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## **NORTHERN UGANDA: GIVE DISPLACED PEOPLE REAL OPTIONS**

Peace negotiations over the past two years between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have produced tangible gains for the north which must not be lost. Despite the fact that LRA leader Joseph Kony has not signed the Final Peace Agreement, improved security has meant that many internally displaced people (IDPs) can now access their farm land and begin rebuilding their homes. The situation remains fragile, however, and many of the displaced keep a foot in two places – one in the original camp or transit site and one in their home land – in case security deteriorates.

As humanitarian programs now transition to recovery and development activities, it is crucial for international donors to provide adequate, flexible, and timely funding to ensure that clean water, health care and education are available in the home communities. The Government of Uganda must also fulfill its responsibility to protect the rights of displaced civilians, including their right to decide on where they will finally settle, and to rebuild northern Uganda in order to address the long-standing grievances of people in the Acholi sub-region.

### **Encourage Voluntary Return, but Let People Make Their Own Choices**

Rhetoric by the Government of Uganda calling for the internally displaced to return home now is becoming increasingly strong. Officials have issued Camp Phase-Out Guidelines, which include plans for the gradual demolition of abandoned huts. There are concerns that the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is not taking a strong enough stance in opposing the Government of Uganda's focus on returns to the exclusion of other alternatives. In particular, there is a lack of clarity on options for those who choose to stay where the camps are located. UNHCR needs to foster ways for the displaced who wish to integrate locally to negotiate with landowners. While displaced people remain in the camps, basic services must be maintained to prevent de facto forced returns and

### **Policy Recommendations**

- ❑ International donors and agencies, particularly UNHCR and the US and UK governments, should urge the Government of Uganda to ensure voluntariness of returns.
- ❑ The US and UK governments should urge the Government of Uganda to commit additional funding to the PRDP.
- ❑ The US should increase discretionary non-earmarked funding for reconstruction and recovery programs in the north by at least \$35 million in FY09, and provide increased funding to UNHCR to support its IDP programs.
- ❑ The US should provide financial support to improve the performance of local authorities responsible for civilian protection, particularly the police and Community Development Officers.
- ❑ UNHCR should extend reintegration assistance to neglected internally displaced people in West Nile State and to vulnerable displaced people in urban areas.

the outbreak of disease, such as the current Hepatitis E virus outbreak, which has spread to several districts as a result of poor sanitation in the displacement camps.

About half of the more than 1.5 million internally displaced people in northern Uganda have moved out of the original camps. Even though most have only moved into transit sites closer to their areas of origin rather than returning home, many are beginning to cultivate their land and make plans to move home permanently. There is an urgent need to improve basic services in return areas – access to safe water, health care, and education – to encourage voluntary returns. Security fears are also having a major impact on returns. Displaced people living in camps nearer to the Sudanese border told Refugees International that they were not prepared to return home at this time – even those living in camps where people are dying of Hepatitis E – because of the potential threat of the LRA and attacks by Sudanese cattle raiders.

In addition to support for returns of those living in camps in the Acholi sub-region, there are other displaced groups in Uganda that will need help in rebuilding their lives. In Adjumani district in the West Nile sub-region, around 54,000 internally displaced people are living in camps that have received little support from the international community or the local district leadership. IDPs living outside of the camps in urban areas have also fallen through the cracks. As the focus of the international community moves to rebuilding the north and preparing for returns, UNHCR needs to work with local authorities to identify and assist these neglected groups of displaced people.

## Support Recovery of the North

A funding gap is opening up in northern Uganda, with humanitarian funding diminishing while recovery and development funding are taking too long to arrive. As an official with one UN agency told Refugees International, “When insecurity was so bad that we could hardly leave our compound, we were flooded with funding. Now that we have access and could do something really useful for communities the funding dries up.” International donors need to identify mechanisms for channeling timely recovery funding to the north. Waiting for funds to come through regular development channels will take too long to respond to the urgent needs for basic services in return areas.

