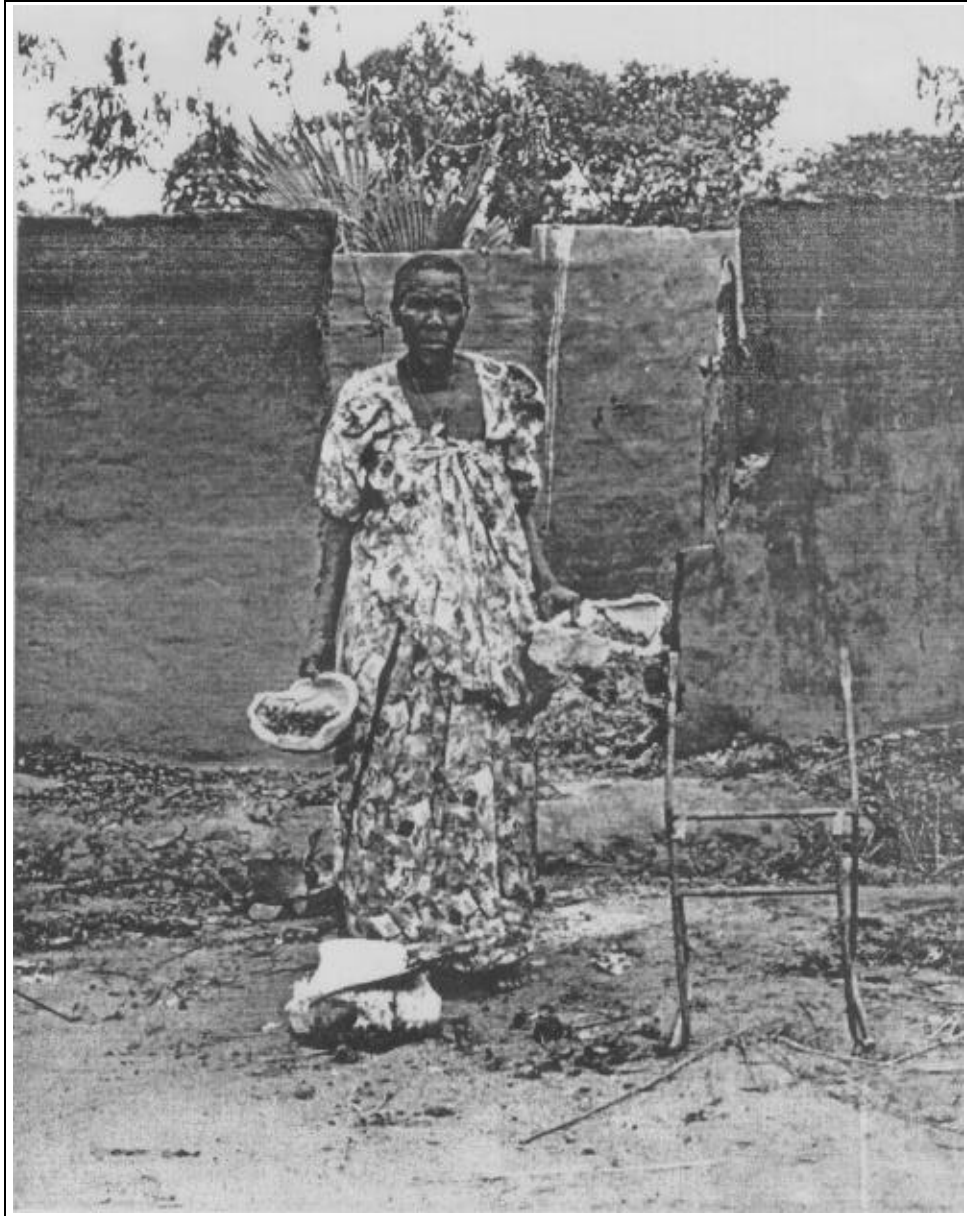


LET MY PEOPLE GO

The forgotten plight of the people in the displaced camps in Acholi



An assessment carried out by the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative and the
Justice & Peace Commission of Gulu Archdiocese.
(July 2001)

LET MY PEOPLE GO

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“Let my people go” (Exodus 5:1)

1. INTRODUCTION

At the moment of writing this report, most of the population of Acholiland has become displaced and lives in camps sometimes referred to as “protected villages”. People have been coming to the camps over the last five years by force, persuasion or voluntary means. Situated in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, the camps host a population of over 460,000 people, which represents slightly over fifty per cent of the total population of Acholi. If we add the several thousand people who have become displaced in towns within Acholi (Gulu and Kitgum) and in other districts in Uganda (notably Masindi, with an estimated 40,000 Acholi living there) the proportion of displacement becomes even higher.

The present report deals only with the displaced persons in Acholi who live in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Given the enormous human suffering involved in this issue, the religious leaders of Acholi have showed from the very beginning their many reservations about accepting the policy of displacing the population as the only solution to guarantee their security. As part of their common activities for peace, in different public statements, as well as in their lobbying with the Government of Uganda and with the international community, they have consistently advocated for the search of alternative solutions to the issue of security and for the return of the population to their original homes, giving them the necessary assistance for that. In their more recent joint message “Have hope for peace” (30th December 2000) they spoke out clearly in favour of dismantling the camps.

Being aware that this is an issue of high concern that needs to be urgently and seriously addressed, in March 2001 the core team of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative planned for a systematic research and consultation in the displaced camps of Acholi in order to write a report. Two different teams - one for Gulu and one for Kitgum - made up of four to five members each visited a total of 24 displaced camps during the months of April, May and June, seeking the views of an estimated 900 people who live in these settlements.

Method followed

Working on the conviction that in the present context of armed conflict and suffering the best experts on the situation are the people on the ground, the research was carried out by interviewing groups of residents of the displaced camps. Methods followed by our two teams of Gulu and Kitgum were, however, slightly different: in every camp we visited in Gulu we had a single group

of 15 to 30 people, representing a cross-section of the camp population: elders, women, youth, adult men, usually including Local Councillors (LCs), teachers, religious leaders and people working with community-based organisations. In each of these interviews we normally had also the camp leader(s). Most people interviewed had been in the camp from the beginning and were strikingly familiar with dates and events. The interviews were conducted in classrooms or religious buildings, allowing some privacy and enabling people to feel free to speak out their minds. Normally they lasted for a period which ranged from two to three hours. All the interviews were conducted in Lwo, the local language; interpreters were not needed. In this way our teams were able to be in as close contact as possible with the people interviewed. Questions centred around three issues:

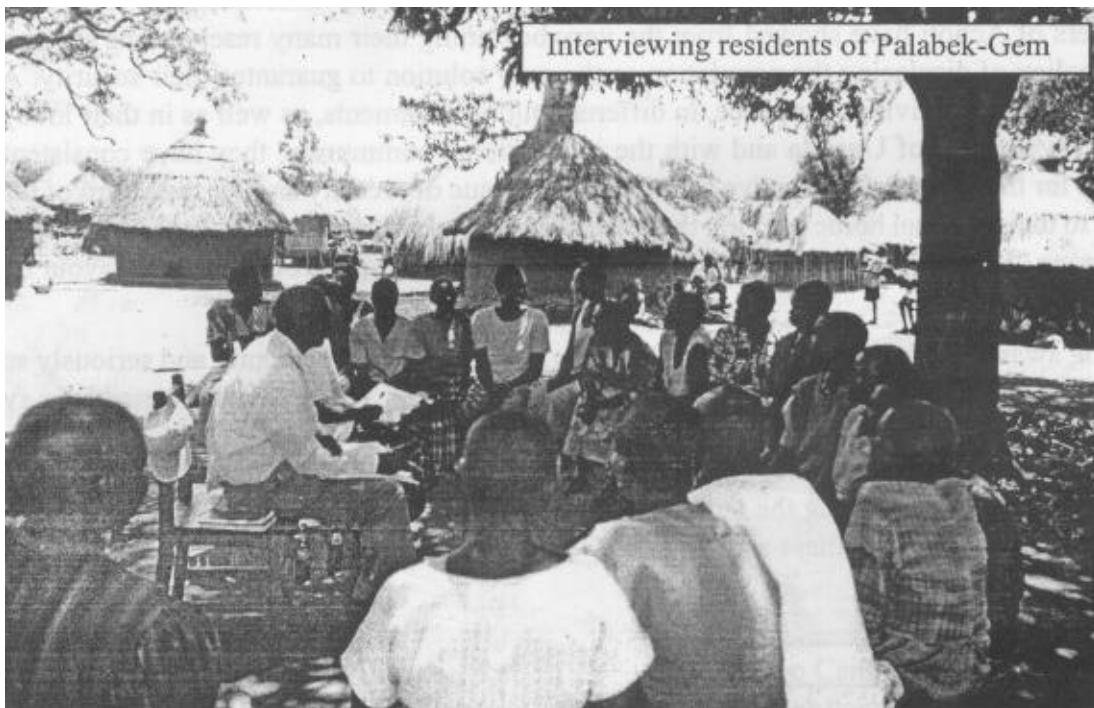
- ◆ When and how was the camp started?
- ◆ Describe your experience and life-conditions in the camp during these years.
- ◆ What are your perspectives on the future? Do you want to go back home, and if so what would you need?

◆

Our team in Kitgum preferred to gather bigger numbers of people in order to divide them into peer groups for separate discussion: women, youth and adult men. Otherwise the guiding questions as well as the method followed were the same as in Gulu.

The answers in each camp were duly recorded. Separate reports camp by camp are available in our files and have formed the basis for documentation in writing the present assessment.

In addition to this basic exercise, our team searched for some available desk data, trying to use more than one source, read some previous reliable reports published on the situation in Acholi, and conducted some additional interviews with selected individuals in Gulu, Kitgum and Kampala whom we thought could provide us with some useful views and information.



The basic research was conducted in the following displaced camps:

GULU

- ◆ Pabbo
- ◆ Amuru
- ◆ Opit
- ◆ Anaka
- ◆ Atyak
- ◆ Unyama
- ◆ Alero
- ◆ Cwero
- ◆ Paicho
- ◆ Ajulu
- ◆ Awac
- ◆ Palenga
- ◆ Koc Goma
- ◆ Lalogi
- ◆ Awer
- ◆ Acet

KITGUM

- ◆ Palabek Kal
- ◆ Palabek Gem
- ◆ Lukung
- ◆ Acholibur
- ◆ Pajule
- ◆ Potika
- ◆ Agoro
- ◆ Lacekocot

Eight of these camps were, in fact, visited twice (Pabbo, Amuru, Lalogi, Koc Goma, Cwero, Awac, Unyama, Alero), the reason being that during our first visit people in many camps asked our team to come back in order to conduct some training workshops (which normally last two days) for the peace committees put in place by the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative in the different sub-counties of Acholi. In the eight camps mentioned above we were able to make this second visit after a few days or weeks, allowing more interaction which provided us with some valuable additional information.

