

## Northern Uganda crisis – briefing paper for MPs and peers

### Why should the UN Security Council act now on northern Uganda?

**In response to the deteriorating situation in northern Uganda as we approach the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this devastating and largely forgotten conflict, and whilst the UK has the presidency of the UN Security Council during Dec 2005 we are calling on MPs to:**

1. Sign EDM xxx – to be tabled, **Katy to add in number.**
2. Write to the Foreign Secretary urging the Government to push for an UNSC resolution on the conflict in Northern Uganda as part of a broader plan of action.

#### **Scale of the catastrophe and length of neglect**

The crisis in northern Uganda is one of the world's worst humanitarian catastrophes and the world's worst case of systematic child abuse. Rebel ranks are made up of abducted children, sexually abused and forced to fight on behalf of the leadership of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Statistics remain a scandal – for example amongst the 1.8 million displaced a recent WHO survey shows that there are 100 war-related deaths a week.

As the conflict enters its 20<sup>th</sup> year in January 2006 there is additional justification for UNSC action. The UNSC has passed around 1000 resolutions but not one addressing this conflict. Clearly there are many other urgent issues for the UNSC to address but none where the degree of suffering is so acute and yet so neglected.

#### **Clear threat to international peace and security**

The LRA has been active in southern Sudan since the beginning of the conflict. The continuation and recent escalation of the conflict now poses a clear threat to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan agreed in January 2005. Continued insecurity has impacted on both its implementation and the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes. Furthermore, LRA incursions into the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) now threaten a third country, also struggling through a transition to peace, prompting an aggressive reaction by the Government of Uganda (GoU). Without action and a resolution specifically addressing northern Uganda, the conflict threatens to destabilise the entire Central Africa and Great Lakes region.

#### **Responsibility to Protect agreed at the UN World Summit Sept 2005**

All UN member states signed up to a collective responsibility to act to protect civilians where a sovereign government fails to perform its duty. Northern Uganda provides a test case for invoking this agreement. Before momentum around this action is lost the UNSC should at least call on the Government of Uganda to live up to its commitments made at the summit. The UNSC has also expressed its willingness to respond to situations where civilians are being targeted in Article 10 of resolution 1265 (Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict).

#### **Need to ensure the success of the International Criminal Court (ICC) investigations**

For Uganda, and for future ICC investigations, it is vital that the investigations contribute to a just and sustainable peace. It is not at all clear how arrest warrants will be served and in a way that does not put abducted children and civilians in greater danger. A UNSC resolution could help ensure sustained commitment by and support to regional governments, and support the Government of Uganda to cooperate with the ICC and help it succeed.

#### **UNSC mission report (14 Nov) recommends action by the GoU to protect civilians**

To follow up its recommendations, the UNSC is now surely obliged to put northern Uganda onto its agenda and can do this most effectively through a resolution. The UN Secretary General's report (28 Nov) to the UNSC on protection of civilians in armed conflict identifies northern Uganda as an area of concern. The mission itself was a shameful abdication of responsibility but a positive outcome can still be salvaged. UNSC action is clearly not the only available tactic, but its absence represents a 'black hole'. There is now a window of opportunity for the UNSC to finally engage on behalf of the people of northern Uganda. Bilateral approaches outside the UNSC framework have not solved the problem to date - a multilateral approach must be part of the solution.

#### **Responding to the current escalation of violence**

The conflict has always demonstrated peaks and troughs but the increase in violence since October 2005 is a disturbing development, and in all probability it represents specific retaliation by the LRA against the issuing of ICC arrest warrants. For the first time the targeting and killing of aid workers is a reality. Many agencies have had to restrict their humanitarian operations for many weeks now, thus

## Northern Uganda crisis – briefing paper for MPs and peers

denying access for hundreds of thousands of displaced people to adequate clean water, health care and food.

### **UNSC has previously acted in the face of greater impediments**

The UNSC has acted before without the invitation of the relevant government or full consensus of all its members. The presence of a peace support operation has often helped the agreement over resolutions - but not in every case, for example in Somalia, or even the Darfur resolutions are not based on a UN peace support operation (a resolution is the first requirement before a UN peace support operation can be agreed). Ultimately, UNSC action depends primarily on political will, whatever the country context or actions considered.

### **New opportunities for international backing for peace**

The recent statements by the LRA calling for new peace talks and a positive response from parts of the GoU represent a renewed window of opportunity despite the continuation in hostilities. The collapse of the previous peace initiative by Betty Bigombe is at least partly due to insufficient multilateral international backing - including in the initial months when the UNSC visited Uganda in November 2004. The opportunity to support a new peace initiative should not be missed again.

### **Questioning the traditional approach of giving the GoU the benefit of the doubt**

Recent national events have challenged the perception of Uganda as an example of good governance as the UK itself indicated at the Commonwealth Summit. The changing of the constitution, the arrest of a key opposition leader, foot dragging over multi-partyism and threatening statements towards the DRC are all issues that the international community has expressed concern over. The GoU claims that the war is nearly over and that the military approach is a success. The recent UNSC visit agreed that 'great progress had been made' and yet the experience of agencies working on the ground does not support this view. A UNSC resolution would send a powerful message to the GoU that the suffering of millions of people in northern Uganda cannot be allowed to continue.

### **What could the UK Government do?**

The UK Government during its Presidency of the EU has shown leadership in persuading other EU countries to agree on a statement urging the GoU to take action to protect its civilians (agreed at the General Affairs and External Relations Council). We call on the UK Government to use the unique opportunity of the UK Presidency of the UN Security Council in December to push for a resolution as part of a broader plan of action. The resolution should urge the GoU to fulfil its responsibility to protect its civilians through the adoption of a strategy that focuses on providing security and protection rather than confrontation, which guarantees unimpeded access for aid agencies and to pursue a peaceful solution to the conflict.

### **For more information please contact:**

**Oxfam** – Katy McDermott, Parliamentary Officer, Oxfam: 01865 472339 [kmcdermott@oxfam.org.uk](mailto:kmcdermott@oxfam.org.uk)

**World Vision** – Jo Trevor, Parliamentary and Public Affairs Adviser: 01908 841032  
[jo.trevor@worldvision.org.uk](mailto:jo.trevor@worldvision.org.uk)

### **The issue of 'next steps' in any UNSC resolution**

NGOs are not suggesting specific "next steps" within the resolution if progress is not made. We believe this approach is prudent in order to secure the support of the more resistant members of the UNSC. Reference to military intervention and/or sanctions are likely to block any chance of a resolution. It is not clear at this point that sanctions or military intervention are appropriate though some kind of peace support operation may be an option. Other options might include high profile envoys including African leaders. Our primary objective is to get northern Uganda onto the international agenda at the highest level, and continually strengthen this commitment over time.

<sup>1</sup> *This note is drawn from key points raised by eight leading NGOs in recent meetings with the FCO. We urge the UK in the strongest possible terms to use the opportunity of the presidency of the UNSC to secure a resolution as part of a broader plan of action to address the crisis in northern Uganda.*

The following agencies have authored this note: **International Rescue Committee, Oxfam, Save the Children UK, Tearfund, World Vision UK**