

May-June 2006

Africa's Great Lakes: The Arduous Path to Peace

By Michael Poffenberger

Editor's note: the following is a reflection by the AFJN Associate Director on his recent Great Lakes peace and security assessment trip to Uganda, Rwanda and the D.R. Congo.

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The manifestations of violence and instability in Africa's Great Lakes region are as varied as they are horrifying. People in the region have suffered through rape, massacres, and political strife for years. Trying to unravel the complexities of regional dynamics and to advance an effective policy agenda in Washington is an impossible task without having visited and experienced the circumstances firsthand. It was with this intent in mind that I recently traveled to Uganda, Rwanda, and eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The trip made me deeply aware of the immensity of the challenges ahead for the people—particularly women—in the war-affected areas.



Traders make their way into town as road workers look on in Bukavu, DRC.

A number of dangerous factors have intersected to destabilize the region. First and foremost, effective state structures and a democratic mentality are lacking. In DRC, upcoming elections in July will be the first since shortly after independence in 1960. Second, police forces and national militaries—particularly in DRC—are corrupt, politicized, mismanaged, and under funded. Third, arms flow freely throughout the region, buried in caches by rebel groups and traded by gunrunners, making their way back and forth across borders through various conflicts. Fourth, the lack of regulation of resource markets such as diamonds, gold, and coltan have allowed opportunists (including the governments of both Uganda and Rwanda) to exploit Congo's mineral riches and cause violence without contributing to economic development. Finally, amidst an atmosphere of poverty and insecurity, ethnic identity has been manipulated and politicized to produce conflict.

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Water: A Human Right or an Economic Commodity?

By Mhiza Edmund Chifamba

In Africa, water and land are common goods to be maintained by the community for future generations. Yet multilateral agencies and private companies want to commodify water, arguing that this is the best way to solve problems of access to clean drinking water, and to reduce the incidence of diseases. Will the rights of private companies now overshadow the basic needs and rights of the people?

Africa's water problems are the worst in the world. The continent has the lowest number of its population, 62 percent, using water supply services, and access to water for sanitation is at 60 percent. Africa's rural population suffers disproportionately.

Yet the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)—agencies perceived to be for human development—have included the privatization of water services as part of their structural adjustment conditions and poverty alleviation programs. For example, in Ghana, the World Bank and IMF argued against the government's policy of receiving subsidies on water provision and sanitation from wealthy and industrialized customers to benefit the poor. The institutions' plan was to allow for competition by private companies and for corporations to take over water

services and to sell water at full market rates. Their argument was that this, in part, would reduce the high incidence of water-borne diseases, such as cholera and dysentery, and thus improve health conditions. However the outcome was contrary to expectation. Rates shot up 200 percent over a period of three years, leading to 78 percent of Ghana's poor not having access to piped water.

Policies of water privatization put water out of range for the poor and unemployed. It is even worse for the majority of Africans living in rural areas (relying on subsistence agriculture for their livelihood), as these market-driven water strategies do not increase their access to water, but rather add to the long list of ways in which their basic needs are not being met.

Despite the negative impact of water privatization on the poor and marginalized, the World Bank and IMF link this strategy to development, imposing privatization as a condition for debt relief and development assistance. Governments are increasingly required to provide water services by incorporating private companies into crucial public services. This forces an untenable competition between governments in developing countries and large multinational companies in the business of providing clean water. Private companies profit from the small sections of the population with the earning capacity to pay for services. Yet this small group is also the small taxation base upon which governments rely.

Development of water services based on the replacement of government agencies by private profit-making companies moves the common good away from the public sector and into the private sector. This has been shown to be inadequate both for the urban poor and for the rural communities, leaving them with ongoing water scarcity for drinking and sanitation, with the resulting dangers to their health.

This is a refusal to meet the basic needs of the people and to respect their rights. Clearly, access to water should be viewed and treated as an important human right, impacting food security, health, and income generation.

Mhiza Chifamba is Executive Director of the Washington Office on Africa.

Stop the Exploitation of Child Soldiers

By Kathleen Mackin

The problem of child soldiering demands immediate attention – not only to get children away from violent conflict, but also to help them in the process of rehabilitation and reintegration. Child soldiering results from poverty and insecurity- challenges which are prevalent in many African countries. A lack of public awareness and political will perpetuate the problem.