Appreciation

The research team wishes to gratefully acknowledge the time and efforts that all the people interviewed gave to us, answering our questions, presenting their views and often recalling very painful personal stories. Particularly, we would like to thank the local religious leaders (Catholic, Anglican and Moslems) who helped us in organising the discussions and made us feel welcome.

This research was conducted without any fund allocated for it. Those who carried it out did so in a voluntary basis and transport was made possible thanks to the generosity of some individuals and organisations. In this respect we are particularly grateful to CARITAS Gulu, Quaker Peace and Social Witness and Kitgum Catholic Mission.

Limitations

Although the issue of the displaced camps needs to be understood in the context of the fifteen-year conflict in Acholi, it falls beyond the scope of this research to explain the causes and the development of the war. However, bearing in mind that a number of readers may not be very familiar with the topic, a chronology of events is presented at the end of this work for easy consultation.

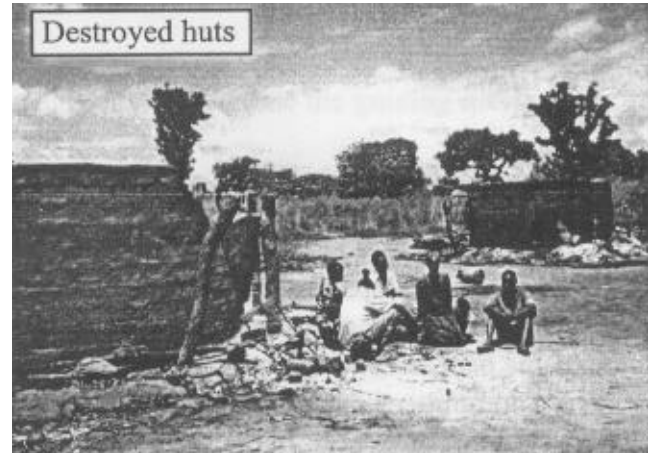
2. THE ORIGIN OF THE DISPLACED CAMPS IN ACHOLI

“Yoweri aye okela kany. En deg ni pe abed gang.” (Yoweri is the one who brought me here. He doesn’t want me to stay at my home.)

“Wabino kany pi dic pa Gamente.” (We came here because we were forced by the Government.)

We heard the two statements which open this chapter from two elderly women who were selling charcoal by the side of the road in Alero, one of the most congested camps of Gulu district. Their very spontaneous remarks convey the pain and frustration of many thousands of people who in most cases live against their will away from their homes in appalling conditions.

If we compare Gulu and Kitgum (which includes Pader), the circumstances which explain the origin of displaced camps in Acholi are slightly different. This is why we shall deal with both parts separately.



Did people come voluntarily?

In Gulu district the current pattern of massive displacement began in 1996, a year that most people in Acholi remember as the one in which the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) descended to its worst depths of brutality. Civilians were killed or tortured almost everywhere on a daily basis and children were abducted in their thousand. However, a small number of camps were started later in 1997 (Lalogi, Acet, Cwero). The decision to create camps was officially announced by President Yoweri Museveni on the 27th September 1996 to members of the Parliamentary Committee of the Office of the President and Foreign Affairs. However, in at least in two of the camps surveyed (Pabbo and Ajulu) people told us that they remember that as early as August that year Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF) soldiers were already moving in villages and ordering people to move to the trading centres.

Former Member of Parliament (MP) for Cwa Constituency, John Okello Okello, recalls that on that date (27th of September 1996) the MPs from the North raised serious objections about the plan to move the population of Acholiland into camps, and that at the end of the meeting the President agreed to consult with the military again saying that he would let them know about his decision in two weeks time, something which never took place¹

Officially the UPDF denies that it ever used force to make people move away from their villages:

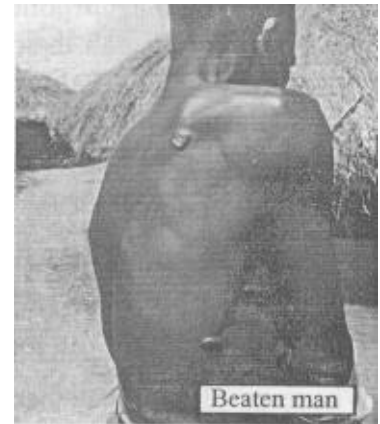
1 - Interview with John Okello, 13th July, 2001

“People came voluntarily to the camps. In 1996 people in the rural areas always tried to stay close to the night camps of the Army patrols in order to be better protected against the rebels, and from this the idea of the camps with Army protection arose so as to give permanent security to the Acholi population, since it is not possible to dispatch a soldier at every homestead.”²

While it is true that some people moved voluntarily closer to Army units before August 1996 seeking protection, most people were indeed forced to move by Army personnel, who often used rather drastic methods. In every camp we visited in Gulu, people told us invariably that they were forced. In some cases people remember that soldiers gave them a seven-day deadline (Opit) or only three days (Awac), threatening to treat those who resisted as rebels. In most cases, however, it would appear that soldiers just stormed villages - often at dawn - without any previous warning. They told people to move immediately without giving them much time to collect their belonging. People were often beaten to force them out of their compounds.

Much of the property left behind was looted by both rebels and soldiers. A number of people who ventured to go back to their former homes soon after found them burnt down. Men told us that they were harassed and even shot at, and women raped. A resident of Paicho summarised that experience of unbearable stress with these words:

“We were beaten by Government troops, who accused us of being rebel collaborators and told us to go to the trading centre. On the other hand, rebels would also come and threatened to kill us unless we moved deeper inside the bush.”



In Pabbo, Opit, Anaka, Cwero and Unyama we met a good number of people who had direct experience of having had their villages shelled. We were told that big guns of the BM21 6 barrel type were used to fire at villages where people refused to move. The Army has consistently refuted these allegations and stated that it only fired at or shelled rural areas where it suspected that the LRA was present. Aerial bombardments were used - we were told - in places like Kaloguro village, in Pabbo, Awach, KocGoma, Amuru and Anaka. This first wave of forced displacement occurred at a time of the year which normally marks the beginning of the harvesting season. Given the fact that in most cases people were not given time to collect any foodstuff, their crops remained in the fields or in the granaries. In Pabbo and Opit people told us that there were cases of Army helicopters being used to collect foodstuff from abandoned villages.

Force was also used by the UPDF some months after the camps were started, in order to compel back into the camps communities who had gone home to tend their fields. We heard this complaint in every camp we visited in Gulu and in some in Kitgum.

We also noticed in every camp that people resented very much the fact that this move took place without any previous consultation. Maj. Gen. Salim Saleh, in charge of military operations in the Gulu-based UPDF 4th Division at that time, indicated one year after the move took place that the Army acted alone in creating camps because it *“suspected bureaucracy and politicking over the issue”*.³

2 – Interview with Army Public Relations Officer (PRO) Khelil Magara, 6th July, 2001

3 – The Monitor, 26th October, 1997.

Another official explanation from the Army is that *“people were told that the camps would be there for as long as the insurgency continued, everyone knew that this could be for a long time”*.⁴

On at least in two occasions people told us that they remember hearing Army officers tell them that staying in the camps would be a temporary arrangement that would last only a few months. In Pabbo, people quoted former Dep. 4th Division Commander Lt. Col Lakara as saying in an address at the trading centre that *“all rural areas should be left free for the UPDF to finish the rebels in a matter of few months”*. And in Anaka, a certain Captain Ocitti was remembered saying to the recently evicted villagers that it would be a matter of only one or two months.

Furthermore, people resented very much the fact that soon after the forced removals of people from the countryside, Maj. Gen Salim Saleh started some kind of commercial farming business in Kilak country, engaging people in this enterprise under conditions tantamount to exploitation, since people were given money to engage into farming but had to repay double the amount after the harvest. According to former MP of Cwa constituency Okello Okello *“people were so desperate that many engaged in this kind of business”*.⁵ During our consultations with people in the camps many expressed the fear that the policy of putting the population of Acholi into camps was a well-calculated move in order to grab their land. A project proposal two years ago by the Divinity Union Ltd, owned by Maj. Gen. Salim Saleh, highlighted some large chunks of land in Acholi to be used for large-scale commercial farming. Whether founded or unfounded, the people’s fear of having their land grabbed is real. It cannot be underestimated as an important factor that deepens the already existing rift between the people of Acholi and the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government.

The reasons behind the move

Whenever official statements have been issued declaring that people moved freely to the camps, it has been often added that the reason why the camps were created was in order to provide security for the people and protect human lives.



The issue of whether or not these camps have served the purpose of protecting human lives against rebel attacks will be tackled in the following chapter. However, we can say from the beginning that given the fact that the UPDF acted hastily in order to empty the rural areas and dumped tens of thousands of civilians in centres where no advance arrangements for health, sanitation, food or other assistance had been made, one immediate effect of this action was to provoke a very high death toll among children (who are also human lives). Thus the camps policy effectively provoked death, which according to the official explanation it was seeking to avoid.

But apart from that, looking back a few months before the camps were put in place, it seems to us that the unfolding of events points to rather more complicated reasons and causes behind.

4 – Interview with PRO Khelil Magara, 6th July, 2001.

5 – Interview with John Okello Okello, 13th July, 2001.

Soon after the Presidential elections which took place in May 1996, the Presidential Advisor on Political Affairs, Major Kakooza Mutale, who in October that year deployed in Gulu the Popular Intelligence Network (PIN), was sent to Gulu. During the months of July and August he organised rallies in which people remember being told that a big military confrontation with Sudan was imminent and that therefore everybody should get some basic military knowledge about tactics of self-defence. It was soon after his tour that the UPDF started telling people to move away from their homes. The association of these two facts made many people think that out of fear of an invasion from Sudan the UPDF considered it to be of advantage to have the civilian population concentrated in trading centres.

