



CSOPNU

Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda

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POINT OF NO RETURN: TAKING STOCK OF ONE YEAR OF CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES IN NORTHERN UGANDA

The peace negotiation between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda (GoU) in Juba has reached a critical agenda on Accountability and Reconciliation. Many analysts describe it as "a make or break in the peace talks". Although the final outcome is not yet clear, there has been progress towards a comprehensive settlement. Out of the five agenda item, agreement has so far been reached on three agendas. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) was signed on 26th August 2006; the Comprehensive Solution Agreement signed on 2nd May 2007 and the Accountability and Reconciliation Agreement signed on 29th June 2007 (principles). Currently, the parties are doing consultation on the implementation protocol on Accountability and Reconciliation.

Sunday 26th August 2007 marked one year of the landmark Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) between the GoU and the LRA that was signed in Juba, Southern Sudan. Both parties to the peace talks have demonstrated commitment, restraint and flexibility in the interest of peace in Northern Uganda.

We encourage and applaud the parties to the talks for this historical achievement, your resilience and the various stakeholders for their immeasurable efforts in keeping the peace talks on track: the government of Uganda and the LRA for demonstrating and honoring their commitment for a peaceful solution to the conflict. We think the involvement and the participation of the community in the consultative process is commendable; the mediator and his team have kept the peace process on course to date; and the media and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have played an active role in raising and sustaining the voice of the voiceless for a just and lasting peace in northern Uganda.

We also must recognize and commend:

The international community:

- The AU appointing observers from Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, DRC and Sudan among others,

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- The UN for appointing a special envoy for LRA affected areas, meeting between former UN Humanitarian Coordinator and the LRA high command and logistical support to the Peace Talks Secretariat in Juba among others
- European governments for the human and logistical support among others
- The ICC for giving peace a chance by taking a low profile approach and
- The US government for logistical support and the appointment of a Conflict Resolution Advisor on Africa by the Assistant Secretary of State.

People have tasted the fruits of the illusive peace; significant dividends of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement and the peace process include:

- Improvement in security that has created an enabling environment for some IDPs to start returning to their homes
- Unlimited humanitarian access
- Reduced attacks against civilians, both in Uganda and Southern Sudan
- Communications and attitudes have improved and negative statements have reduced

The hopes and future of the people of Northern Uganda hinges on the success of the peace talks. However, the community still remains skeptical about the outcome of the Juba peace process because of the following concerns:

1. The parties are still caught up in mutual suspicion and propaganda based on past experience.
2. The formal and informal justice systems as the mechanism for accountability and the ICC indictment remain a critical issue in the peace process. To answer the question of “whose justice?” it’s important to assert that the wishes of victims should take precedence. Emphasis should be on justice that the people understand, justice that is just in the eyes of the people
3. As the talks progress toward a comprehensive settlement, concerns remain about where and who will sign the final agreement, especially on the LRA side. Besides, as the negotiation proceeds to DDR and Ceasefire, the active participation of the combatants is paramount. With the ICC indictment hovering over members of the LRA high command, it appears unlikely the combatants will be part of the negotiations. The long term implication and result could be unsustainable solutions to the conflict.

To ensure that peace and justice are achieved in Northern Uganda all stakeholders have to do everything it takes to avoid returning to the horror Northern Uganda has seen for the last 20 years. Our appeal is:

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1. In the spirit of complementarity, the Government of Uganda should impress on the UN Security Council to invoke Article 16 of the Rome Statute to suspend the arrest warrant for 12 months to enable the peace process to move to the next level, subject to the provisions of the same.
2. We urge the Government of Uganda and the LRA to continuously demonstrate total commitment to achieving just and lasting peace in Northern Uganda despite the challenges and hurdles they currently face.
3. All parties concerned should continuously consult with and take heed of the voices of the victims and all affected groups. Studies such as the recently released “Making Peace Our Own” (UNOCHR 2007) contain critical and balanced views and concerns that should form part of the peace process and discussions.

The coalition of Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) was established in 2002 with the purpose of advocating for a just and lasting peace in Northern Uganda based on analysis and articulation of perceptions, underlying causes and effects of the conflict. Northern Uganda is meant to represent the political north that includes the West Nile and North-eastern districts of Teso into which the LRA have made incursions. CSOPNU's role is to conduct and support focused advocacy at national and international levels through research, analysis, discussion and policy advice.

For more information refer to: www.csopnu.net or the secretariat at the address above.

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Steering Committee:

CARE International in Uganda, The African PACT, Soroti District Association NGO Network (SODANN), Save the Children in Uganda, Pader NGO Forum, Jamii ya Kupatinisha (JYAK), Concern Worldwide, Oxfam Great Britain, Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, World Vision Uganda and Uganda National NGO Forum & Concerned Parents Association (CPA)