Street children and children living in camps for the displaced are most vulnerable to abduction or to joining military groups voluntarily. The investment in these children through education and protection will prevent a long and expensive cycle of child soldiering, which degrades societal structures and abuses human rights. There must be better options for children.

Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) will soon introduce a bill on child soldiering in Congress that would cut off U.S. military support to countries found using child soldiers. Please be on the watch!

AFJN offers Kathleen its gratitude for her months as an intern! Kathleen is now working as a research assistant in northern Uganda.

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The first leg of my trip was in Uganda. People in the country's northern districts have been caught between the terror of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the neglect of their national government for more than twenty years. Nearly two million people are currently confined to displacement camps, where the government forced them ten years ago. Mortality rates in the camps are estimated at almost 1000 every week. Although rebel attacks are now relatively sporadic, the LRA maintains enough of a presence to prevent people from returning to their land, and threatens the population with wanton killing, maiming, and child abduction. Long active in northern Uganda and southern Sudan, the LRA have also recently moved into northeastern DRC to avoid pressure from Ugandan forces, threatening even more people with their criminal activities.

An end to this madness does not seem in sight. Prospects for peace negotiations are slim. Chief mediator Betty Bigombe—whom AFJN hosted at meetings in Washington

in February—faces a tough job, undermined by the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictments and lacking a clear mandate from the Ugandan government. It is equally unclear how the ICC plans to carry out its warrants for the top five LRA leaders. The Ugandan military has questionable commitment to ending the war, and regional forces in Sudan and DRC have been unwilling to engage the rebel group seriously.

People in northern Uganda expressed to me their fatigue and frustration with living in conflict. They are growing more desperate by the day. As the violence drags on, the gap between northern peoples and their government grows wider, and yet another generation of children is born into war. Urgent measures should be taken by the government of Uganda and international community to deliver relief, protect civilians, and arrest the leaders of the LRA.

In Kigali, my next stop, I visited several humanitarian and

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Darfur Crisis and Advocacy Update

Darfur Crisis Continues: Following the SaveDarfur rally in Washington on April 30th, which AFJN staff attended along with an estimated 50,000 other concerned citizens, Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick was dispatched to push for a settlement to the ongoing peace talks in Abuja, Nigeria. That week, the biggest of the three major rebel factions signed a deal with the Sudanese government. Mediators are encouraging the remaining holdout groups, the Justice and Equality Movement and a faction of the Sudan Liberation Army, to sign on. While it is a positive step, most international observers still agree that the agreement will mean little on the ground in Darfur unless a larger peacekeeping force is deployed.

In early May President Bush dispatched Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the UN Security Council, where she urged the body to act quickly to implement the peace deal and resolve the humanitarian and security crisis in Darfur. The United States is circulating a draft resolution in the UN that sets a May 30 deadline for an assessment team deployment, though it will be at least six months until the peacekeeping force will be deployed. The UN is also considering organizing a force to protect civilians and Darfurian refugees in Chad.

Legislative Updates: Two Darfur-related amendments to the supplemental appropriations bill passed in the Senate. One provides funding for a Presidential Special Envoy for Sudan. The other provides \$60 million to the Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities account to support an expected UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur.

Funding for the African Union Mission in Sudan, however, remains an urgent issue, if civilians in Darfur are to be protected. While members of the Bush Administration have expressed support for an additional \$50 million above the President's request of \$123 million included in both the House and Senate version of the supplemental appropriations bill currently being considered in Congress, it remains unclear whether this funding will be included in the final bill and it is important to contact members of the appropriations committees. A Conference committee, made up of members of the appropriations committees on both houses of Congress, will meet later this month to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate version of the bill. In particular, it is important to contact Senator Cochran (MS), Senator McConnell (KY), Senator Byrd (WV), Senator Leahy (VT), Representative Lewis (CA), Representative Kolbe (AZ), Representative Obey (WI), and Representative Lowey (NY). **Please contact them to urge continued support for \$173 million to fund the African Union Mission in Sudan!**

Thanks to Genocide Intervention Network and the Friends Committee on Legislation for providing information for this update.

How Many Lives Will Be Lost Before Northern Uganda Matters?