Also in July 1996, some important changes took place at the high level of military command in Gulu. The then 4th Division Commander based in Gulu Brigadier Chef Ali, whose attitude towards the Acholi population was described by many local leaders as “friendly and positive”, was transferred and replaced by Lt. Col. James Kazini. Maj. Gen. Salim Saleh was also sent to Gulu as Presidential Advisor on Military Affairs. Both of them seem to have developed a military strategy based on the assumption that the population supported the rebels (even though rebels were killing Acholi civilians daily) and that once the rebels were left without such a favourable environment, it would be easy to finish them off. In the words of the Member of Parliament for Aswa constituency Reagan Okumu,

*“the Government tried to cover up its weaknesses in dealing with the security situation and it experimented if that could be a good practical way of ending the war regardless of the human suffering that the forced displacement brought about.”*⁶

The old Maoist theory which compares a rebel movement to a fish that needs water (a supportive population) in order to live and move freely comes to mind. The NRA/UPDF seems to have acted following this postulate, which surely some of its first leaders learnt in the hotbed of the Mozambiquean Liberation Movement FRELIMO, and that it is still defended in public today by some UPDF officers.

Soon after the move of forcing people into camps began, the members of the Acholi Parliamentary Group went to meet with the then Minister of State for Defence Amama Mbabazi, and expressed to him their concern about what was taking place. According to Reagan Okumu, his reply was that since the people in Acholi supported the rebels, the Army had no choice but to move people away from their villages in order to deny the rebels food and information. He further mentioned that he did not believe that the reported atrocities committed by soldiers were true. Soon afterwards the deputy Ambassador of Germany visited Gulu, and a delegation of the European Union met with Amama Mbabazi to discuss the same issue. Again, he told them that the NRM was a civilised Government that could not carry out such atrocities.

On various occasions the international community has expressed its deep concern about the appalling human rights situation created by the displaced camps in Acholi. In a report submitted to the United States Embassy in Kampala, known as the “Gersony report”, the author concluded:

“In sum, the Gulu protected villages have caused significant economic losses, were inadequately organized and have increased disaffection from the government at a time when public support for

6 – Interview with Okumu Reagan, 26th May, 2001.

*the insurgents was at its lowest ebb... The protected village policy merits serious re-evaluation and should be phased out as quickly as possible”.*⁷

And in the Amnesty International report “Breaking the circle: protecting human rights in the northern war zone”, published in March 1999, the organisation interprets the creation of the displaced camps in the following way:

*“In the war in northern Uganda the control of civilians is a key strategic objective for both the government’s Uganda Peoples’ Defence Forces (UPDF) and the armed opposition Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA)”.*⁸

Displaced camps in Kitgum



Camps in Kitgum came into existence at three different points in time: in January 1997 (Lukung, Padibe, Palabek Gem and Palabek Kal), in October-November 1997 (Pajule, Lacekocot, Acholibur) and in March 1999 (Potika and Agoro). The circumstances which gave origin to these camps were different from the ones in Gulu, and the percentages of the population which is

displaced is also different: 80 % in Gulu and 20 % in Kitgum (which also includes Pader district). On at least two different occasions the Government has attempted to create more displacement in Kitgum: in September 1997 and in September 2000 (in Pajule), although in both cases the population and some of their leaders openly resisted the move.

Between the nights of 7th January and 12th January 1997, LRA rebels systematically swept through villages of the Lamwo sub-counties of Lukung and Palabek, in northwest Kitgum. These units methodically hacked and clubbed to death a total of 412 men, women and children. Thousands of homes were looted and burned. The remaining population fled in sheer terror. This was the largest single massacre of the war in Acholi.

The fact that the UPDF arrived only on the fifth day, 12th January, has understandably led many to think that as the massacre took place there was a deliberate policy of non-intervention on the part of the Army. At that time, the Brigade Commander of the 503 Brigade based in Pajimu barracks, Lt. Col. Edson Muzoora, also known for his friendly attitude towards the population, had just gone on official leave, and a much-heard comment in Kitgum those days was that if he had been around the Army would have intervened promptly. An Acholi MP revealed to us that soon after the massacre took place, the Acholi Parliamentary Group tried to arrange for a meeting with the then acting Brigade Commander Lt. Col. Fearless Obwoya, but he refused to meet with them.

7 – Gersony, Robert: *The Anguish of Northern Uganda*. Kampala, August 1997, page 53.

8 – Amnesty International: *Breaking the Circle. Protecting Human Rights in the Northern War Zone*. London, March 1999, page 1.

Potika and Agoro camps are the most recently created ones, having started in March 1999. At that time rebels had come down over the mountain of Lamwaka, heading for Madi-Opei. The UPDF pushed them back and forced people to leave those areas. According to the camp-dwellers we interviewed, the UPDF planted landmines all around the mountainous villages soon after they were evicted: at the riverside, in doorways to huts, by granaries, and any other place they thought the rebels would go. As a result, a number of people were injured or killed when they went back to collect their belongings. This information is consistent with records from the office of the Catholic Justice and Peace Committee in Kitgum, who in April that year met a number of people who had been hit by landmines near Potika and had been sent to Kitgum Hospital. Moreover, during our visits to Agoro and Potika we met people with missing limbs who told us how they were hit by landmines. We also heard sad personal experiences from women who told us how their children were killed by landmines when they tried to reach their villages looking for food. People in Potika and Agoro told us that they would like to go back home, but the Army does not allow them.

Former MP of Cwa constituency Okello Okello recalls that on the 12th May 1999, President Museveni came to his constituency, where he held two rallies in Ayoma and Mucwini. Okello Okello asked the President to allow people to go back to their homes, to which the President replied that he had ordered a certain gun that would take three months to be delivered. After its arrival - he said - the rebels would be finished off within few weeks.

The year before, 1998, the President had paid another visit to Kitgum, in August. On that occasion, in a meeting with District leaders, he told them that the Government was making plans for displaced people of Acholi to return back to their homes within the next few months, and that security would be provided for them at their original places. This never materialised.

The fact that levels of displacement in Gulu and Kitgum are different have given rise to various theories. The three more common ones are the following:

- ◆ That, whereas the people of Gulu support the rebels, the people of Kitgum reject them and are more “pro-Government”.
- ◆ That rebels don’t go so often to Kitgum since conditions there are harder for them.
- ◆ That the people of Kitgum expressed more opposition and resistance to the idea of setting up displaced camps.

In our opinion, there is little ground to sustain the statement that “the people of Gulu support the rebels whereas the people of Kitgum do not”. In Reagan Okumu’s opinion, “*these are the kind of dangerous statements that can only favour a divide-and-rule policy*”⁹. Neither do we think that the population of Kitgum is more supportive of the present Government than the people of Gulu district. Presidential elections results in 1996 and 2001 from both districts were not very different.

As regards the second theory, that rebels find life more difficult in Kitgum than in Gulu and therefore don’t come to Kitgum so often, it is difficult to sustain that the levels of rebel violence have been much higher in Gulu than in Kitgum during the past five years. A look at a day-to-day chronology of events gathered since 1997 by the Justice and Peace office of Kitgum reveals that rebel violence has occurred in Kitgum to about the same extend as in Gulu. This is an interesting fact, because it shows that in such circumstances people can find ways of coping with the situation without having to live in displaced camps.

9 – Interview with Okumu Regean, 26th May, 2001.

In so far as the third theory is concerned, it is true that attempts to resist the setting up of camps have indeed taken place in Kitgum at different times. In a joint statement signed by the Catholic Church and the Church of Uganda on the 2nd of October 1997, religious leaders denounced the fact that soldiers had been moving around villages of Kitgum district telling people to leave their homes and go to live closer to barracks. The letter, which was read in all churches on the following Sunday and widely distributed among the diplomatic community, strongly opposed the move to repeat the experience of the displaced camps in Kitgum. Soon after, relationships between the religious groups and Kitgum District authorities became sour for some time.

The most recent attempt to create more displacement in Acholi took place last year. On the 28th of September 2000, a rally was held in Pajule in which senior Army officers, the acting RDC of Kitgum and the DISO gave the population four days to come to the camp in the centre of Pajule. Tensions those days run very high, especially after the Parish Priest of Pajule Fr. Raffaele Di Bari was killed in an ambush on the 1st of October. Soon after that the Kitgum LC V chairman issued another order telling people not to come. Many people continue to stay at their villages in Pajule, despite constant rebel presence in the area, having learned - somehow - how to cope with the situation.



3. PEOPLE' EXPERIENCES IN THE CAMPS DURING THESE YEARS

"Being in the camp is like being in a prison".

"We are dehumanised. You may be having people weeping at a burial and next door you have people dancing at a disco. This is the effect that life in the camp has had on us".

A woman in Amuru camp

The beginning of living in displacement

Predictably, the massive forced transfer of thousands of people from rural areas to trading centres caused havoc and untold suffering. People in Opit recalled that during the first two weeks in the trading centre no food distribution took place and after a few days most people had nothing to eat. We heard camp residents in Ajulu recall that when they reached the trading centre there were no facilities to host them and they had to spend several nights in the open, braving the rain. Almost nowhere were provisions made for food, shelter, water supply, medical attention or sanitation.

International humanitarian law adhered to by the Ugandan Government (*Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions*) allows forced movement of civilians in most exceptional situations, where the party to the conflict can show that it is the only possible way to guarantee the security of civilians, but in an important clause it states:

*"should such displacements have to be carried out, all possible measures shall be taken in order that the civilian population may be received under satisfactory conditions of shelter, hygiene, health, safety and nutrition."*¹⁰

The government itself admitted later on this serious shortcoming. In a press release published in *The Monitor* on the 26th October 1997, Maj. Gen. Salim Saleh declared that the evacuation of villages was done in a *"haphazard and uncoordinated manner"* and that the authorities did not *"put in place basic amenities for their (the people's) livelihood"*.

It was only in late October 1996, more than a month after the official announcement of creating the camps was made, that the authorities met to draw up an overall strategy for running the camps. On 29th October a meeting chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Services Paul Etyang drew up plans for providing food for 100,000 people in Gulu district for a six-month period. However, as the Army continued to force people quickly out of their homes, by the end of November 1996 Gulu District Local Council figures put the number of displaced people at around 200,000, and by February 1997 the Council was reporting that an estimated 280,000 people in the district were living in camps.¹¹

As the 1999 Amnesty International report on Northern Uganda highlights, the Ugandan Government had already used the forcible removal of villagers into camps as an element in counter-

10 – Additional Protocol II to the Geneva Convention, Article 17.

11 – Uganda Humanitarian Situation Report. United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs, 15th March 1997.

insurgency on two previous occasions: in Gulu district in late 1988, and in Soroti and Kumi districts between February and October 1990 during the insurgency by the Uganda People's Army (UPA). It seems that no lessons were learned from these two previous experiences.

