

Christian Peacemaker Teams Exploration in Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo



November and December 2007

CPT Exploration Participants were:

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The purpose of the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) exploration in East Africa was to learn more about the various conflicts in the region, to explore on-going grassroots initiatives for justice and peace, and to look at the potential for supporting such initiatives.

UGANDA

In Uganda CPT focused primarily on the current on-the-ground reality in post conflict northern Uganda as the Juba Peace Talks are being conducted.

Uganda has suffered violence for many years. The most recent cycle of violence in northern Uganda was begun by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA), following the rise to power of president, Yoweri Museveni. This resulted in the abduction of thousands of children to serve as soldiers, porters and sex slaves; brutal human rights violations, which included massacres, rape and maiming, and the displacement of several million people. The most targeted population was the Acholi people, however others were also affected by the conflict. The internally displaced persons (IDPs) were forced into camps by both the actions of the LRA, and the strategic military operations of the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF) conducted in 1996. At this time, there appears to be a sufficient feeling of security and IDPs in certain districts are beginning the process of re-establishing their former village homesteads. However, this return process is inhibited by numerous obstacles.

The Ugandan government, with help from the World Bank and other international funders, is promoting investment of all kinds. Talks between Uganda and the DRC are presently being held to settle how to co-operatively exploit recently discovered oil under Lake Albert, which borders DRC. Heritage Oil of Canada and Tullow Oil of the United Kingdom are involved in this enterprise.

Uganda has had success in growing the economy, eradicating extreme poverty, providing education, dealing with HIV/AIDS, and promoting gender equity. There continues to be concern, however, about the protection of human rights in Uganda, the government's refusal to prosecute UPDF soldiers who have committed atrocities, the persecution of sexual minorities and communities in Karamoja and government corruption that has deprived the north of reconciliation and development monies.

Civil Society Today

Over ten years ago, the Ugandan government's strategic military plan pushed the agrarian population of the north into crowded camps where many lost connection with family lands. Landmarks marking property boundaries were destroyed in the fighting, and fields have grown over. The LRA burnt people's homes and stole their property, and under the guise of security, Ugandan authorities confiscated animal herds, an important source of wealth. In the IDP camps, formerly self-sufficient farmers have had to rely on humanitarian aid. Community elders are no longer able to regulate social behaviour. Government judicial and administrative structures, such as the Local Council system, have replaced traditional justice.

Some of the largest IDP camps have become town-like economic units where some may wish to stay. Town populations have grown and many former abductees have remained there. CPT

learned that the largest employers in Gulu are international non-governmental organizations threatening an economy at risk when these organizations leave.

Juba Peace Talks

Following internal peace agreements reached in Southern Sudan, which resulted in a fragile stability, the LRA entered into a process of peace talks in July 2006 in Juba, Sudan mediated by the government of Southern Sudan. The United Nations (UN) appointed a special envoy to assist in the process and several international observers are also participating. Local religious leaders and civil society organizations travelled to Juba in an effort to bring the voices and desires of the survivors to the process.

Since the inception of the Juba Peace Talks there have been numerous challenges, which have led to uncertainty in the affected population of northern Uganda. These challenges include: internal divisions within the LRA leadership; pressure from foreign governments including the United States and DRC for a military resolution should the Juba Peace Talks fail; uncertainty about the Ugandan government's commitment to peace; ICC arrest warrants seen as preventing the peace process from including the leadership of the LRA who will not participate personally; a lack of representation by survivors of the conflict and affected citizens. The International Criminal Court (ICC) warrants, considered an important Western legal mechanism are not seen locally as an answer to the need for justice and reconciliation. The Acholi people in particular see the use of traditional justice processes as a key step towards reconciliation, forgiveness and healing in their communities. It is unclear how these differing approaches to justice can work together. Based on our meetings with numerous affected groups, traditional mechanisms unique to the Acholi are not necessarily welcomed by other tribes and do not address the atrocities committed by the UPDF.

According to interviews with numerous local and international non-governmental organizations and church leaders in northern Uganda, the Juba Peace Talks have been reasonably effective and the LRA is no longer active in Uganda at this time.

Post Conflict Reality

After the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement was signed, the Ugandan government stated that IDPs could begin to return to their lands. At the same time, LRA leadership stated their commitment to the peace process and that the returnees would not be at risk of LRA attack. IDPs, some whom have lived in camps for 20 years and are now dependent on international humanitarian aid, face multiple obstacles in the return process, including identifying and re-establishing their lands. They do not even have the needed resources to begin to work their overgrown lands and need seeds, farming implements, and other basic supplies. Some, unsure of the success of the Juba Peace Talks, continue to fear violence. Basic infrastructure, which had been established in the camps, is not available in the areas where returnees are going, and this is a significant factor inhibiting the return process.

To encourage IDPs to return home and to help disperse the large camps, smaller camps, known locally as satellite or decongestion camps, were created as an intermediate step. These smaller camps allow people to congregate closer to their home villages, enabling them to work their fields

during the day and still have camp security and infrastructure. Statistics are unclear but local groups suggest that few people have successfully returned to their land.

