

Scepticism Over Juba Accord

Author: [IWPR ICC](#)

Many across northern Uganda question whether the LRA is ready to lay down its arms. Many people in northern Uganda remain sceptical that the recently agreed peace pact will be signed by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, and Uganda as scheduled at the end of March.

The LRA's demand that the International Criminal Court, ICC, arrest warrants for the LRA's top commanders be suspended before it signs a peace deal is seen by some as a delaying tactic that will enable the rebels to re-equip.

Christopher Omara, the chairman for Gulu district youth council, noted recent reports that elements of the LRA were already in the Central African Republic, adjacent to the rebel camp in the Garamba Park of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

"When LRA members were signing the permanent ceasefire agreement, others were reportedly moving towards the Central African Republic," Omara told IWPR.

"This means that the signing was one of the LRA's diplomatic ruses, to prolong their stay in the jungle and revamp their seemingly disintegrating group."

Some see the LRA's demand for the suspension of the ICC arrest warrants as an insurmountable obstacle to signing a peace treaty. All parties the parties involved – the ICC, the Ugandan government, and the LRA - have shown little willingness to give ground on this issue.

The chairman of the LRA delegation team, David Matsanga, has said that LRA leader Joseph Kony would never sign a peace treaty unless the arrest warrants were lifted.

The ICC also appears determined to put Kony and the remaining commanders on trial, despite the fact that none have been arrested – a task that presumably must be completed by the Ugandan army.

"So there is that possibility the talks will stop at [their] current level, or take longer than imagined, at best," said Omara.

The peace talks have extended over 18 months in Juba, South Sudan, and this has benefited the LRA, said Omara, because it has allowed them to build up a political wing, which they never had before.

This has been done with Kony's extensive use of non-rebel negotiators, some of whom have since been replaced after Kony accused them of personally benefiting from the talks.

"These non-rebel negotiators have been talking on behalf of the rebels, and they have succeeded in validating the rebellion that clearly never had a cause," said Omara.

Omara said the LRA now appears to have an agenda, and noted their recent demands that northern residents be guaranteed 35 per cent of top government and military positions, as well as government contracts in the expected reconstruction of the north.

Such positions attempt to portray the LRA as fighting on behalf of the north, even though the vast majority of the LRA's war victims were northerners.

Since the conflict in northern Uganda erupted in 1987, an estimated 100,000 people have died, most of them from war-related causes and about 50,000 people have been kidnapped, most of them children. Nearly two million have been displaced, although many are beginning to return home.

Samuel Oduny, an elder in Gulu, has never had confidence in the Juba peace talks since they began in July, 2006, despite the recent agreements.

"Kony is very unpredictable, and he has let many peace talks aimed at ending the northern insurgency, down," said Oduny.

"And I don't think Kony will come out of his hideout because, since the Juba talks began, he has been in hiding."

The chairman of the Democratic Party in Gulu, Mzee Uma Kerubino, however, believes that a final peace agreement will be signed due to the insistence from neighbouring countries, such as South Sudan, where the LRA has also caused problems.

"Countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and southern Sudan, where the LRA has within the past few weeks reportedly killed people, are going to work together to ensure that the LRA signs the agreement, to rid them from their countries," said Kerubino.

There have been recent media reports that the LRA on the March 1 killed a senior member of the Gbadi people while fishing in Djugu, a town bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sudan.

The LRA are also accused of killing the chief of Nyemulu village in Diabo near Dungu on February 12, in addition to reportedly abducting people.

Such acts have shattered people's optimism.

Kerubino believes that as Kony's army appears to be disintegrating, this may force him to sign the peace deal.

"Support is dwindling from within Kony's own camp with the recent defections," said Kerubino, pointing out that Kony undermined his standing by ordering last year's execution of his deputy commander, Vincent

Otti.

Molly Arach, a resident of the Te-Tugu internal refugee camp, which is about 16 kilometres east of Gulu, remembered dark days in her past when she was told that the LRA had again attacked people, despite having agreed to a peace settlement.

Arach lost two children to the LRA, and said she could only wonder when she might enjoy a permanent peace.

"I don't know when this suffering will end," said Arach.

Still others, perhaps reflecting a growing majority in the north, have grown tired of speculation about the LRA.

Peter Ocan, a resident of the Koro internal refugee camp, paused only a moment from his drinking to say that he didn't want to be bothered about it.

"I will wait for whatever comes out of the talks," he said. "Confidence or no confidence, a final result is coming, and that is what I am waiting for."

Caroline Ayugi is an IWPR journalist in Gulu.

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