How to survive

"I used to have a yearly harvest of twelve bags of rice, which I would use for paying for my children's education. Now I wake up in the morning, I can't go to my fields and my only choice is to spend the whole day doing nothing"

A resident of Paicho camp

Most people interviewed in the camps, both in Gulu and in Kitgum, identified lack of food as their worst experience during these years. People expressed their great bitterness and frustration at their inability to sustain themselves and their families, especially when they consider that in the past they used to enjoy plenty of fertile land yielding a lot of food. Women in particular, expressed their sadness about the fact that they cannot bring up their children.



In most camps we were told that food relief distribution usually takes place these days every two months. In other camps like Awac people say that although some food used to be provided when the camp was first established nothing is being distributed these days. It seems that the average distribution is five mugs of posho and three kilos of beans for a household of eight for a month, plus a tin of cooking oil which is to be shared between two families. Most people told us that these food rations usually do not last more than two weeks. In Opit people told us that in 1998 they went for more than four months without any food relief being distributed. People in most camps seem to remember 1998 as the year in which hunger was most unbearable. The office of the Justice and Peace Committee in Kitgum has documented a number of cases in which people in displaced camps resorted to eating seeds treated with chemicals, which caused an unspecified number of deaths. A lot of complaints about the quality of the food were also brought out during our interviews, including many cases of rotten beans and flour with worms. In Anaka and Alero people mentioned cases when in 1998 pieces of broken glass were found mixed with maize for distribution.

Conditions vary from camp to camp. Those close to Gulu town are better off than those located in more outlying areas. Koc Goma, Awer and Unyama had some reasonable space between huts, fairly adequate water supply and people seemed to be better fed. However, in most camps we visited one of the most depressing sights is the many children showing signs of malnutrition, such as reddish hair and swollen bellies. In August 1997 the Gulu District Medical Officer estimated that 50% of the children living in displaced camps were malnourished. Although these days the figure is surely lower than that, it is evident that poor nutrition leaves many children at the mercy of fatal diseases. We were told that last year 52 children died of smallpox in Alero.

Another common sight in the camps is long queues of women to grind their corn. In Cwero - with a population of 7,800 - we found only one grinding mill which was broken down at the time of our visit and so people had to walk to Paicho (15 kilometres) for grinding. Pabbo, with a population of 47,000, has only two grinding mills.

Besides the issue of poor feeding, in most of the camps water supply is also a big problem. A good number of boreholes have been put in place in recent years by some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), but when they break down the cost of repair is beyond the means of the community. In Alero, with a population of 15,000, we found six boreholes, three of them broken. In Cwero we found that all three boreholes were broken and women had to walk a distance of three miles to fetch some water from a well. This was also the situation we found in Amuru, where women told us bitterly that in these forages for water a good number of them have been raped by rebels or by government soldiers. Little wonder that in many camps a jerrycan of water is a highly treasured commodity which is sold at 500 shillings.

Inadequate sanitation is another big concern. In most camps we visited the latrines are located between the houses, at very close distance, and are often overflowing. In some latrines the pits are left open, and we have heard of a good number of cases of small children dying after they fell into them. In overcrowded camps, like Padibe, Pabbo, Lukung, Anaka and Amuru, the stench is unbearable and flies are everywhere, making it easy for an outbreak of infectious disease to spread quickly.

Given the fact that food supplies are totally insufficient, many people have tried from the beginning to reach their homes during the day, walking long distances of up to fifteen kilometres in order to dig in their fields. This is in many cases a risky enterprise. Although the Army states that when people go to their fields to plant and harvest they can come to the detachment and get an escort ¹², given the fact that in most camps soldiers are relatively few it is difficult to see how this can be implemented.

Venturing into the countryside for farming or foraging for food has resulted in many cases in women being raped, people being beaten by both rebels and government soldiers or even being caught in the middle of gunfire. “*Ipuro ki lworu*” (you dig with fear) was a very common expression we heard. In some cases people have found written messages in their original villages warning them not to return or face death.



Given the great hardships involved in getting access to their original land, those who can afford it have tried at times to rent a plot of land from camp residents whose fields are within reasonable distance. We were told in some camps that the usual yearly rent for an acre of land is between 30,000 and 40,000 shillings. Landlords can evict their tenants at any time and, understandably, this is one of the main sources of local conflict among camp residents.

12 – Interview with PRO Khelil Magara, 6th July 2001

Shortage of food and land influences what people plant, as a recent study by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) shows in detail. Where people might have planted cash crops like rice or simsim, or nutrient rich crops like cowpeas, millet or groundnuts in the past, the poor camp residents are now planting just staple foods like sorghum and sweet potatoes. One of the consequences of this is an increase in the length of the hunger gap, from 2.7 months for new residents of a camp to 3.49 months for those who have stayed over two years. Similarly, the number of meals eaten per day by a new camp resident averages 1.93, while it is only 1.6 for the resident of over two years.¹³

Many people have no choice but to survive by means of occasional labour, especially women, who engage themselves in activities like fetching and selling firewood, selling charcoal, brewing alcohol, laying bricks... We found women in almost all these camps selling basins of charcoal at 400 shillings each. A widow who had to take care of her six children plus four orphans from her sister told us that she has no other means of survival and that she may sell one of those basins in a day, if she is lucky.

Given these circumstances, it is understandable that a number of women and girls resort to sexual trade to survive. Some declared that they hate to do it but they have to because they don't want to see their children die. In many camps men told us very bitterly that since soldiers are the only ones who have money in the camp, it is easy for them to have access to sexual services from camp residents. Girls as young as thirteen elope with soldiers, who defile them and get away with it. Elders in Palabek Kal lamented that marriages are breaking down and pointed out that in the year 2000 as many as sixty married women had left their husbands and eloped with soldiers. No doubt, this is one of the factors that account for the fact that in most camps relations between the population and the soldiers stationed there are far from cordial.

Environmental disaster

The natural environment also suffers with the continuation of the camps. A study carried out in June 2000 by the Kitgum District Forestry Officer shows that the camps have had a negative impact on the availability of firewood and building materials as well as the quality of the soil and water, and therefore the very quality of life for those living in the camps. He observed in Padibe:



*“The openness of the area with no single tree standing for a stretch of kilometres away, the littered compounds with polythene materials, the flies seen everywhere, the stinking and contaminated atmosphere... pools of dirty water with mosquito larvae distinctly seen, poor toilet facilities, lack of utensil dryers, and above all the poor housing conditions intended to accommodate entire households”.*¹⁴

13 – International Committee of the Red Cross. A Household Economy Study by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Five IDP Camps in Acholiland. Kampala, 2001.

14 – Kitgum District Forestry Officer, June 2000.

The lack of firewood has been a serious challenge in the camps. Fruit and shade trees have been cut down within the camp, making the land vulnerable to erosion. In many camps, women and girls have to walk more than eight kilometres to get firewood. The mentioned study shows that women spend 50% of their daily time fetching firewood for their families, a serious misuse of women's resources. This increased burden of household chores also affects the girl-child, as girls are pulled out of school to help. So far, there is no programme addressing the need to replant trees, either from the government or from any international agency.

The increasing problem of finding firewood has such effects as people not washing with hot water or cooking food completely. This lack of facilities and resources directly affects health, so it is no surprise that IDPs report large numbers of disease cases such as malaria, diarrhoea and intestinal worms. These three kinds of disease can have very serious effects on children, who make up more than half the population of camps.

The collapse of cultural and moral values

“There is no more respect of elders and parents. My child can become my enemy”.

(An elder at Paicho).

As one moves through any of the displaced camps, one of the most depressing sights is to see scores of unattended children everywhere, idle youth loitering about and men drinking alcohol. This is just the surface of a deeper problem that most people, especially elders, feel as something very painful: the collapse of the good cultural values that people used to feel proud of. A whole generation is growing up in a moral and cultural vacuum, and considering that children under the age of 15 account for more than 55% of the total population in the IDP camps in Acholi¹⁵ this is a very serious situation.

The main means of transmitting the Acholi traditional culture to the younger generations is the evening family gathering at the fireplace, referred to in the Acholi language as *Wang oo*. Army-enforced regulations in most camps state that everybody is expected to be indoors or at least next to their huts by 7:30 p.m. Those who break this rule are routinely beaten. The consequence is that since there is no more *wang oo*, children - adults often complain - are not taught good cultural values.

Cramming together people in a small space is seen in all camps as another main reason for the lack of respect that children show towards their parents, since both parents share the same hut with the children without any privacy and at times children make fun of their parents when they see them sleeping together at night.

As a result, very early pregnancies (at the age of thirteen or fourteen), children becoming thieves, and alcoholism among adolescents who have dropped out of school, are worrying features of life in the displaced camps. People resent very bitterly the fact that in recent years no pupil from a school in the camps got a first grade. Little wonder when one considers that in Acholibur there are only four classrooms for 1050 pupils (only 17% of their students pass exams to continue to secondary

15 – International Committee of the Red Cross. A Household Economy Study by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Five IDP Camps in Acholiland. Kampala, 2001.

school after P7). Palabek Gem Displaced Schools had 20 teachers for the 1060 enrolled pupils, and only 13% were able to pass exams to continue to secondary school. Pajule Displaced Primary School has an average of 300 pupils in the P1 classes, and in Pabbo the average size of a P1 class is about 500 pupils. Given these circumstances for most young people going to Secondary School is just a dream beyond all possibility.

In the opinion of James Otto, secretary of Human Rights Focus, and one of the more respected elders in Gulu, this breakdown of moral values cannot but bring a very dark future for the Acholi, even if the war comes to an end:



“A life of dependence and destitution breeds lack of respect to parental authority, they don’t get any help from their parents. If children are not provided for by their parents they will try to fend by themselves. This is why there are so many children from the camps who join the Local Defence Units at the age of 13 or 14, since they have nothing to do and the perspective of earning 40.000 shillings a month is attractive. If things continue this way we are going to lose a whole generation that has been born or brought up in the camps.”¹⁶

The issue of security. Are the “protected villages” really protected?

The official position of the Government of Uganda is that people are in the displaced camps for their own security. This is why from the beginning it gave them the name of “protected villages”. Indeed, most people we talked to told us that despite all the hardships of life they felt more secure than when they were at their original homes. This was one of the few positive aspects they normally saw about life in the camps, since in case of attack they had a greater chance of preserving their lives (this feeling was stronger in the camps of Lamwo, in Kitgum, than in Gulu).

However, many people who once advocated in favour of the camps are now wondering if protection is really being offered and at what cost to the people.