By Adrian Bradbury & Peter Quaranto

In March, we spent two weeks in Gulu, Kitgum and the internally displaced persons camps of northern Uganda. Before we arrived we thought we understood the suffering of the over 1.7-million Acholi who have been herded into these IDP camps. We had no idea.

A study earlier this year by the Ugandan Ministry of Health and the United Nations estimates that over 1,000 people are dying every week from violence or disease in the camps. But that's just part of the picture. The IDP camps are over-crowded, lacking health services and amenities, and are protected only inconsistently. If we learned one thing from our trip, it is that the camps are a horrifically inadequate protection strategy.

Yet, even with such mortality rates, the Government of Uganda refuses to declare the region a disaster area. Sadly, the United Nations Security Council also remains silent. We want to know why.

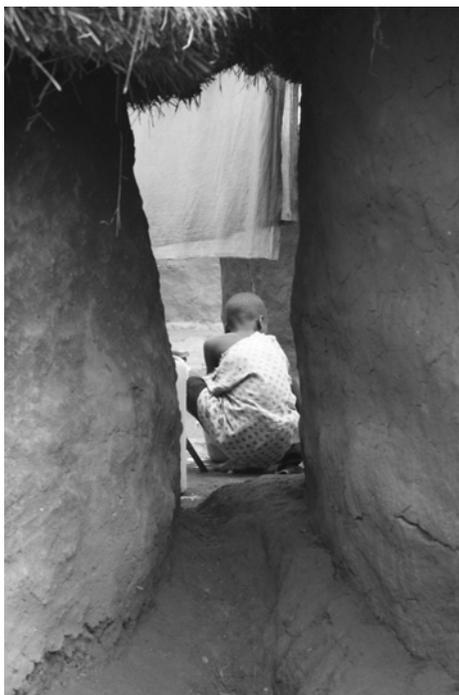
"Most parts in the north are not as insecure as portrayed. The problem is shrinking," claims President Yoweri Museveni. "Gulu has largely been free from terrorist activities. To declare the region a disaster area, what are you trying to achieve?" he asks. The donor countries and the Security Council seem to accept this analysis with little reservation.

So, we have one question: how many people have to die before the war in the north is treated as a priority for both the government of Uganda and the international community? The question is ridiculous. More compelling though, is the answer.

Just tell us the number. Is it 250,000? 300,000? 500,000? Maybe it's a million? Is there a number that will ring the alarm bells? If not, what exactly are we waiting for?

At the World Summit in 2005, member countries of the United Nations unanimously endorsed the 'responsibility

to protect'. In item 139 of the Summit's Outcome Document, the member countries affirmed that the international community has a responsibility to intervene when a state manifestly fails to protect its own population. United Kingdom Prime Minister Tony Blair made that commitment very clear. "For the first time at this Summit we agree that states do not have the right to do what they will within their own borders, but that we, in the name of humanity, have a common duty to protect people where their own government will not."



A girl washes clothes in an over-crowded displaced persons camp in Gulu District of Uganda.

If the "responsibility to protect" means anything anywhere, it ought to mean something in northern Uganda.

Activity by the LRA in Uganda has diminished and protection may be improving, but the mortality rates in the camps continue. Over 1,000 people a week are dying because of inhumane conditions. That is not protection.

We're not pointing fingers; we're all responsible, and that's why we have to act.

Fortunately, after years of inaction, the Core Donor countries - US, UK, Norway, Netherlands and Canada - seem poised to act. On March 20th in Geneva, representatives from these countries met with representatives of the Ugandan government to discuss a comprehensive plan for protection and peace. The donors discussed support for strengthening protection, bolstering mediation and helping to arrest LRA leadership.

Later in the month, UN Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland chaired a follow-up meeting in Kampala to discuss implementation.

Also in March, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1663, which condemns LRA activity and asks the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) to take steps to stop the attacks. The United States and others have shown further willingness to explore Council action and coordination to disarm and arrest the LRA, which now operates in three countries.

These are hopeful developments, but so much more can be

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done to help end LRA activity, resettle IDPs with security and engage in a broad political process of reconciliation. Without the political will, the discussions unfolding will simply be politicking as usual and little will change. Unless of course we demand better. And we shall.

