

Uganda Willing to See Officials Tried at ICC

Author: [Goodluck Musinguzi](#)

Minister says government ready to hand over army members and officials to the international war crimes court, should the need arise.

Ruhakana Rugunda, the Ugandan government's chief negotiator in peace talks with the rebel Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, has told IWPR that Ugandan soldiers and political leaders who committed crimes during the LRA's 21-year insurgency must also face justice.

"Not a single person will be shielded in pursuance of long-lasting peace for northern Uganda," said Rugunda. "Patience continues to guide the government delegation, and everything will be explored because each side has to account for what happened in the war."

Rugunda, Uganda's interior minister, was reacting to comments by Vincent Otti, the LRA's second-in-command, who told IWPR that he was ready to hand himself in to the International Criminal Court, ICC, in The Hague to answer charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes – but only if the court charges Ugandan army soldiers on similar counts.

Rugunda was speaking in his home town of Kabale, in the far southwestern corner of Uganda, after flying from Juba, the South Sudan capital where the peace talks are taking place, to attend the funeral of his 93-year-old mother Norah Rugunda.

He hinted that the government might be prepared to hand to the ICC – the world's first international war crimes court – any politicians or members of the Ugandan People's Defence Force, UPDF, who were suspected of war crimes but had not been indicted and tried by the country's own legal system.

But the minister made it clear at the same time that the chances of government soldiers or national politicians being sent to The Hague was extremely slim.

"Really, the problem of impunity [from justice] has been with the Lord's Resistance Army," he said. "The LRA has committed a lot of crimes and not a single person has appeared for justice or before the legal system."

Speaking to IWPR correspondent Samuel Okiror Egadu by satellite phone from a base deep inside the Garamba National Park in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the LRA maintains its main guerrilla bases, Otti had said, "I am ready to go and face ICC in The Hague to answer the charges if the ICC also investigates government soldiers and commanders. If UPDF are included on the list of indicted commanders, I will definitely go to The Hague. Short of that, I will never go."

Otti explained, "It's not only LRA alone who committed atrocities in northern Uganda. It's both LRA and UPDF. Why did ICC indict us alone? It's very one-sided."

Reacting to the alleged lack of balance in the indictment process, Rugunda said Uganda's own criminal laws had dealt harshly with UPDF officers who "committed mistakes" in the course of warfare with the LRA.

He said that under item number three on the peace talks agenda - "accountability and reconciliation" - the LRA has the opportunity to back up its allegations against UPDF soldiers and national politicians. The Ugandan government will analyse LRA claims and take action wherever justified, the minister added.

Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni referred the country's 21-year civil war in the north to the ICC in December 2003. In July 2005, the court issued arrest warrants for five senior LRA figures - its leader Joseph Kony and top commanders Otti, Raska Lukwiya, Okot Odhiambo and Dominic Ongwen. Lukwiya died in combat last year, so the list is now down to four.

In inviting the ICC to start work, Museveni's government wanted it specifically to investigate the LRA's part in the conflict. Rugunda's hint that the ICC might be able to indict non-LRA participants in the war seems to run counter to reports from Juba which say that, if a peace deal is reached, Kony, Otti, Odhiambo and Ongwen will not be handed over to the ICC.

According to a report in Uganda's New Vision newspaper from Juba, negotiators reached an agreement after Rugunda departed for Kabale last week, which said, "The parties believe that the [Ugandan] national legal and institutional framework provide a sufficient basis for ensuring accountability and reconciliation in Uganda with respect to crimes and violations committed during the conflict."

The agreement was signed by the LRA's chief negotiator, Martin Ojul, and by Steven Kagoda, permanent secretary of the Ugandan Internal Affairs Ministry, who commented, "Gradually, we have been moving closer. Now there is easy communication."

The agreement also provides for the use of alternative traditional justice systems in the main Acholi, Lango and Teso ethnic areas affected by the conflict and for the establishment of a South Africa-style truth and justice commission in Uganda.

Asked which Ugandan army officers he would like the ICC to investigate and charge with war crimes, Otti told IWPR, "I don't need to mention them. Ugandans know them very well. If the ICC wants me to tell them, I can."

Otti's ICC arrest warrant lists 33 counts of war crimes violations since July 2002, including attacks on civilians and the enslavement and forcible conscription of child soldiers.

Goodluck Musinguzi is a reporter with the Uganda Radio Network (www.ugandaradionetwork.com), an IWPR project.

Location: [Africa](#)

Topic: [Uganda](#)

Focus: [ICC - International Criminal Court](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uganda-willing-see-officials-tried-icc>