Humanitarian needs still exist in the north, particularly while the majority of the internally displaced remain in the original camps or in transit sites. During the transition period donors must provide humanitarian and recovery funding simultaneously to adequately meet IDP needs. Lack of flexibility in funding by donors is hampering the ability of international and local organizations to respond to the changing situation. In particular, US funds for

Uganda are very heavily earmarked, leaving only approximately \$2 million of discretionary funds for FY08 out of approximately \$125 million allocated for northern Uganda.

The Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP), developed by the Government of Uganda and officially launched on July 1, is meant to be the framework for rebuilding the north. However, its extension from 14 to 40 districts without an increase in funding significantly reduces its potential impact on the northern districts most affected by the conflict. There is still great confusion about how the PRDP will be funded, implemented, and monitored, and about the level of additional financial commitment by the Government. The PRDP is another example of the Government of Uganda’s ability to draft plans and policies for the north that look good on paper but are poorly executed. Donors are understandably reluctant to contribute funds to the PRDP without clear guarantees from the government.

## Build Local Capacity for Protection

Abuse and neglect of children and violence against women continue to affect the internally displaced in northern Uganda. Child abandonment is a serious concern. As parents go back to farm their fields, they often leave their children behind in the camps to attend school, which leaves them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The biggest protection concern for women in the camps is domestic violence. International non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have developed programs to deal with protection and sexual violence. However, these essential activities will not be sustainable if NGOs do not build the capacity of local organizations to take them over.

Improved policing in local communities would go a long way towards improving security and building up the confidence of the displaced to return home. While Special Police Constables (SPCs) have been dispatched to sub-counties around northern Uganda, they have been badly trained and are ill-equipped. Because of lack of transportation and resources, they do not patrol in the communities, but rather stay in the sub-county headquarters and wait for people to report abuses. International agencies have given training and support to the SPCs, but programs have been uncoordinated and there continue to be complaints about police misconduct. Increased donor support is needed to create a more capable and robust police force, and to support local social welfare structures like the Community Development Officers (CDOs), who deal with gender-based violence and child protection concerns.

*Advocates Camilla Olson and Melanie Teff assessed the humanitarian situation for internally displaced people in northern Uganda in July 2008.*

# NORTHERN UGANDA:

## KEY FACTS ON ENSURING THE VOLUNTARINESS OF RETURNS

- ❑ **UNHCR must take a strong stance in opposing any move by the Government of Uganda towards forced returns.** The Government of Uganda has produced camp phase-out guidelines, the contents of which have caused major concerns with regard to the voluntariness of the returns process. The Guiding Principles on International Displacement, which the Government of Uganda has recognized, affirm that all returns should be voluntary and that the displaced have the right to resettle in areas outside of their home land. In this context, UNHCR needs to be much more proactive in advocating for the basic rights of the internally displaced with the Government. The agency should cease asking its implementing partners to demolish the huts of people who are moving to their home areas, as they did earlier in the year in Gulu, and initiate discussions with the Office of the Prime Minister on clarifying procedures for those who wish to stay near the camps so that they can enter into negotiations with the local landowners. An element of semi-urban planning may be needed in camp areas so that they can transition into permanent residential areas. Concern about land disputes in areas on which camps are located was a bigger issue raised by IDPs with Refugees International than land disputes in return areas at this stage. UNHCR is transferring the monitoring of population movements and of basic services over to district leadership in northern Uganda, but it is important that it retains the protection aspect of returnee monitoring.
- ❑ **Lack of basic services in return areas is preventing the majority of IDPs in northern Uganda from going home.** Due to the fact that people have been displaced for so long, local water sources have become inaccessible or contaminated. Many displaced people in Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader districts cited the need for safe water as their main reason for not returning home. They also told Refugees International that they were waiting for grasses to be high enough to put thatch on their huts. For those who wish to return sooner, plastic sheeting should be given. For extremely vulnerable people in the camps, such as the elderly and disabled, the need for assistance to build a hut on their land is delaying their ability to return. While most displaced people have begun to cultivate their own land, until they are able to sustain themselves from their harvests they will require additional targeted food assistance. Better access to health and education services in the camps than in return areas is also affecting decisions about whether to maintain a presence in the camps. In planning for basic service provision, the impact of over two decades of conflict on the psychological well-being of the displaced population needs to be taken into account, particularly when people return to areas where atrocities were committed.
- ❑ **Ongoing security fears remain a significant cause of non-return.** The displaced lack confidence in a lasting peace in northern Uganda, especially those whose homes are close to the Sudanese border. When Refugee International visited northern Uganda, unconfirmed rumors of a return of LRA rebels were enough to scare some returnees into packing and planning for a return to the camps. The lack of a strong police presence in communities in the north is also impacting the overall security situation, as many of the displaced expressed concern about their own safety in the face of rising local criminality. The presence of landmines is also hampering returns and preventing some IDPs from accessing their land for cultivation.
- ❑ **Basic services in the camps need to be maintained for the remaining IDPs, particularly services for the most vulnerable.** If basic services are not maintained in the camps for those who have yet to go home, then it is tantamount to forcing people to return. Failure to maintain adequate sanitation in the camps in northern Uganda has already led to a Hepatitis E outbreak that has spread to several districts