In fact, the LRA’s deadly attacks in the displaced camps have taken place from the beginning. In Opit, for instance, people told us that in the past five years the camp has been attacked eighteen times. From the outset, the Government was under no illusion about the likely response of the LRA concerning the creation of these settlements. In November 1996, Major Kakooza Mutale had this to say to the press:

“The depopulation of villages removes the soft targets and logistics for the survival of the rebels. They will lack food, information, youth to abduct and people to kill. Desperation will drive them to attack the army and the camps. That will be their end.”¹⁷

Many of the attacks have taken place a few days after distribution of relief food aid, which in the view of many of the people we talked to, means that rebels come “to get their share”. At the end of this report we have listed twenty-one recorded cases of major attacks in camps since 1997, which represents only part of what has taken place. In this section we shall only highlight two incidents which gained some attention when they happened.

16 – Interview with James Otto, 10th July, 2001.

17 – New Vision, 13th November, 1996.

On the 23rd of March 1997, LRA rebels entered the trading centre at Pabbo, looted shops, abducted an unspecified number of children, fired some shots and departed. As they withdrew, the UPDF fired several mortar rounds at them. But being within a populated area, eight civilians were killed.

On the 5th of March 2000, a group of rebels were sighted coming from Palabek going towards Padibe. Some local leaders from the camp moved quickly to Kitgum to inform the District Internal Security Officer (DISO), who promptly sent word to Pajimu barracks to ask for more soldiers to protect Padibe camp. The reinforcements never came and at around midnight the rebels carried out a murderous attack in which they killed twelve people, injured twenty and burned eight hundred huts. At the moment of the attack there were only a dozen members of the Local Defence Unit (LDU) and most of them were at a drinking party dancing. In fact most of the people killed were shot dead at the disco.

Location of military barracks in the displaced camps has long been a very controversial issue. Some Acholi MPs have referred to IDP camps as “protected barracks” or “protecting villages”, alleging that civilians were being used as a first line of alert against rebel attacks against the military. During our visits to the camps, we were able to see for ourselves that in the cases of Pabbo, Alero, Cwero and Awach, the location of the military detachment in the middle of the camp exposed the civilian population to real danger. “We are the ones protecting the soldiers” or “we are tired of protecting the Army” were bitter complaints we often heard in those (and other) camps. However, most camps we visited consisted of widely dispersed huts within a kilometre or two of the village centre, not immediately near military detachments.



Location of IDP camps in Acholi

Kilak County

1. Awer
2. Pagak
3. Parabongo
4. Pabbo
5. Atiak
6. Bibia
7. Olwal
8. Amuru
9. Labongogali
10. Kaladima
11. Guru-Guru
12. Okungedi
13. Mara awobi

Nwoya County

14. Anaka
15. Alero
16. Kochgoma
17. Purongo
18. Agung
19. Aparanga
20. Wii Lawora
21. Wii Anaka
22. Olwyio
23. Ongako

Aswa County

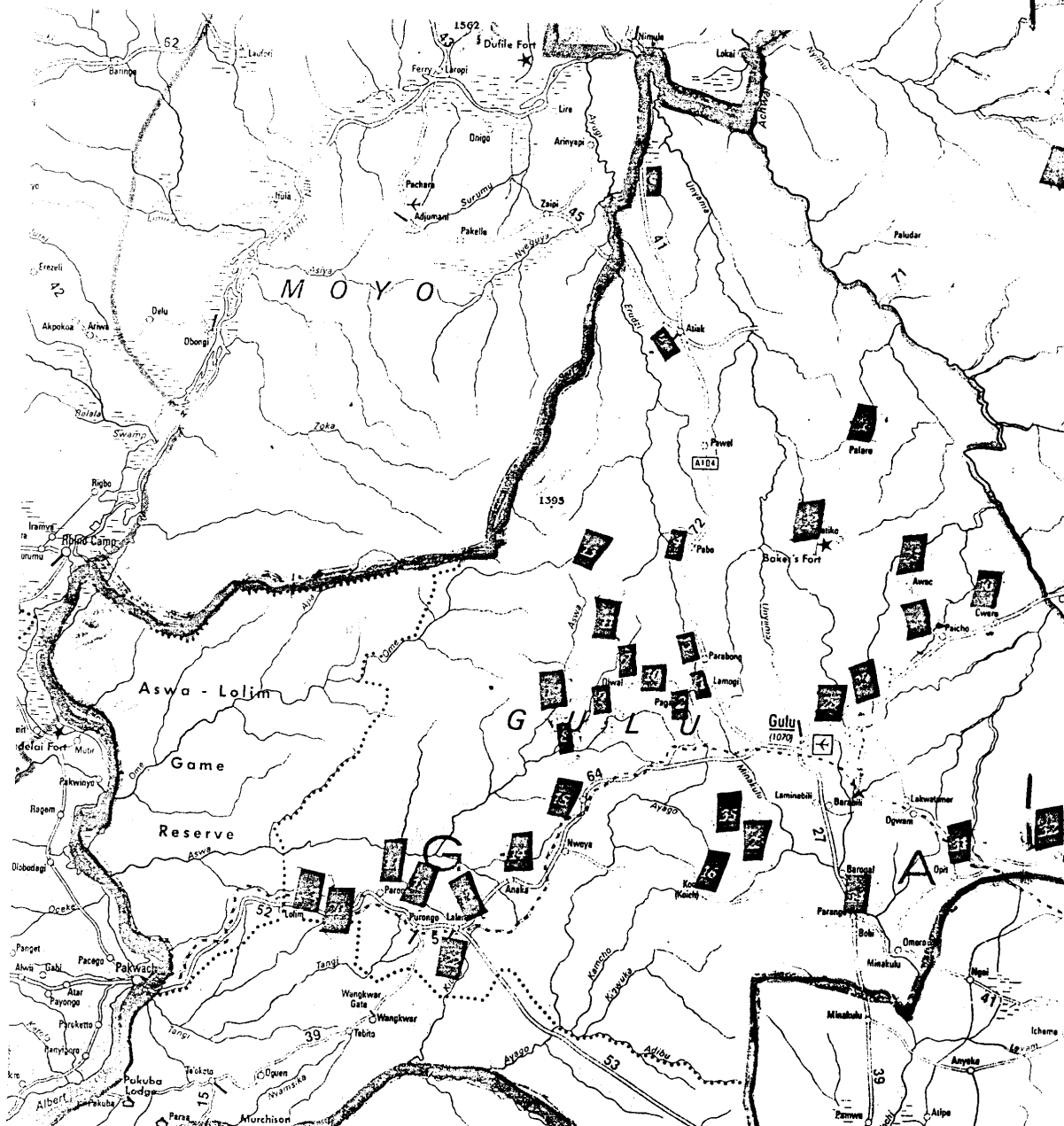
24. Patiko-Ajulu
25. Awach
26. Palaro
27. Paicho
28. Teyapadhola
29. Unyama
30. Cwero

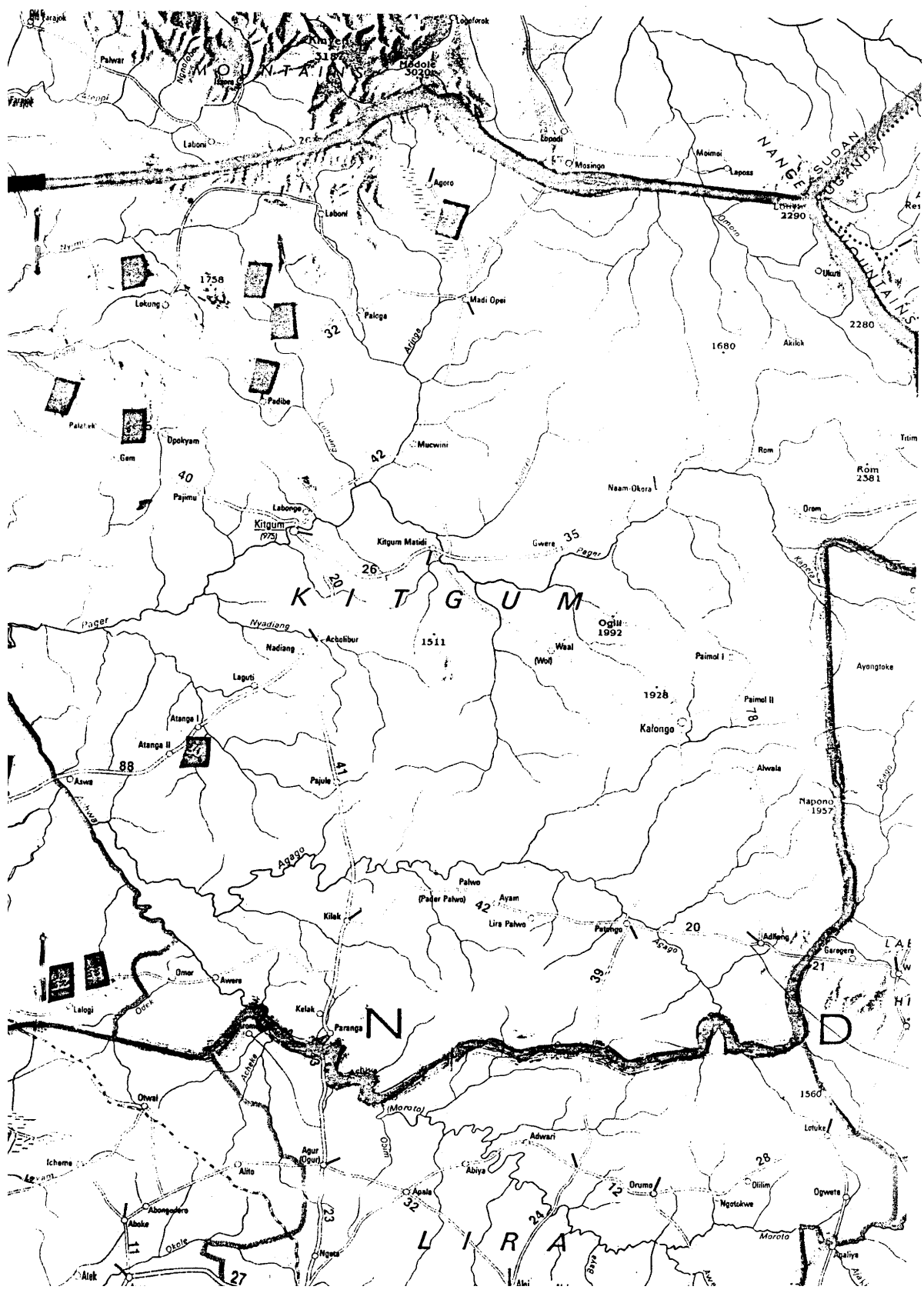
Omoro County

31. Opit
32. Lagogi
33. Acet
34. Palenga
35. Ongako

Kitgum

36. Palabek Kal
37. Palabek Gem
38. Padibe
39. Lokung
40. Atanga
41. Potika A
42. Potika B
43. Agoro





4. PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

“If this situation of displacement in the camps continues for five more years, it is going to be the total destruction of the Acholi”

An elder in Cwero

“To say that IDPs feel a sense of betrayal on the part of the Government would be an understatement”

Commissioner Mariam Wangadya. Uganda Human Rights Commission Magazine, January 2000

Having surveyed a total of twenty-four camps and heard personal stories of several hundred camp residents (who in our view constitute a good representative sample of the people of Acholi) it appears clearly to us that this is a very serious issue of concern that calls for immediate appropriate action. Everything in Acholiland, from the social fabric to the natural environment has been adversely affected by the continuation of the camps. Removing people on such large a scale from their homes and ways of livelihood has created dependency, despondency and increased disparity between those who are victims of this conflict and the rest of the nation.

