

Museveni: Progress Following Peace Talks Irreversible

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President outlines development plans for northern Uganda as tentative peace talks continue and displaced villagers return home.

Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, has said the progress made at the on-off peace talks between his government and the Lord Resistance Army, LRA, rebels in South Sudan's capital of Juba is irreversible.

"We are making progress following the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and the Juba peace talks. The progress we have made to date is irreversible," Museveni said at celebrations of the country's 45th

independence day anniversary at Kololo airstrip, Kampala, on October 9.

"All stakeholders should build on this to ensure a faster redevelopment of northern Uganda," he said.

Since the Juba peace talks began in July last year, a fragile peace has returned to northern Uganda and displaced people have gradually started returning home from the squalid camps that until recently housed some 1.7 million villagers.

Museveni said following the signing of a ceasefire between the government and LRA last August, 920,550 Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs, have begun to travel home to the war-torn ravaged northern Uganda. Since June 30 this year, 539,550 have returned to the Acholi, Lango and Teso regions, while 381,000 are in satellite camps near their villages, he said.

"The IDPs are now returning to their homes and negotiations for peace in the North are ongoing. The general mood for resettlement is positive," said Museveni.

The two-decade-long rebellion has left over 1.7million people displaced, an estimated 100,000 killed and nearly 80,000 abducted, 38,000 of them children under the age of 15.

The peace negotiations, which are currently adjourned, are mediated by South Sudan's vice president Dr Riek Machar and overseen by the United Nations' special envoy to northern Uganda, former Mozambique president Joachim Chissano.

Three agreements on the five-item agenda of the talks have been signed so far, including one on accountability and reconciliation - which deals with traditional justice systems, and which seems to sideline the International Criminal Court, ICC.

LRA leader Joseph Kony, his deputy, Vincent Otti, and top commanders Domenic Ogwen and Okot Odiambo are wanted by the Hague-based ICC to face charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, pillaging and enslavement.

But arrest warrants issued in July 2005 have been seen by many as an impediment to the peace talks.

In his speech last week, Museveni announced the plans of his government to address the humanitarian needs of the IDPs and war-affected populations in the war-ravaged region with an emergency Humanitarian Action Plan.

“In the course of next year, the government will prioritise restoration of infrastructure including schools, bridges and roads. The government will also continue with its plan for the restoration of peace, livelihoods, recovery and development of the region,” he said.

The president also said his government was “doing all in its power to alleviate the suffering” of Ugandans following the flood disaster that has beset the north and north-eastern region of the country, piling another agony onto IDPs trying to return home.

“The government, line ministries and our development partners have put mitigation measures to address the calamities: massive displacements, landslides, destruction of infrastructure and crops, loss of lives,” he said.

Last month, Museveni declared a state of emergency in northern Uganda, in the wake of the floods which have left thousands homeless and countless numbers dead, sweeping away roads and bridges and leaving entire communities isolated.

He said the government was jointly working with the World Food Programme, WFP, the United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, and the World Health

Organisation, WHO, to attend to education, food, water and sanitation in the region.

“The floods in the north and northeast have caused havoc to our physical infrastructure and the government is working in partnerships with international organisations to restore basic services,” said Museveni.

“Three military helicopters shall be used for continued surveillance and monitoring of the flooded area, giving assistance as shall be required. However, the challenge remains that with the rains expected to continue into November, accessibility to the affected areas is becoming critical and the need to relocate the people, the need for resources remains a great challenge.”

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