in the Acholi sub-region. For those who remain in the camps and are not able to cultivate their land, access to food is a serious concern. The displaced expressed confusion to Refugees International about the UN World Food Program's policies on phase-out of food rations in the camps: whether a three month ration was a return package or if more food would be given in the camp later on. WFP needs to clearly disseminate information to the local population about food distributions in the camps.

- ❑ **Groups of displaced that have been neglected will also require reintegration assistance, particularly in West Nile State.** In addition to the Acholi sub-region, there are other areas in the north where people were also forced to flee their homes as a result of the LRA's activities, including Adjumani district in West Nile sub-region, where there are approximately 54,000 internally displaced people living in several camps. Unlike the camps in the Acholi sub-region, the camps in Adjumani are not being managed by UNHCR, and the displaced do not currently receive assistance from international organizations. The local district leadership has supported the displaced

with access to health care and education, but access to food remains a major issue for the camp residents, particularly since the land that many were given to farm is in poor condition and they do not receive any food rations from the World Food Program. Many of the displaced in Adjumani are still too fearful to return home because of the potential threat of the LRA. Once they do begin the return process, basic services in their home areas will have to be rebuilt and they will need to be given livelihood support.

- ❑ **Urban IDPs in Uganda have slipped through the cracks** because they have not been recognized by UNHCR or the Government of Uganda. There are vulnerable internally displaced people who fled to urban areas during the conflict who require assistance and will need support in order to return home. UNHCR is undertaking a verification exercise for urban refugees; they should look to conduct such an exercise with urban IDPs as well.

# NORTHERN UGANDA:

## KEY FACTS ON SUPPORTING THE RECOVERY OF THE NORTH

- ❑ **A funding gap is opening up for northern Uganda.** During the height of the crisis in the north, humanitarian funds were available relatively quickly. Donors are now reducing humanitarian funding, but recovery and development funds are taking too long to arrive. The majority of humanitarian funding in northern Uganda has been provided via the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP). The 2008 CAP, which includes some recovery activities, is only about 45% funded as compared to the 2007 CAP which was funded at 71%. Donors have objected to funding recovery activities via the CAP and during the recent mid-year review of the CAP recovery activities were largely removed. Having insisted on this step, however, international donors need to identify alternative ways of providing recovery funding to the north rapidly to strengthen the tenuous peace and ensure that incentives exist for people to go back home.
- ❑ **US funds for northern Uganda are very heavily earmarked,** mostly for AIDS and malaria, leaving only approximately \$2 million of discretionary funds out of approximately \$125 million for FY08 for the north. This restricts the ability of the US to respond to changing realities. For example, during the recovery period, the rehabilitation of community-level health infrastructure should be addressed, but the earmarking of funds to combat specific diseases does not permit this. The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) allows more flexibility in their funding, and permits the application of funds as needed for humanitarian or developmental aims. Other donors, particularly the US, should adopt a similar approach. Flexibility in funding is also needed to address potential crises, including the worst case scenario should the LRA return and the local population move back to the camps.
- ❑ **Greater presence of recovery-focused UN agencies and INGOs working together in a coordinated manner is needed.** Livelihood and early recovery programs targeted to returning displaced communities are urgently needed in northern Uganda. The UN Development Program, which is the lead agency for early recovery, has minimal staff presence in northern Uganda. Other agencies that could support recovery programs, such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, are also largely absent. During the height of the crisis, a "dependency culture" was created in northern Uganda, as international NGOs took the lead in developing plans and delivering services to the local population. As programs transition from emergency to recovery, a change in mindset is needed both by NGO staff and district leaders, who must increase their coordination to align their work plans into the District Development Plans. The US government uses private contractors to channel much of its recovery funding and these companies often fail to coordinate with other agencies, which leads to duplication of efforts.
- ❑ **Assistance by international agencies during the transition must focus on building local capacity.** The so-called "parish approach," which identifies needs at the level of the smallest administrative area, is a positive example of international organizations working with local leadership to try to ensure that basic services reach people in northern Uganda regardless of whether they are in the camps or in return areas. A pilot joint needs assessment conducted in Gulu district at the parish level identified local priorities for basic service infrastructure rehabilitation, but then found that donors were not flexible enough to respond to the outcomes of the assessment. Donors and international agencies need to support such local planning efforts, as well as make a conscious effort to train local district authorities and community-based organizations.