A fundamental aspect for the return process is the need for post trauma services, including healing and community re-organization. During the conflict, the Acholi, Iteso, and Lango people were exposed to brutal crimes against humanity and suffered intolerable conditions in the camps as a result – hunger, disease, abduction, rape, massacres, and in some places land mines. The psychological, spiritual and social impact is staggering. All of these factors transformed, and in many cases, deterred the coping ability of IDPs to new changes such as a return. The reintegration of returned LRA soldiers and formerly abducted children into the community is another difficult issue.

The presence of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during the last several years has helped to address some basic needs. Health clinics, primary schools, a safe water supply, emergency humanitarian aid, and peace building are some of the most common answers to the humanitarian crisis in the region. However, the proliferation of international NGOs in northern Uganda has created a culture of dependency. Local NGOs and ecumenical and interfaith groups are working together in order to empower the communities with peace building and community organizing skills. These grassroots initiatives, sometimes with very few resources for the sizeable task, are engaging the general population in peace and justice actions with the goal of healing and rebuilding the affected communities. These organizations are the engine of transformation in this society and with vision they are moving on the road to peace.

Vulnerable Populations

There are many vulnerable people in Uganda: women, children, orphans, former rebels, former child soldiers, child-headed families, minority ethnic groups, sexual minorities, the elderly, the disabled, and refugees. Poverty, high mortality levels and HIV/AIDS are additional factors affecting these groups.

In the IDP camps many years of dependence on humanitarian aid have transformed the way that men perceive work and culture. The situation is even worse for maimed and elderly people, who do not have the ability to be self-sufficient. In general, people do not know their basic rights. To exert their rights they need more training and effective mechanisms for their rights to be respected.

In Kisolo District, bordered by Rwanda to the south and DRC to the west, thousands of Congolese refugees have crossed into Uganda seeking safety from conflicts between rebel groups and the Congolese army. CPT heard that many refugees refused to register with UNHCR, as they did not want to be moved inland further from their homes, and instead lived in the forests along the border, stealing and begging for food. Local parishes have opened their schools and churches as shelters to the refugees but the need is greater than they can meet. All hope that the refugees will soon be able to return to their homes in DRC.

In the Karamoja district of northeastern Uganda, a separate conflict continues. This conflict is primarily inter-klan: there are six Karamojong clans. To sustain their predominantly semi-nomadic cattle herding lifestyle, these clans also have crossed into neighbouring Teso, Lango and

Acholi districts to graze their animals, entering into conflict with these tribes and participating in cattle rustling. With the prevalence of small arms in the region and numerous unsuccessful attempts by the UPDF to disarm the Karamojong, this region remains home to many hostilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The current situation in Uganda presents two faces: hope, for the success of the Juba Peace Talks and reconstruction; uncertainty, about what the future will actually bring. Social, church and human rights organizations stressed the importance of keeping a close watch on the peace process and the return of the displaced communities.

The CPT team recommends that CPT: continue to monitor the progress of the Juba Peace Talks and if the situation deteriorates consider options for a CPT presence; monitor and research the exploration and exploitation of Ugandan resources and the involvement of multi-national corporations; connect with Ugandan communities in CPT home countries and support campaigns relating to the conflicts discussed in this report; maintain communication with peacemaker friends working in the region and support their campaigns to provide a louder and wider voice to under-reported or renewed conflicts.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), formerly called Zaire, stretches from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Uganda and Rwanda in the east, in the equatorial centre of the continent of Africa. Kinshasa, the capital city of this former Belgian colony, is located in the far west of the country. The troubled provinces of North and South Kivu are located a great distance away in eastern DRC, in Africa's Great Lakes district. CPT visited the cities of Goma, North Kivu, at one end of Lake Kivu, and Bukavu, South Kivu at the other end.

Eastern DRC is home to a number of armed militias, all of whom have been responsible for killing and maiming civilians. Following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, armed Hutus such as the Interahamwe, responsible for mass killings, and the ex-Rwandan Armed Forces (ex-FAR), fled to nearby Congo. These armed groups are composed of recruits from among Rwandan refugees and the Congolese population as well as Hutus. In 1996, the armies of Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi invaded eastern DRC, ostensibly to eradicate these militias. Their efforts were not successful. Rwanda invaded again in 1998. By 2004, many of the armed groups had morphed into the Democratic Forces for Rwandan Liberation (*Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda*, FDLR) with the goal of overthrowing the government of Rwanda, although they spent more time attacking local Congolese citizens. Other local militias, such as the Mai-Mai, also live in the bush and terrorize villages whose people are often forced to flee for their lives.

In North Kivu, the Congolese Rally for Democracy in Goma (*Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie-Goma*, RCD-G) along with armed militias of mainly Hutu civilians, have viciously attacked Tutsis and others. In response, the army of rebel leader Laurent Nkunda has invaded villages and killed civilians, claiming they are protecting Tutsis. During CPT's visit to Goma in

2007, the Congolese national army (*Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo*, FARDC) were battling Nkunda's forces 30 km from the city.

