

## **Funding Problems Stall Juba Negotiations**

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Kampala dismisses as unreasonable LRA cash request for consultations.

Peace talks between the Ugandan government and the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, have been postponed with the rebel group requesting cash from donors to carry out consultations on accountability and reconciliation proposals.

Negotiations between the Ugandan authorities and the LRA were adjourned in June to allow both parties to consult with stakeholders and victims of northern Uganda's 21-year civil war on how to deal with "accountability and reconciliation" - the third item on the peace-talks agenda.

LRA and Uganda government representatives reached and signed an agreement setting out principles for handling accountability and reconciliation for crimes committed on both sides of the conflict in northern Uganda, but some details are not yet finalised.

The LRA says that planned consultations have not been held because of a lack of funds and is requesting cash from donors. While the Ugandan government - which says it needs two million US dollars for its consultations - insists the group's cash demands are unreasonable and accuses it group of stalling tactics.

The consultations were to consider creating a commission to investigate alleged war crimes committed by both sides and explore the possibility of using traditional justice systems - which could be proposed in future as an alternative to prosecutions at the International Criminal Court, ICC, in The Hague.

Joseph Kony, the LRA leader, his deputy Vincent Otti, and top commanders Domenic Ogwen and Okot Odiambo are wanted by the ICC on 33 separate counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The charges include murder, rape, enlisting of children, and sexual enslavement.

A fifth LRA commander Raska Lukwiya - who also had a warrant issued against him - was killed in August 2005 in a battle with government forces.

The outstanding arrest warrants have been cited as a stumbling block to the peace talks, which began in the capital of autonomous South Sudan in July 2006, and were set to resume in mid-September after the two sides had completed consultations.

But acting LRA spokesman David Matsanga Nyekorach said, "Continuing the talks without consultations will be meaningless, so we will not engage in any further talks."

Head of the LRA delegation Martin Ojul said the rebel group has requested two million dollars from donors to pay for consultations.

The LRA says it needs the money to airlift 500 delegates from northern Uganda to the main rebel hideout in the Garamba National Park, in neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC. It also wants to fund its experts to travel to Argentina, South Africa and Sierra Leone to research issues of conflict, justice and

reconciliation.

"It would enable us to assess the failures and successes of these systems and how to improve on them," said Ojul.

"Without these consultations, it would be pointless to resume the talks as the materials for the next round of talks are supposed to be derived from these consultations. So any delay can only be reasonably blamed on those who are making it impossible for the consultations to be held," he said.

But acting government delegation leader Dr Stephen Kagoda said the LRA's cash demands are unreasonable, unrealistic and aimed at delaying the peace talks.

The talks - which are mediated by south Sudan vice-president Dr Riek Machar and overseen by United Nations special envoy to northern Uganda and former president of Mozambique Joachim Chissano - have regularly stalled since they began in July last year.

This January, LRA delegates walked out of the talks after a row over their daily expense allowances, and returned only after these were increased.

"The LRA is looking for two million dollars to ferry people, including musicians, to Garamba for consultation," said Kagoda. "Let the LRA delegation come down to the ground in northern Uganda where the actual war victims are who were maimed, raped [and whose friends and relatives were] killed."

Kagoda, who is a senior civil servant in Uganda's ministry of internal affairs, attacked the group's consultation plans.

"Taking 500 people for consultation - for what? The victims are in northern Uganda. It will not be cost-effective as the real war victims will not reach the LRA leaders," he said.

"To travel abroad to do what...? To consult whom in the Diaspora...?" he asked. "The victims are here. The victims are not in South Africa, Argentina or in the Diaspora."

But Ojul denied Kagoda's claims that the LRA delegation has been soliciting money from donors as a precondition for resuming the peace talks.

"At no time did we make receiving two million dollars a precondition for resuming the peace talks," he said in a statement emailed to IWPR.

"It's not true that we have been soliciting for funds everywhere, including Canada.

"It is unforgivable for a senior civil servant to deliberately make irresponsible, reckless and malicious political statements, calculated at maligning and undermining the integrity of the LRA and the delegates in

particular, with the potential of diverting focus from the process.”

Ojul said the government had constantly used such tactics "to make it appear as if the LRA are the bad guys and they the good ones".

He said the LRA had so far raised 600,000 dollars of the two million it says it requires.

Ojul insisted that peace talks would not collapse, because, he said, the LRA remains committed to ending a civil war that has claimed some 100,000 lives.

"We want to reaffirm to the stakeholders, the donor community, in particular, that in all that we do in this process, we are motivated by the will to make these peace talks succeed."

Meanwhile, deputy leader of the government delegation in Juba Henry Okello Oryem said the Uganda authorities need one million dollars to carry out consultations.

Government delegation spokesman Captain Ba-Hoku Barigye said there was no money in the budget for consultations.

"We have not been able to hold consultations due to budget constraints," he told IWPR by phone from Juba.

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