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Uganda: Government miserably failing in care of victims of conflict

Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children who suffered abuses during the 20-year conflict in Northern Uganda remain destitute and physically and mentally traumatized due to the government's failure to put in place a comprehensive reparations programme, Amnesty International said today.

The organization released a comprehensive report examining the continued suffering of the victims of northern Uganda's brutal conflict, and making recommendations to the government on how to deal with the aftermath of the human rights violations that took place there.

Thousands were killed, abducted, raped or beaten by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) during the conflict. Human rights violations, including unlawful killings, sexual violence and torture were also committed by government forces. There was general impunity for soldiers who committed human rights violations against civilians, and about 1.8 million people were displaced from their homes.

"Thousands of Ugandans still bear the physical and mental scars of the abuses they suffered," said Godfrey Odongo, Amnesty International's Uganda specialist. "They are unable to go forward with their lives. They desperately need government assistance to help them come to terms with the ordeals they survived and rebuild their lives – assistance that sadly has not been forthcoming."

In September 2007, the Ugandan government unveiled a three-year Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) – but this plan does not specifically address the reparation needs of the victims of the conflict.

The agreements signed between the government and the LRA under the peace process attempt to lay a framework for reparations, but fall far short of a comprehensive reparations programme and contain significant flaws – including a lack of provision for consultation with victims. It also remains unclear if and when the government will implement these agreements.

"What is needed is an effective programme that is victim-focused and a comprehensive reparations programme that addresses the continued suffering of victims of human rights violations," said Godfrey Odongo.

"Survivors need medical attention, counselling and psychological support. Formerly abducted children need access to education. Families need compensation for the deaths and injuries that occurred, restitution for their destroyed land and property, an apology for the violations and proper reburials for their loved ones. The government needs to start acting on these needs now," said Godfrey Odongo.

In its report, Amnesty International highlights the plight of:
women and girls who were victims of sexual violence. One 18 year old from Pader district, abducted by LRA

forces, told Amnesty International: "I dream about my forced marriage and the people I was made to kill and others who were killed during our time with the LRA. Because of my experience, I sometimes find myself shouting uncontrollably."

young men and boys forced to become soldiers. A 20-year old from Amuru district has dropped out of school because his "level of concentration in class was almost nil as a result of regular flashbacks and memory of the terrible things I was made to do, including the forceful participation in the beating of my dad and the killing of other abducted people. When I think of these things I find myself losing my sense of being normal."

people unable to recover because of lack of access to money and medical care. A 26-year old from Pader district who returned to her community after ten years held captive by the LRA told Amnesty International: "There is still a (bomb) splinter inside my right leg. I have endured terrible pain for the last three years...I don't know whether I can access medical treatment. I also doubt if I will have the money to pay for it...As it is, the only thing I do is to occasionally clean the wound by myself."

Background

The conflict in northern Uganda between Government of Uganda (GoU) armed forces and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) lasted over two decades from 1986. There has been a lull in the conflict since the start of a peace process in 2006.