

Rebels Appear to Issue New Talks Threat

Author: [Rosebell Kagumire](#)

LRA “letter” says peace negotiations could collapse if new demands aren’t met. The Lord’s Resistance Army, LRA, is apparently threatening renewed conflict unless it’s given financial and practical assistance.

In a letter purportedly from the LRA to Dr Riek Machar, the vice-president of the South Sudan government, which IWPR has obtained, the rebels said they wanted cash and supplies of food, water and medicine before renewed talks can take place – initially scheduled this week.

The letter, dated July 25, which appeared in the Ugandan press, was signed by chief LRA negotiator David Matsanga, but seems to reflect demands dictated by rebel leader Joseph Kony.

A meeting between Kony, his LRA negotiators and Machar was to take place at Ri-Kwangba, a remote location on the border of South Sudan and northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC.

“I am instructed by the High command to tell the international community that the JUBA PEACE process is under siege and there is a danger of it collapsing due to the lack of Funding from the donor community,” stated the letter, whose authenticity has not been verified.

“We call upon the international donor to [the] Juba Peace Process to donate more funds to finalize the peace process. The cost of war in the region will be much, much higher than the funds that are currently needed by Chief Mediator Dr Riek Machar to complete the Juba Peace Process.”

Speaking to the media recently, Matsanga said, “We need about 600,000 US dollars to prepare [for] the meeting in Ri-Kwangba and also to carry out negotiations.”

The peace talks, that have run off and on for two years, and which were suspended in May, are aimed at ending two decades of war between rebels and Ugandan troops.

Most people in the north, however, have returned to their homes and resumed farming since negotiations to end the conflict began.

In the letter, Matsanga accused the donor community of sabotaging the peace process.

“We call upon EU countries, especially Norway, Britain, Denmark and Sweden that have enormously contributed funds, to urgently review their policy on the Juba Peace Process,” said the letter.

The international Catholic relief agency Caritas has been under contract to South Sudan to organise and deliver supplies to the rebels – purchased by Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland – since the start of the talks.

The money already provided has been funneled through the United Nations' Juba Initiative Fund, estimated to be about 11 million dollars, a source told IWPR.

The supplies are intended to prevent the rebels from looting and attacking villages.

However, as IWPR reported earlier, the LRA went on an extended raid in February and March from its base in northeastern DRC through parts of South Sudan and into the neighbouring Central African Republic.

The raid netted the rebels untold amounts of supplies and several hundred abductees, some of whom have been trained as fighters.

The LRA's renewed demands are unlikely to be met by South Sudan and Uganda. Both have hardened their positions, saying that no further talks are necessary since a peace agreement has been negotiated.

The only action left is for Kony to sign, the governments have said.

On two prior occasions, first in mid-April and then again in mid-May, Kony did not show up at a prearranged gathering of officials and negotiators to sign the Final Peace Agreement.

Meanwhile, Uganda, DRC and South Sudan are reportedly planning a possible strike against Kony at his LRA base in the DRC's Garamba National Park.

Uganda's army chief, General Aronda Nyakairima, said recently that the Kampala authorities want to move against Kony, but the DRC has reportedly refused to allow the Ugandans to enter their country.

South Sudan, which has mediated the talks and often called for patience, appears to have given up on a successful conclusion of the talks, in part because of a June 5 attack by the LRA on South Sudan forces that left some 14 soldiers dead.

South Sudanese president Salva Kiir met last week his Ugandan counterpart Yoweri Museveni over the LRA problem.

The two presidents reportedly set July 31 as the date for Kony to sign the Final Peace Agreement or face military action.

Uganda's spokesman at the peace talks, Captain Chris Magezi, suggested that Matsanga and the LRA again were using the peace process to extract money from the international community under the threat of war.

“Matsanga should know that the peace process is not a... goldmine,” said Magezi. “We negotiated and there’s no need to look for more money from donors. All we need is for Kony to sign the final peace agreement.”

Rosebell Kagumire is a reporter in Kampala. Peter Eichstaedt is IWPR’s Africa editor.

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