



CSOPNU

Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda

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PRESS STATEMENT

Community Recommendations on Accountability and Reconciliation in Northern Uganda

FOLLOWING

The signing of the following agreements between the Lords Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of the Republic of Uganda (GoU) in the ongoing Juba Peace Process:

1. The Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CHA) was signed on 26th August 2006 and has been upheld and has so far been renewed several times
2. The Comprehensive Solution Agreement signed on 2nd May 2007; to spell out the roadmap to removing the sources of conflict in Uganda
3. The Accountability and Reconciliation Agreement (principles) signed on 29th June 2007; meant to spell out the justice mechanism for holding all those who were responsible for committing war crimes on both the LRA and Government sides and achieving reconciliation following the conflict.

AND

According to the agenda for discussion, the following stages are yet to be covered:

1. Agreement on Ceasefire that will bring hostilities to a total end;
2. Agreement on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of the LRA forces
3. Agreement on Implementation Protocol to clearly describe the procedure for the implementation of all the above agreements. Currently, the parties are consulting on Mechanism and Modalities for implementation of the principles on this agreement

THE

Agreement on the principles of Accountability and Reconciliation provided for extensive consultations on the mechanism and modalities for implementation. Civil Society Organisations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) comprising 71 local, national, and international organisations carried out independent consultations with communities directly affected by the war in the sub-regions of Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile with the view to seek their recommendations on Reconciliation and Accountability. Approximately 1,144 people participated through Focus Group Discussions (121) and Key Informant Interviews (55).

Community ideas and recommendations were sought on the following:

1. Accountability and responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity
2. Treatment of war criminals
3. Truth-telling about the war as part of reconciliation

Just and lasting peace in Northern Uganda

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)

4. Administration of justice and alternative justice mechanisms
5. Reparations for war damage
6. Strategies for preventions of war crimes and crime against humanity
7. Government responsibility during and after the war, and
8. Women and children's concerns in the administration of justice

THEREFORE

The respondents recommended:

1. That all those who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity including LRA and Government personnel must be held accountable and should bear responsibility for their actions, they noted that the leadership of the warring parties should bear the greater responsibility. However, they noted that they are willing to forgive all those who participated (Government and the LRA) in the commission of crime **ONLY** on condition that the perpetrators of the crime publicly acknowledge the crimes they committed and ask for forgiveness.
2. That sustainable peace and reconciliation can better be realised, in the case of the LRA and GoU conflict, through alternative justice mechanism than through the courts of law (Ugandan courts and the International Criminal Court).
3. That although traditional justice mechanisms vary from one tradition to another, the administration of that justice is primarily the responsibility of the cultural institutions and their leadership, and that leaders of the different cultural institutions of the affected communities can harmonise and come up with a common *modus operandi* on how to actualise the agreed upon alternative justice mechanism.
4. That truth-telling by perpetrators and victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity to an independent commission comprising of representatives from the international community, cultural leaders, religious leaders and civil society organisations (preferably a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)) is necessary for a complete healing process and forgiveness.
5. That the truth-telling must be carried out in an atmosphere where people can freely express their views preferably at community level. That the truth telling-process should put in place mechanisms that will ensure that victims and perpetrators of war crimes are free from all forms of threats and intimidation.
6. That truth-telling should be followed by traditional rituals such as *Mat Oput, Kayo Cuk etc*).
7. That upon completion of all the traditional rituals and ceremonies associated with the agreed upon alternative justice mechanism, government is obliged both constitutionally and morally to provide **REPARATIONS** for the damages caused by the conflict. Further to the reparations for those who lost lives and property, special programmes for infrastructure development and economic empowerment of all the four sub-regions must be instituted.

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8. That to avoid a reoccurrence of conflict and its negative impact in the future, government should develop a comprehensive strategy to ensure that Ugandans are reconciled with one another through balancing development and development resources and through programmes that will change negative stereotypes long held by different communities against one another.
9. That the active involvement of women in the peace, reconciliation and resettlement processes as a special interest group needed to be taken very seriously. Issues concerning education, health, HIV/AIDS, and gender/domestic violence were critical in the negotiations. They also noted recruitment of children in the armed services should be stopped forthwith and those in LRA captivity must be released unconditionally.

In conclusion therefore, we urge all the parties to the negotiations to heed the demands of the affected communities and implement a justice system which is **just** in the eyes of the victims.

The coalition of Civil Society Organizations for Peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) was established 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 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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