Together with the people we met in northern Uganda, we declare that the time has come for all of us to take responsibility. On the local level, each of us, from Kampala to California must stand in solidarity with the people of the north. On the national level, the government should show stronger will to end this war and put forth a comprehensive peace plan. On the international level, the donors and the Security Council must commit to more decisive action to end this war and the crisis in the camps.

Someone asked us when will we stop advocating and campaigning for peace in northern Uganda. There are only two

ways we see that ever happening. First, when there is indeed peace. Second, when the people of northern Uganda can leave the inhumane conditions of the IDP camps of their own free will and go home.

Or, just tell us the number of people who need to die before someone is going to act with urgency. Tell us how many Acholi have to die for it to matter, for the people with power to stop this madness.

When the number hits, we'll be sure to give you a call.

Absurd isn't it? We think so.

Adrian Bradbury is the founder of GuluWalk and Peter Quaranto is the coordinator of AFJN's Uganda-CAN campaign. This article originally appeared in Uganda's Daily Monitor.

Take Action Now

- **The Democratic Republic of the Congo Relief, Security, and Democracy Promotion Act in the Senate Now.** Four Senators sponsored the Act, which would require the U.S. Government to promote humanitarian relief, security, democracy, and transparent management of natural resources to help end the conflict in the DRC and move the country towards peace and stability. **AFJN strongly encourages YOU to call your Senator and support this important legislation!**
- **A supplemental appropriations bill passed the House and Senate, but the versions passed by the two bodies have \$20 billion in differences to be worked out in conference later this month; three provisions must be maintained in the bill.**
 - ⇒ First, funding for the African Union Mission in Sudan is an urgent issue if **civilians in Darfur** are to be protected. \$123 million was included for the Mission in both the House and Senate versions of the appropriations supplemental, but \$50 million more is needed.
 - ⇒ Second, \$35 million for the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance in USAID was included only in the Senate version of the appropriations bill. Much of this money would be directed toward **emergency relief in northern Uganda**, where only minimal international assistance is currently being provided.
 - ⇒ Third, the International Affairs Account, which funds **HIV/AIDS initiatives**, peacekeeping operations, development programs and child survival programs is facing serious cuts. Senators Dewine (OH), Feinstein (CA) Santorum (PA) and Durbin (IL) have written a letter to their colleagues in the Senate urging support during the appropriations process for the President's requested \$35.11 billion for the FY07 International Affairs Budget, rather than cutting billions from that budget as is currently being supported by some Members of Congress. This would jeopardize our country's commitment to stopping the spread of HIV and AIDS and saving lives. Please contact your Senators today to encourage their support of fully funding President Bush's request for the International Affairs Account!

A Conference committee, made up of members of the appropriations committees on both houses of Congress, will meet later this month to reconcile the differences between the House and Senate versions of the supplemental appropriations bill. In particular, it is important to contact ranking committee members, Senator Cochran (MS), Senator McConnell (KY), Senator Byrd (WV), Senator Leahy (VT), Representative Lewis (CA), Representative Kolbe (AZ), Representative Obey (WI), and Representative Lowey (NY). **Please contact them to urge continued support for these three key provisions!**

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human rights organizations focused on regional issues. Though Rwanda itself is largely free of civil conflict, the Rwandan government maintains significant control over political dynamics in eastern DRC, and Rwandan rebels, who fled the country following the genocide in 1994, still operate in DRC. Those rebels, many of whom are accused of committing acts of genocide in Rwanda, terrorize the Congolese population and provide the Rwandan government with a potential future justification for reinvading the DRC (as they have already invaded twice and set off regional wars, one in 1996 and the other 1998 which involved six countries and produced the most deaths of any war since WWII).

My final stop to assess regional dynamics was in Bukavu, a beautiful town on Lake Kivu in eastern DRC. I was graciously hosted by the Missionaries of Africa and the personnel of the archdiocesan Justice and Peace Commission. In DRC, a country the size of western Europe with few roads and an infrastructure devastated by war, the Catholic Church is perhaps the best organized and most effective institution. The Church is using its networks to sensitize the Congolese population on how best to contribute to a peaceful transition in the upcoming elections and is advocating to the government and international community on issues of peace and security.