In January 2008, Nkunda's forces and other area militias signed a peace agreement with the government of the DRC. A United Nations (UN)-patrolled buffer zone is to be created. The UN first mandated an armed force (*Mission d'Observation des Nations Unies en RDC*, MONUC) in 2000, and various Security Council resolutions have expanded its responsibilities. There are presently approximately 17,000 MONUC soldiers in eastern DRC.

One of the main weapons of Congolese warfare is violence against women, in the form of rape and mutilation intended to stigmatize, destroy families, and disrupt the social fabric of communities. Local economies are significantly disabled when women can no longer tend to crops. Children born to violated women are rejected by their communities. Churches and local organizations are doing what they can to provide support and rehabilitation for surviving women who often require extensive medical treatment as well as trauma healing. Casualties of war also include children who have been abducted and required to serve as soldiers and army wives.

The DRC is a vast land, rich in natural resources including diamonds, gold, cobalt, timber, and most of the world's reserves of coltan, which is essential to the manufacture of electronic equipment. Observers have noted the systematic looting of these resources. One analyst says, "Foreign governments, global mining conglomerates, multi-lateral institutions and local elites all work in concert to control DRC's fabulous wealth in perpetuity." It appears in the interest of multinational companies to keep the DRC at war so that they can profit from these resources without interference from governments or citizenry. Human rights workers that CPT spoke to mused aloud about the unseen, hidden forces that are behind the violence that ravages eastern DRC.

Present Situation in North Kivu

On December 12, 2007, CPT witnessed families with household goods and livestock, streaming along the back roads toward shelter in UN-supported IDP camps. Thousands were arriving daily in the Balengo-Mungungo area near Goma. CPT heard also of families fleeing to live with relatives in Goma, straining resources and escalating prices of food and lodging in the city. While Nkunda had never attacked the city itself, some considered that he had active sympathizers there. Hutu rebels and other militias such as the Mai-Mai have also been responsible for attacks on civilians in the area. Over 800,000 people were reported to be living in IDP camps in North Kivu.

As mentioned above, a peace conference sponsored by the United States, the European Union, and the African Union was held in Goma in January 2008. Specific objectives of the conference included understanding the causes and consequences of insecurity in the region, proposing mechanisms for disarmament, reducing fear and mistrust, setting up a conflict resolution mechanism and engaging all active forces in a process of reconstruction and sustainable development. All parties to the North Kivu conflict were invited. President Joseph Kabila and militias including Nkunda's forces have agreed to a ceasefire. The deal also calls for integrating the various armed groups into the national FARDC. However, attempts to do this in the past have failed.

At the same time that violence is tearing apart the countryside, churches and NGOs in Goma are working to promote nonviolence and to educate people about their human rights. Quaker pastors are facilitating Alternatives to Violence Program (AVP) workshops in the IDP camps seeking to explore an understanding of violence and ways to work for peaceful solutions. Other human rights activists in the city are endeavouring to change the culture of violence in their country. They want the world to know that there are caring Congolese who want a better life for their people and who are working to promote human rights and nonviolence

Present Situation in South Kivu

The present situation in the South Kivu province of eastern DRC is one of on-going violence and fear of impending violence due to rogue militias from the forest areas. The most active militia at the moment is the former Rwandan Interahamwe. They are guilty of raiding rural villages, demanding food and supplies, killing and raping villagers and abducting children and women. The abducted boys are forced to be child soldiers and the abducted women are abused as sex slaves for the soldiers. The actions of the militias are especially feared because of their unpredictability.

There are vivid memories of Rwandan refugees fleeing the genocide in 1994. This included the Interahamwe who perpetrated the massacres in Rwanda, and fleeing Rwandan soldiers from the defeated government forces. When the refugees were able to return to Rwanda, these armed groups remained in the DRC. They live in the forests, including a national park not far from Bukavu, and constantly threaten nearby villages. Bukavu has many IDPs who have fled from the rural areas. This has brought with it the problem of street-children -- children of rape who are rejected by their families and communities. Most people that CPT spoke to do not have confidence that MONUC soldiers will protect them

In Bukavu CPT met with civil and church organizations working for human rights for survivors of sexual violence, torture victims, people with HIV/AIDS, disadvantaged youth, and other vulnerable groups. They spoke primarily of the atmosphere of violence created by war, especially sexual violence, which is perpetrated with impunity. Many organizations, in addition to supplying medical and legal assistance, monitor human rights abuses and train peace workers, mediators and para-legals. One human rights worker sees a role for internationals like CPT to shine a light on the hidden root causes of the wars in the DRC -- multinationals which make secret contracts with militias to protect access to the country's resources.

Although there is a call by some for strong military action to get rid of the unwanted Rwandans, local peacemakers in Bukavu call for diplomatic solutions. One human rights worker outlined a three-pronged solution: that the Rwandan government be compelled to take back Rwandans willing to return to Rwanda, that third countries be found to welcome those who cannot or will not return, and that any who want to stay in Congo be disarmed and integrated.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the DRC, where there is continued fighting between the militias and the military creating an enormous humanitarian crisis, CPT found several organizations working on alternatives to violence. CPT should consider the possibilities of establishing a presence there to support the grassroots initiatives for justice and peace.