northern Uganda to a developmental level equal to rest of the country;
2. Convene a conference of major donors in Uganda to ensure funding commitments are secured for a sustained recovery process;
3. Appoint a full-time diplomat to work with the U.N. and regional governments to advance dialogue with LRA leaders, defections of LRA members, protection of civilians, and a viable strategy to arrest rebel leader Joseph Kony; and
4. Commence an inter-agency process to assess prospects and develop a strategy for apprehending LRA leader Joseph Kony, in coordination with regional governments and U.N. forces.