

Kampala Running Out of Patience With Kony

Author: [Patrick Okino](#)
[Samuel Richard](#)
[Peter Eichstaedt](#)

More frustration for Ugandan officials and international peace negotiators as rebel leader rebuffs them again.

Hopes of a formal end to Uganda's bloody insurgency received another blow over the weekend when rebel leader Joseph Kony once again refused to sign a peace deal.

"Kony has failed the peace agreement. This implies that he is not interested in the peace process," said Calvin Ayang, a resident of Baropiro village in northern Uganda, reflecting the views of many in the north.

"The best is to attack his hideout at Garamba [National] Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and [he] be forced out or killed," Ayang said about Kony – the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA – who for the third time this year rejected an agreement that has been two years in the making.

As recently as last week, Kony claimed he would sign the deal on Saturday, November 29, a deadline that had been set by leaders of Uganda and South Sudan, after talks effectively ended earlier this year.

But Kony also demanded to meet, as he has on several occasions in the past, with a group of about 20 tribal and cultural leaders from northern Uganda who flew to Juba on November 27. They were then taken to a meeting place near Nabanga on the South Sudan, DRC border, and later met with Kony in his camp.

At the camp, Kony restated his longstanding request that charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity issued by the International Criminal Court, ICC, in The Hague be lifted before he would sign. He also reportedly demanded that his army be integrated into the Ugandan army and that he be given a government post.

Kony apparently left the meeting and is thought to have returned to his camp in Garamba National Park, where for the past year he has raided and looted towns and villages, some as far away as the Central African Republic, and abducting hundreds of children.

Upon learning that Kony would not sign the deal, the Ugandan peace team and chief talks mediator, South Sudan vice president Riek Machar, who were at Nabanga, returned to Juba, while cultural, political and religious leaders from northern Uganda continued to meet with Kony.

Lango paramount chief Yosam Odur, who was among those who spoke to Kony, told IWPR that the rebel commander welcomed them into his camp, but warned against pressuring him to sign the final peace agreement.

"He welcomed us cordially, but later said he would not make a mistake to sign the agreement as long as the ICC indictment against him still stands," Odur told IWPR on phone from Kony's camp.

“He described [those of] us who are pressuring him to come out and [put pen to] paper as betrayers and government spies.”

Sam Engola, a member of the government delegation, told IWPR from the Beijing Hotel in Juba after returning from Nabanga, that some of Kony’s fellow Acholi tribesmen in the diaspora have advised Kony not to sign the deal.

He said Machar and Joachim Chissano, the United Nations special envoy to the Kony talks, never met the elusive rebel leader this trip.

“As the government delegation, there is nothing we can do,” Engola said. “The only option is to write the report and present to the government and the parliament.”

Because Kony did not sign, President Yoweri Museveni cancelled plans to travel to Juba to put his signature to the document, a trip that was conditional on Kony doing so first.

“How can you talk to a ... person like Kony [so that] he listens?” Museveni told reporters in Kampala. “The only way he can listen is through military offensive.”

Meanwhile, a government official with the delegation in Juba, who asked to remain anonymous, was critical of the suggestion that the LRA be incorporated into government forces he fought for 20 years.

“His inclusion into government and his troops into army are not possible,” the man said. “There are procedures to be followed in recruitment into army. Kony doesn’t have qualifications to join government. He is a primary six pupil.”

Presidential advisor for northern Uganda Richard Twodong said Museveni will develop a course of action after he is briefed on the meeting by Machar, Chissano and his government team.

“Whatever action government is going to take against Kony, is up to [Museveni],” said Twodong. “People are tired of his nonsense. Under normal circumstances, Kony should be fought. What more is left? He has shown he is not interested in peaceful means to end this rebellion.”

Uganda’s military spokesman Major Paddy Ankunda said, “We are not surprised [at] Kony refusing to sign a peace deal. Kony has perfected the art of lying. He is not a peace maker.” He suggested that military action against Kony is possible.

While many in the north are angry that Kony did sign the peace agreement, few believe that he was ready to do so.

“I have failed to [understand] what Kony really wants and his motives,” said Juma Jami Okot, a presenter with Mega FM radio station in Gulu.

Gilbert Okello, a resident of Amuru, said, “Kony is a character you can’t rely on. I knew he would not sign the peace deal. If he was to sign, he would have first released children and women [he is holding].”

Jimmy Okello, from Kakoge, said Kony was just buying time so that he could re-supply his forces and would only come out of the jungle if he’s captured alive.

Patrick Okino and Samuel Richard Egadu are IWPR-trained reporters. Peter Eichstaedt is IWPR’s Africa Editor.

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