Though a peace deal was signed in 2002, an array of militias remain active in eastern Congo, with members originating from Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, and Congo itself. Even locals are often unable to discern which militias are which, as opportunists regularly take up arms and commit acts of banditry while claiming to be part of a rebel group. An official process is underway to demobilize the various groups, but meager incentives for rebels to disarm have not proven sufficient. Thus tens of thousands of rebels remain unconvinced that their security can be guaranteed if they demobilize and exchange their guns for farming tools.

Around Bukavu, the Rwandan groups have caused the most violence. To the north in Ituri, ethnic Hema and Lendu militias have committed massacres and created refugee crises. To the southwest in Katanga and in other areas, Mai Mai militias, initially organized to protect the local populations, have faced food and resource shortages and responded by attacking the very people they are meant to protect. Nearly 18,000 UN troops in DRC have helped the security situation, but they are clearly inadequate.

The human costs of this endemic insecurity have been horrific. Massive displacement and migration have taken place from vulnerable rural areas into the towns, and out of the Congo into neighboring Rwanda and Uganda. Insecurity has also made aid access difficult, and many people are stranded and unable to receive any assistance. Most of



Peter Quaranto (left) and Michael Poffenberger stand with Archbishop John Odama of northern Uganda, who will participate in the AFJN Conference in October.

those whom I met were struggling to find sources of livelihood amidst such conditions, though they remain optimistic that the upcoming elections will be the key to opening the door to peace and development. Most observers, however, are unconvinced. Congo, for the sake of the region, needs the support of the international community in developing its police and military, providing effective elections and democratic transition, and finally disarming rebel groups.

Attempting to understand the political dynamics in Africa's Great Lakes region challenges my mind, while the people I met there challenged my heart. It is discomfoting to be conscious of how much people endure while suffering through war. Though it is difficult to reconcile their world with mine, the visit will certainly motivate hard work in raising awareness and improving the international response to these regional crises.

The AFJN office in Washington is now working to introduce legislation addressing northern Uganda and to advance existing legislation on DRC. Our government currently has, at best, a mixed record in the region. As with most issues related to Africa, however, without public mobilization, the U.S. government will not be proactive in advancing peaceful human development. That is why your voice and mine can be so important!

AFJN Happenings in Brief...

Conferences/Workshops:

- U.S. Institute of Peace: Charles Taylor and Liberia
- Ambassador Bill Swing, UN envoy to the D.R. Congo
- Great Lakes Forum: DRC analysis with representatives of State Dept. and Congolese Electoral Commission
- Georgetown: Historical analysis of the DRC conflict
- Woodrow Wilson Center: Muslim Responses to Draught in the Horn of Africa
- Global Health Council: Refugee women and HIV/AIDS
- World Bank: Debt sustainability and human development
- Global Action for Children: World AIDS Orphans Day panel presentation
- Woodrow Wilson Center: Women and Peacebuilding in Darfur

Meetings:

- With the offices of Senators Brownback and Biden to discuss northern Uganda
- Northern Uganda working group
- Global AIDS Roundtable
- ADNA & Catholic Task Force on Africa

AFJN Events:

- Staff presentation at George Washington University on the role of the U.N. in the D.R. Congo
- Special Forum with Congolese Congress of America on prospects for peaceful transition in the D.R. Congo
- Presentation to Parliamentarians from West Africa

Briefings:

- House International Relations Committee hearing on child soldiers
- Press conference of Alafuele Kalala, candidate for President of the D.R. Congo

Sign-on Letters:

- For Darfur AU troop funding
- To USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance for emergency aid to northern Uganda
- To the US administration on immigration policy for undocumented immigrants
- To Congress, ensuring enforcement of law that 10% of AIDS money goes to orphans and vulnerable children
- To Gilead Sciences, requesting making anti-retroviral drugs available in the developing world
- Urgent call for U.S. Initiative on Health Workforce in AIDS-Impacted Countries
- To Committee on Appropriations to increase funding for global AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria

Rallies/Demonstrations

- Rally in support of undocumented immigrants
- Street theater at World Bank and IMF calling for debt cancellation
- All night rally/vigil for night commuters in Uganda
- Rally on National Mall to stop Darfur genocide

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Vicki Simon (Maryknoll Mission Associate—Street children in East Africa)
Dr. Daniel J. Towle, M.D. (Touching Tiny Lives—Children with HIV in Lesotho)

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