

## **US Backs Action Against Kony**

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Washington concerned continued LRA presence in eastern DRC could destabilise region.

The United States has assured the Ugandan government that it will back a planned push by its armed forces into the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC, to flush out rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA, from their bases in the Garamba National Park.

Dr Jendayi Frazer, the US assistant secretary for African affairs, gave the American pledge during a meeting last week in Kampala with Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni.

Frazer told reporters that the US government is "very concerned about the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we are working to ensure that the security situation improves".

There has been a flurry of diplomatic activity throughout September in an attempt to confront the eastern Congo's deteriorating security and avoid a return to hostilities by the competing armies of Uganda, the Congo and Rwanda.

"President Museveni and I spoke about the eastern DRC and he assured me that he will continue to work to reduce tensions with the government of the DRC," said Frazer. She added that she had also held talks with Presidents Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Joseph Kabila of the DRC.

Museveni and Kabila signed an agreement in Tanzania on September 8 that will see a joint Ugandan-Congo force, supported by United Nations soldiers, attempt to remove LRA fighters from the Congo's Garamba National Park by mid-December.

The agreement, reached after two days of negotiations in a mountain lodge at Ngurdoto near the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha, followed severe border tension between the two countries. Uganda's defence minister Crispus Kiyonga threatened a unilateral Ugandan invasion of Congo to get at the LRA and other rebel groups.

The leaders of northern Uganda's LRA rebellion, which has lasted 21 years and seen at least 100,000 people die and 1.7 million others become internal refugees, fled to the Garamba National Park, in the northeastern Congo, in late 2004 from their former bases in southern Sudan.

Frazer said the US would host a three-day meeting from September 15 in Kampala of heads of state from the Great Lakes region - Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, and Burundi - to discuss the eastern Congo crisis.

Between 1998 and 2003, these countries and their various militia proxies fought a major war in the eastern Congo that left more than 2.3 million dead. Warfare has continued sporadically.

In August this year, there were three separate attacks across the Ugandan border by Congo government and Interahamwe forces that resulted in the deaths of three Ugandans and a British oil worker. Villages

were looted and four Ugandan soldiers were abducted by the Congolese.

The Interahamwe (a Kinyarwanda word meaning "Those who fight together") is an ethnic Hutu paramilitary organisation that enjoyed the backing of Rwanda's Hutu-led government leading up to, during, and after the 100-day Rwandan Genocide of 1994. A majority of the 800,000 Rwandan killings were perpetrated by the Interahamwe on ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Following the overthrow of Rwanda's Hutu-dominated government by the Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front, RPF, the Interahamwe fled into the eastern Congo.

The surprise Ngurdoto Accord came soon after Kiyonga had warned his countrymen to be prepared for renewed fighting in the Congo in the course of a briefing for parliament's defence committee in Kampala, the Ugandan capital.

Kiyonga gave notice that military targets would include four other groups in addition to the LRA.

He named the other potential targets as the Interahamwe and three guerrilla organisations dedicated to the overthrow of President Museveni - the People's Redemption Army, PRA, the Allied Democratic Forces, ADF, and the National Army for the Liberation of Uganda, NALU, all operating from the forests of the eastern Congo.

The defence minister's threat came amid reports by the United Nations Refugee Agency that some 35,000 or more Congolese have fled into Uganda from the renewed warfare in the eastern Congo between local militias, renegade soldiers and the national army.

Frazer, Museveni and Kabila are also highly concerned by renewed attacks by rebel Congolese army general Laurent Nkunda on Congolese forces in the eastern Congo's North Kivu Province. Nkunda led a Congolese Tutsi militia that was backed by the Rwandan government during the Congo war. His forces - several thousand strong and as ruthlessly efficient as those of the Rwandan National Army - have re-emerged as a significant threat to prospects for lasting peace and stability in the eastern Congo. In early September, Nkunda said a "state of war" now exists between his Tutsi forces and the Congo army.

"Unless this [Nkunda] situation is addressed it could have major adverse consequences for the whole of the Great Lakes region," Stephanie Wolters, a former BBC correspondent in the Congo and now a Congo analyst with South Africa's Institute for Security Studies, told IWPR.

"In large part the development of Nkunda's menace reflects the failure on the part of successive Congolese governments successfully to manage and complete the [post-war] demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration process and to address other specific issues Nkunda has raised.

"Since January 2007, some 160,000 people have been displaced in North Kivu alone, bringing the total number of displaced in the province to 600,000 - more than fifty per cent of the total displaced population in the entire country [of DRC]. The situation for the population is dire: all sides accuse them of assisting their enemies and, increasingly, local communities become the targets of acts of revenge by one or other armed group."

There have been reports that Rwandan troops have re-entered DRC to bolster Nkunda. Rwanda, in turn, accuses the DRC of harbouring the Interahamwe. "It is relatively easy to identify instances of logistical support provided by Rwanda to Nkunda and his associates over the past three years," said Wolters. "This

has also involved permitting them to recruit in Congolese Tutsi refugee camps on Rwandan territory, allowing Nkunda and his men to travel back and forth between Rwanda and the eastern DRC, and providing safe haven to those who have fallen foul of Congolese law. There is ample evidence that Nkunda - for whom an international arrest warrant was issued in 2004 - frequently, and openly, travels to Kigali [the Rwandan capital] and is allowed to do so armed."

On the LRA, Frazer warned that while the US government supports the year-long peace talks in Juba, the southern Sudanese capital, between the Ugandan government and LRA negotiators, the process cannot be allowed to drag on endlessly.

"For the rebels, the peace talks are their way out," she said. "The other way is a renewed effort to apprehend them, and we would certainly support those efforts. We feel that we have the basis, especially under the UN Security Council resolutions, to assist an effort to mop up the LRA."

The International Criminal Court, ICC, in The Hague has issued arrest warrants for the LRA's top commanders, who are all believed to be in the Garamba base. The warrants allege that LRA chief Joseph Kony, his deputy, Vincent Otti, and commanders Okot Odiambo and Domenic Ogwen "engaged in a cycle of violence [in northern Uganda] and established a pattern of brutalisation of civilians by acts including murder, abduction, sexual enslavement, mutilation, as well as mass burnings of houses and looting of camp settlements".

An arrest warrant was issued against a fifth man, Raska Lukwiya, but he was killed in fighting in northern Uganda last year.

The charge sheet further alleges that Kony and his men abducted civilians, including children, who were forcibly "recruited" as fighters, porters and sex slaves to serve the LRA.

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Sudan  
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**Focus:** ICC - International Criminal Court

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