To leave things as they are can only worsen the situation day by day. However, the existence of the camps does not seem to be seriously challenged by official stakeholders these days. For instance, recently the Foundation for Human Rights Initiative organized a workshop on the Rights of the Internally Displaced Persons in Uganda. It took place at Fairway Hotel in Kampala from the 7th to the 11th of May 2001. In its final recommendations nothing was mentioned about the return of the IDPs to their original homes.

The official position of the Army seems to be that *“the people will stay in the camps as long as there is still insecurity”*¹⁸, on the grounds that *“the Government cannot allow the people to run the risk of being massacred, this is why they have to stay in the camps, even against their will”*.¹⁹ However, in a recent interview with the New Vision, UPDF 4th Division Commander Brigadier Henry Tumukunde declared that the camps must be disbanded soon through a phase-by-phase programme.²⁰

Without any exception, in every camp we visited the overwhelming majority of the people we interviewed declared their wish to return back home as soon as possible. Generally, people are not allowed to go back to their villages (although this rule seems to be somehow more relaxed in some camps in Kitgum), and many who have ventured to go back on their own told us that they have suffered intimidation and threats by Government soldiers, who accuse them of being rebel collaborators.

18 – Interview with PRO Khelil Magara, 6th July, 2001.

19 – Ibid.

20 – New Vision, 16th November, 2001.

However, in every camp we visited we could easily detect two different opinions among its residents: those who would only go back after they are assured of a minimum of protection and security at their villages, and a good number of people who would be ready to go immediately at their own risk, whether or not the rebels are still around. Those of the second group argue that since they have had experience of insecurity even in the camp, they prefer to bear the situation at their homes. There is no doubt that people resent very much the fact that they were forcibly removed from their homes, and they seem to feel that while the Government can offer protection to civilians by asking them to move close to military barracks, the authorities should not compel them if people decide they do not wish to make use of this measure. Many people told us that the Government should make it clear without any ambiguities that people are free to return to their homes, so that they are not disturbed by Army personnel.

A clear perception we noticed in almost every camp is that the very existence of the situation of displacement in Acholi is making it difficult to convince the rebels to come out openly and take advantage of the Amnesty, since the prospect of being resettled in an IDP camp cannot be attractive to anybody.

Areas which are known to have been mined (such as Agoro and Potika) would need a careful programme of de-mining, so as to allow people to return home safely.

For everybody, the ultimate solution would be to end this war by peaceful means, through negotiation and using the Amnesty Law. The latter, people feel, still has very little impact on the ground. This would involve improving relations with Sudan, improving security in Acholiland and negotiating an end to the conflict with the LRA.

In a few camps (particularly Pabbo, Anaka and Opit) people have heard about the new policy of “decongesting the camps”. When we asked their opinion, most people expressed little enthusiasm about it, saying that once again this was a new idea that was coming out without any previous consultation and that it sounded to them like a way for soldiers to feel protected by the presence of civilians in more outlying areas.

Everybody expressed the need for some help if they are to go back to their original homes. They would need agricultural implements like seeds and hoes, as well as some household items. They feel that they should also benefit from restocking programmes. Many expressed their need for iron sheets to rebuild their homes. Some infrastructure should also be rehabilitated, such as schools, health units, roads and water sources.

During our survey, our team was able to visit some villages – near Pajule, Acholibur, Palabek Gem and Palenga - where people live despite intermittent rebel presence. These people have lived in camps for some months, or even years, and as the Army policy of not allowing people to go back home seemed to be more relaxed, they decided to return on their own. An interesting double pattern appeared there:

- 1) People did not go back at once, but gradually, as they developed trust that it was safe for them to stay at home. At the beginning many of them built temporary shelters and just stayed there for a few days. Later on, as they felt that circumstances allowed it, they rebuilt their original homes and resettled there permanently. However, it seems that despite all the hardships in the camps there are some people, especially youth, who do not seem to be ready to go back in the near future because of the new social life they have developed during these years in the camps.

- 2) People seem to be more ready to resettle in villages close to Army units which are stationed at Parish level. Routine patrols in rural areas give the population a reasonable sense of protection. When we asked people from Atyang and Opaya villages (about five miles East of Palenga) why they decided to leave the camp and move back to their villages they answered that the fact that there is a nearby UPDF detach at Lakwatomer Parish was a decisive factor for them.

As a conclusion of this assessment, the Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative and the Justice & Peace Commission of Gulu Archdiocese wish to state categorically and unambiguously that **the camps in Acholi need to be dismantled and people living in them should be helped to go back to their homes.** This process should begin before the end of the year 200. Appropriate measures, including security, should be put in place by the Government of Uganda. The help of the international community is needed for an orderly resettlement. The people in the camps have to be consulted and involved from the very beginning.



It is our view that we cannot wait until the war ends completely in order to think about the resettlement of the people of Acholi. The United Nations Convention on Internal Displacement prohibits displacement “*in situations of armed conflict, unless the security of the civilians involved or imperative military reasons so demand*”²¹, and it stresses the principle that it should last no longer than absolutely required. In view of this, many wonder how the presence of

hardly two hundred rebels during the last eighteen months can justify the fact of almost half a million people living in displacement in appalling conditions. Alternative solutions should be explored without any further delay so that this situation comes to an end. This calls for a lot of dialogue, facing the truth about facts without fear, willingness to acknowledge past mistakes as well as willingness to forgive.

For displaced people, the process of returning to their original homes will, no doubt, bring about some problems that will have to be faced. For instance, the issue of land should be taken sensibly. People should not be told, let alone forced, to go and stay in somebody else's land, but in their original places.

Alongside the process of enabling people to return to their original homes, a great deal of effort needs to be put into the task of restoring broken relationships, including relationships between the civilian population and the Army, who may have an important role to play in helping people to go back to their homes. In this respect, Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative has been working during the last three years to train peace committees in all the sub-counties of Acholi. These committees could be very instrumental in supporting the population in re-organising their social life and dealing with conflicts that may arise at the local level. We, the religious leaders of the Catholic, Anglican and Muslim communities of Acholiland, commit ourselves to continuing to be involved in a variety of on-going activities that will support reconciliation, peace-building and moral and cultural rehabilitation, all of them needed as a part of the process of resettlement of the people of Acholi.

21 – United Nations Convention on Internal Displacement, Article 17.

5. APPENDIX

List of Abbreviations

ARLPI	- Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
DISO	- District Internal Security Officer
ICRC	- International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	- Internally Displaced Persons
LC	- Local Council
LDU	- Local Defence Unit
LRA	- Lord's Resistance Army
NRA	- National Resistance Army
NRC	- Norwegian Refugee Council
PRO	- Public Relations Officer
RDC	- Resident District Commissioner
UPDF	- Uganda People's Defence Force

Profiles

Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI)

ARLPI is an inter-faith forum which brings together Muslim and Christian (Catholic and Anglican) leaders in Acholiland, Northern Uganda. It provides a pro-active response to conflicts through community based mediation services, advocacy & lobbying and peace-building activities. ARLPI was formally inaugurated in February 1998. Its guiding principle is that peace is a long term group effort: "*Kacel pi kuc*" (Together for Peace).

Its main activities have so far included: training of volunteer peace animators at the sub-county level in Gulu, Kitgum and Pader Districts, seminars on peace and conflict resolution (notably the Bedo Piny pi Kuc in May 1998, the Gulu Peace Conference of 1999 in conjunction with ACORD and the Northern Uganda-Southern Sudan religious leaders meeting on peace in July 2001), documentation of conflict and peace issues, organisation of annual multi-faith community prayers for peace, and mediation between Acholi and Jie along the Pader/Karamoja border in East Acholi.

Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative
P. O. Box 104. Gulu (Uganda)
Web-site: www.acholipeace.org

Justice & Peace Commission

The JPC was formally started this year by the Archbishop of Gulu John Baptist Odama, and it brings together the Justice and Peace committees of Gulu and Kitgum, which have been active since 1997. For the past four years, it has organised peace education courses for leaders of Catholic Parishes, rural youth and schoolteachers. It has also documented extensively on the Acholi conflict, publishing a monthly newsletter with a chronology of events, and advocated for peace and human rights.