# NORTHERN UGANDA:

## KEY FACTS ON STRENGTHENING LOCAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS

- ❑ **International donors must support the Government of Uganda to revitalize protection structures at the local level,** particularly the Community Development Officers (CDOs), who need to have a stronger presence in every sub-county. As international organizations transition away from humanitarian assistance in the north, CDOs are well-placed to take over leadership on services related to gender-based violence (GBV), children, and other vulnerable groups. UNICEF has given logistical support to the CDOs in northern Uganda, but many are overstretched and they still lack resources, including accommodation, office space, and transportation to increase their presence in communities. Districts have not allocated adequate resources for the CDOs and their role is not clearly outlined in the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for northern Uganda. Child Protection Committees, which include the participation of community members in each sub-county, also require support.
- ❑ **Training and resources for community police in northern Uganda must be prioritized.** Special Police Constables (SPCs) who are deployed throughout the north receive only two months of training compared to the normal nine months for regular police. There have been many complaints about abuses carried out by the SPCs against the local population. International organizations have conducted training programs, but there is a lack of coordination between the different agencies. Training for the SPCs should be organized through the national police curriculum and channeled through the government's Justice Law and Order Sector. SPCs do not patrol in the local communities often because they lack transportation. As a result they wait for crimes to be reported to them at the sub-county headquarters. Refugees International was told of cases in which women who had been raped had to pay for the police to transport not only them, but also the perpetrator, to the local sub-county headquarters because the police did not have any funds for fuel. A stronger and more capable police presence in the communities would improve the sense of security for displaced people and encourage voluntary returns.
- ❑ **GBV is the highest reported protection concern in the camps, particularly domestic violence.** Local structures to deal with violence against women are weak. International non-governmental organizations have set up hotlines for rape survivors to report incidents, but when cases are referred to local institutions like the police or judiciary, there is little capacity for follow up. Women face problems accessing medical assistance after they have been raped because of confusion regarding Police Form 3, which requires survivors to report to the police before they can go to a health clinic, a deterrent for many women. In addition, health centers in the districts in northern Uganda are often lacking in adequate medical supplies and staff to treat rape cases. Policies for survivors of rape need to be clarified at the national level to ensure that proper care and access to justice is provided. International NGOs implementing GBV programs in northern Uganda need to focus on increasing the sustainability of their work by building the capacity of local organizations in the north to take over these services.
- ❑ **Lack of access to education in northern Uganda is having an impact on child protection.** Many schools that were displaced during the conflict still need to be rebuilt in the return areas. Teacher accommodation is also needed in return areas to give incentive to teachers, particularly female teachers, to move back with the schools. Many parents leave their children in the displacement camps when they go to cultivate their land so that they can continue their schooling. This has led to an increase in exploitation and abuse of children in the camps. For particularly vulnerable groups such as youth, former child combatants, and children with disabilities, there are serious gaps in funding for longer-term education and training programs.