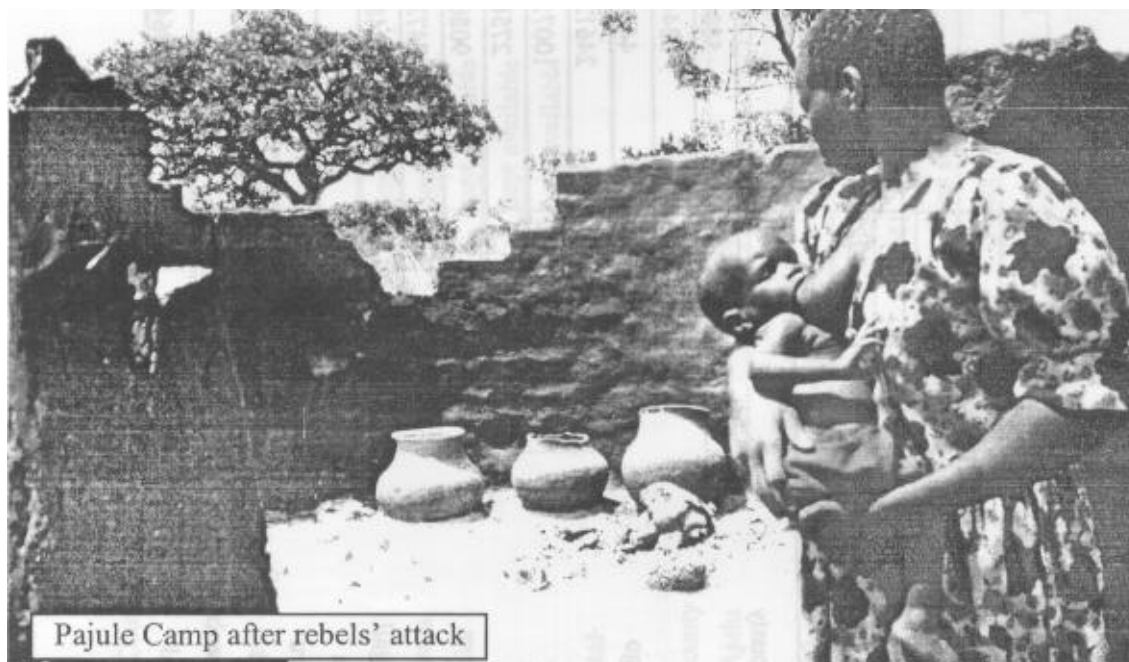
Justice & Peace Commission
P.O. Box 200. Gulu (Uganda)
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Some Attacks on IDP Camps

16 th January 1997.	ANAKA. Unspecified number of abductions.
20 th March 1997.	PABBO. Unspecified number of abductions.
20 th March 1997.	OPIT. Unspecified number of abductions.
21 st March 1997.	ATYAK. Four soldiers killed.
23 rd March 1997.	PABBO. UPDF fired mortars, killing eight civilians. 728 huts burnt.
16 th April 1997.	PALABEK GEM. 14 civilians killed. Abductions.
24 th April 1997.	PALABEK GEM. Two civilians killed.
25 th August 1997.	PABBO. 46 huts burnt.
26 th November 1997.	PABBO. 21 people killed.
13 th February 1998.	PAJULE. 34 huts burnt. 31 abducted.
6 th April 1998.	ANAKA. Five wounded.
28 th April. 1998.	KOC GOMA. 3 abducted.
11 th May 1998.	AWER. 12 abducted.
13 th May 1998.	PABBO. One killed. Unspecified number of abductions.
27 th May 1998.	PABBO. Six abducted.
18 th June 1998.	LACEKOCOT. 20 abducted.
5 th December 1998.	ANAKA. 18 abducted.
11 th December 1998.	ANAKA. 50 abducted.
14 th January 2000.	PABBO. 6 killed.
30 th January 2000.	PABBO. 29 abducted.
6 th March 2000.	PADIBE. 12 killed. 800 huts burnt.
15 th April 2001.	PABBO. One killed. Mission looted.
13 th July 2001.	PABBO. One killed.



Population in IDP Camps in Acholi

Population in Gulu District 2000

Camps by Sub-County	Norwegian Refugee Council				ICRC	
	Female	Male	Population	Households	Population	Households
Kilak County						
Awer	5808	5559	11367	2884	13583	2425
Pagak	6344	5901	12245	2915	10290	2061
Parabongo	4460	4485	8945	1855	9644	1595
Pabbo	24612	22558	47170	11219	41536	8816
Atiak	10075	9151	19226	5036	19297	3860
Bibia	2758	1928	4686	962	4909	1141
Olwal	9086	7840	16926	3638	13722	2209
Amuru	17473	17962	35435	7864	32998	6532
Labongogali	3248	2778	6026	861	10239	1602
Kaladima	not available	not available	2160	551	1780	356
Guru-Guru	not available	not available	3909	861	3160	632
Okungedi	not available	not available	not available	not available	2306	433
Omara Awobi	not available	not available	not available	not available	1530	356
Sub-Total	83864	78162	168095	38646	164994	32018

Camps by Sub-County	Norwegian Refugee Council				ICRC	
	Female	Male	Population	Households	Population	Households

Nwoya County

Anaka	16094	17708	33802	7682	25064	4150
Alero	7412	7611	15023	3976	10791	2075
Kochgoma	6089	6295	12384	2174	11324	1747
Purongo	6781	6915	13696	3631	6517	1185
Agung	770	795	1565	322	1639	316
Aparanga	not available	not available	Not available	not available	2997	545
Wii Lawora	not available	not available	Not available	not available	2995	543
Wii Anaka	not available	not available	Not available	not available	2161	393
Olwiyo	not available	not available	Not available	not available	1705	310
Ongako	not available	not available	Not available	not available	2112	415
Sub-Total	37146	39324	76470	17785	67305	11679

Camps by Sub-County	Norwegian Refugee Council				ICRC	
	Female	Male	Population	Households	Population	Households
Aswa County						
Patiko-Ajulu	5548	5543	11091	2165	11325	2164
Awach	8408	7773	16181	3058	18229	3656
Palaro	not available	not available	15221	3152	17141	2908
Paicho	5552	5911	11463	2674	16299	2856
Teyapadhola	3941	3615	7556	1833	not available	not available
Unyama	not available	not available	6305	1431	not available	not available
Cwero	not available	not available	Not available	not available	7872	1694
Sub-Total	23449	22842	67817	14313	70866	13278

Norwegian Refugee Council				ICRC	
Female	Male	Population	Households	Population	Households

Omoro County

Opit	9245	8440	17685	3764	11475	2225
Lalogi	9137	9199	18336	3912	17560	3455
Acet	10205	10190	20395	3628	25390	4033
Palenga	not available	not available	6966	1463	6970	1394
Ongako	not available	not available	3789	974	not available	not available
Sub-Total	28587	27829	67171	13741	61395	11107

Grand Total 173046 140370 379553 84485 364560 68082

Source: Statistics from NRC and ICRC in Gulu

Population in Kitgum District

Camp	Male	Female	Population
Palabek Kal	7030	10023	17053
Palabek Gem	4089	4436	8525
Padibe	9865	11553	21418
Lokung	8035	7871	15506
Atanga	4885	6780	11665
Potlka A	1223	1581	2804
Potlka B	1466	1405	2871
Agoro	1128	1275	2403
Total	37721	44924	82245

Source: Draft District Development Plan 2001/2003

Chronology of the Civil War in Acholi 1986 – 2001

1986

In spite of a peace accord signed in Nairobi in December 1985 between Museveni's NRA and the UNLA, the former attacked and captured Kampala on the 26th January, toppling Gen. Tito Okello's regime, and gradually moved north to take over the whole country. By the time they reached Gulu most people had fled deep into the rural areas and the remnants of the UNLA had fled to Southern Sudan to regroup. From there, after a few months of calm, these remnants, newly named the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), launched a bush war against the new NRA/NRM Government. The first significant attack took place in Gulu on the 20th August. The first UPDA commanders were Odong Latek, Kilama, Eric Odwar and Ojuku, all of whom died in successive years. Some others, like Fearless Obwoya, Walter Ochora, and Wiilit were to join the NRA later on. During the second half of 1986 the UPDA dominated the rural areas with much support from the local population, and spread in Lango as well, while in Teso the rebellion centred around another group, the Uganda People's Army (UPA).

Acts of brutality such as the killing and torture of civilians, looting and burning of houses and granaries were committed by both sides. By the end of the 1986 most schools and dispensaries in rural areas were closed and the isolation of the North increased, with roads to Kampala being blocked and the railways no longer working.

1987

The UPDA, under the command of Alice Lakwena, fought pitched battles against the NRA at Corner Kilak, leaving more than one thousand dead on both sides. Lakwena rallied mainly uneducated youth from the countryside together with remnants of the UPDA under the name of "Holy Spirit Movement" and fought using unconventional methods such as smearing their bodies with oil in the belief that it would protect them from the enemy's bullets. She led a force of several thousand in a military campaign that swept through Lango, Teso, Pallisa up to Iganga, attempting to reach Kampala, but they were defeated near Jinja in October; then Alice Lakwena fled to Kenya.

In February, the Catholic Missions of Kalongo, Patongo, Padibe, Namokora and Aliwang were forcibly closed down by the Government.

During that time organised large-scale cattle rustling by Karimojong warriors carried out with the connivance of the NRA – and also partly by the NRA itself - wiped out livestock, which had been the basis of the economy in Acholi: a major disaster from which the area's economy has never recovered.

Alice Lakwena's remnants re-grouped under the command of Joseph Kony in Gulu and of Lakwena's father Severino Lokoya (in Kitgum), who called himself "Rubanga Won" (God the Father).

1988

As the rebel movement came increasingly under the control of more fanatical leaders, the UPDA, led by Anjelo Okelo, managed to negotiate a peace deal with the Government. A peace agreement was signed at Pece Stadium in Gulu, witnessed by the Catholic Bishop of Gulu Cypriano Kihangire.

The population's initial support for the rebels greatly decreased. The rebels began abducting and killing large numbers of people in rural areas. In a retaliatory attack on Pajule Catholic Mission in April, they killed 16 people who had taken refuge in the compound. Many people left their homes to seek refuge in "safer" areas in Gulu and Kitgum ("internally displaced").

1989 – 1990

Severino Lokoya was arrested by the NRA and imprisoned (eventually he was released and settled in Gulu, where he started a religious sect). The rebel movement increasingly came under the command of Joseph Kony. His group was first known as Lakwena Part Two and later on the Uganda Christian Democratic Army. The conflict reached a stalemate with ambushes, looting, skirmishes, attacks on civilians and burning of schools being daily occurrences.

An Italian priest, Fr. Egidio Biscaro, was killed in an ambush on the Kitgum-Lira road on the 30th January 1990.

People, especially youths, were forcibly recruited into local militias, such as the “arrow group” by the NRA.

1991

The NRA launched a tough military campaign known as “Operation Simsim”, led by Maj. General David Tinyefuza, which from April to August sealed off the Northern districts of Apac, Lira, Gulu and Kitgum from the rest of Uganda. Gross human rights abuses, like extra-judicial killings, were committed by the NRA. Eighteen prominent opposition politicians from Gulu and Kitgum (among them Tiberio Okeny and Adimola) were arrested, beaten, taken to Luzira prison and charged with treason (they were eventually acquitted, and later sued the Government and were compensated).

The year was marked by the beginning of the rebels’ practice of maiming and mutilations, including the cutting off of lips, ears and hands.

Tension between Sudan and Uganda also increased, after the town of Moyo was bombed a number of times, and Sudanese People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) officials - including John Garang - were seen in Gulu and Kitgum.

1992

Apart from a few incidents of highway robbery and looting, the year was generally calm as the rebels appeared to have been greatly weakened by the NRA’s military operations. Travelling became relatively safe.

1993

The most memorable event of this year was Pope John Paul II’s visit to Gulu on the 6th February. The lull in rebel activities continued up to August, when groups of heavily armed rebels came from Sudan under the new name of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and launched attacks on Army units.

In the meantime, the rebellion in Teso came to an end after most rebels of the UPA accepted a Government amnesty. Their main military commander, Hitler Eregu was killed at the Kenyan border.

Towards the end of the year, peace talks between the Government and the LRA began, under the leadership of the Minister for the Pacification of the North, Betty Bigombe. Rebels were allowed to move freely and at times they mixed with NRA soldiers in barracks and trading centres. People in Acholi enjoyed a peaceful Christmas for the first time in many years.

1994

Peace talks continued until the beginning of February, when Museveni gave the rebels a seven-day ultimatum to surrender. The LRA responded by launching armed attacks, especially on roads. With the full support from the Sudanese Government, who accused Uganda of helping the SPLA, the rebels started the widespread planting of landmines on both main roads and footpaths.

In August, a local attempt was organised to deal with the difficult problem of re-integrating abducted children who had escaped or been released from the LRA. This initiative was called GUSCO the acronym of “Gulu Support the Children Organisation”. This NGO amongst others, is still operating with great effect.

1995

This year saw the beginning of an escalation of violence which was to continue into the following year. In April, the LRA massacred more than two hundred people in Atyak, after this event Uganda and Sudan severed diplomatic relations.

In August, several hundred rebels invaded Kitgum district and carried out the first massive abduction of children and youth to beef up their forces. During their retreat towards the Sudanese border one month later, they were bombed by an Army helicopter, leaving dozens of rebels - and their abductees - dead.

The new Constitution was introduced in October 1995. The NRA was re-named the Uganda People's Defence Force (UPDF).

From October and up to the beginning of 1996, a joint offensive by SPLA and UPDF dislodged the LRA from their base in Palotaka in southern Sudan, and continued to fight them well inside Sudan.

1996

Presidential and Parliamentary elections were held. Over 90 per cent of the Acholi voted for opposition leader Paul Ssemogerere.

In February the LRA made a violent comeback, laying ambushes, planting landmines and continuing with massive child-abduction. Night attacks in Gulu and the burning of whole villages became almost a daily occurrence. Museveni put Col. Kazini in charge of the UPDF 4th Division based in Gulu and appointed his half-brother Salim Saleh as special advisor for security, spearheading the counter-rebel offensive. This was the year when some of the worst atrocities occurred: Bodies of villagers were lined up on the Gulu-Kampala road, the LRA ambushed buses on the road between Karuma and Pakwach, leaving dozens of people dead, some cyclists had their legs chopped off. In July, they also attacked the refugee camp at Acholpii, in Kitgum district, killing 115 Sudanese refugees. In August, rebels killed 20 civilians in a market in Cwero. In September Col. Kazini turned over three rebel suspects to a mob in Gulu, who stoned them to death.

In July, two Gulu elders (Okot Ogoni and Lagony) who had gone on a peace mission to talk to the rebels were murdered the very day they arrived at the venue. This was a heavy blow to people's hopes of a negotiated settlement.

In October, 139 schoolgirls were abducted from St. Mary's College at Aboke in Lira District. Most of them were released soon after the deputy headmistress, Sr. Rachele Fasero, dared to follow the rebels and pleaded for the girls. Soon after, the *Concerned Parents Association* was formed to lobby for the release of all abducted children. Many students were also abducted from Sir Samuel Baker Secondary School in Gulu.

The policy of moving people into the so-called "protected villages" began in Gulu. Often, the UPDF used a scorched-earth policy to force people into displacement camps, including aerial bombing of villages.

1997

The year started with a five-day massacre in areas of Lamwo county, in Kitgum district, (especially Padibe, Palabek and Lokung) which left 400 killed by the LRA and forced thousands into displacement. Later in January, a Parliamentary commission of enquiry about the war in the North passed a recommendation to pursue a military solution and not to engage in any peace talks with the rebels.

Night attacks, planting of landmines, ambushes on the roads and widespread abduction of children continued without interruption. One of the prominent victims was the wife of the Anglican Bishop of Kitgum, Baker Ochola, one of the most respected peace activists.

The Acholi diaspora organized the first peace conference in London, known as the "Kacokke Madit" (Big Meeting).

In April, another joint offensive by the SPLA and the UPDF inside Sudan forced the LRA to move its camp further north from Aruu to Jebelein.

The international community became more concerned with the situation in Acholi after the publication of a number of reports: “The anguish of Northern Uganda”, by Robert Gersony for USAID, “The scars of war” by Human Rights Watch, “The destruction of childhood by the LRA” by Amnesty International, “Shattered Innocence” by UNICEF and “The bending of Spears” by Dennis Pain. Also, Catholic, Protestant and Moslem religious leaders started some local peace initiatives. A great prayer for peace was organised in Kitgum on the 15th August, in which a joint peace message was read.

1998

Rebel activities continued, although at a lesser scale. The assistant RDC for Kitgum, James Canogura, was shot dead in an ambush on the Kalongo-Kitgum Road. Thirty girls were abducted from a secondary school in Kalongo.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright visited Gulu and pledged to support Uganda against Sudan.

A peace inter-faith group was formed: the *Acholi Religious Leader’s Peace Initiative*, which organized the first big peace meeting inside Acholi, the *Bedo Piny pi Kuc*.

The Acholi diaspora organised the second Kacokke Madit in London.

1999

LRA rebels were still active at the beginning of the year. On the 4th January about 70 of them were killed in a battle with Karimojong warriors near Morulem, in Kotido district. In a single incident, they abducted more than 70 children and youth from Omiya Anyima, in Kitgum District. In February they went back to Sudan and for ten months there was practically complete peace in Acholi, with many people from the protected villages attempting to go back to their areas. In the meantime, the UPDF tried to seal off the border with Sudan and the Carter Centre carried out negotiations with the Sudanese government, which culminated in the signing of a peace accord on the 8th December between Uganda and Sudan. The return of all abductees and the restoration of diplomatic relations were pledged.

Amnesty International published a report in which it denounced human rights violations by the UPDF in the Northern war zone.

A big peace conference was organized in Gulu by ACORD and Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative. Big expectations were raised when the Parliament passed the Amnesty Bill in December. However, hopes for an early return to peace collapsed as LRA made a new violent incursion on the 22nd December, attacking Gulu town one week later. Soon after it was revealed that Kony had executed his deputy Oti Lagony in early December when the latter expressed his willingness to lead a rebel group into Uganda to respond to the Amnesty.

2000

Although the rebels were not present in as big numbers as in the past, insecurity continued to prevail and 400.000 people, about half of the population of Acholi, continued to live in the displaced camps. A rebel attack on Padibe camp on the 6th March left 12 people killed.

During March and April Karimojong warriors killed more than 80 people in areas of East Acholi bordering Karamoja. The Government responded by distributing several hundred guns to reinforce local militias, a move which met with the opposition of the religious leaders.

Kitgum RDC, John Baptist Ocaya died after falling into an ambush on the Kitgum-Gulu road in June.

A second peace deal between Uganda and Sudan, brokered by the Carter Centre, was signed in September.

As lawlessness continued to claim many innocent victims in the countryside, a Catholic priest well known for his defence of human rights, Fr. Raffaele di Bari, was shot dead in an ambush on the 1st October near his mission in Pajule.

An Ebola epidemic broke out in Gulu in October, claiming 170 lives, among them Dr. Matthew Lukwiya, medical superintendent of Lacor Hospital. Acholi delegates who attended the third Kacoke Madit conference in Nairobi were expelled by the Kenyan Government because of fears of Ebola.

A big demonstration and prayer for peace was organised by the religious leaders in Gulu on the 30th December.

2001

The period leading to the presidential elections of the 12th March was generally calm in Acholi, where once again people voted massively against Museveni. Soon after, the LRA started killing people in villages and laying ambushes. Eleven students from a school of catering were killed near Paraa lodge. The UPDF claimed to have killed forty rebels between February to mid-April.

In a hopeful move, Sudan repatriated 62 abductees who had escaped from Kony's camp and reached Juba. There were conflicting reports about the Sudanese government stopping or reducing its military assistance to the LRA and helping escapees to return to Uganda.

Acholi religious leaders led a mission of mediation between the Acholi and the Jie of Karamoja, greatly reducing the usual period of violence during the months of the dry season in the border areas of East Acholi.

As the Amnesty Commission finally opened its branch office in Gulu, a two-day workshop on the implementation of the Amnesty was organised. Despite the fact that the Amnesty Commission was facilitated and that Museveni and Bashir met in Kampala in a bid to re-establish diplomatic relations between Uganda and Sudan, on the ground peace continued to be elusive, with many killings and ambushes still taking place. Religious leaders (particularly Fr. Tarcisio in Pajule) and District leaders in Gulu initiated some peace talks with groups of rebels which opened up a window of hope in the resolution of the conflict.

We'd love to hear from you.
Our e-mail address is : info@acholipeace.org

ADDENDUM

By Friends for Peace in Africa (FPA)

The following lists of Internally Displaced Camps was provided to FPA by Hon. Reagan Okumu, M.P. after the publication of Let My People Go.

Pader District (10):

(a) Aruu County

1. Puranga
2. Rackoko
3. Lagile
4. Awere
5. Pajule
6. Corner Kilak
7. Acolibur
8. Atanga

(b) Agago County

1. Paimol
2. Omia Pachwa

Kitgum District (8):

(a) Chua County

1. Namokora

(b) Lamwo County

2. Palabek Kal
3. Palabek Gem
4. Agoro
5. Madi Opei
6. Lokung
7. Padibe

Gulu District (32):

(a) Aswa County

1. Oroko
2. Labworomor
3. Owalo
4. Ajulu
5. Awach
6. Gwengdiya
7. Paibona
8. Cwero
9. Paicho
10. Unyama
11. Tegot Atto
12. Rwot Obilo
13. Lukodi
14. Coo pee

(b) Kilak County

1. Atiak
2. Bibia
3. Pawel
4. Pabbo
5. Parabongo
6. Awer
7. Pagak
8. Olwal
9. Amuro

(c) Nwoya County

1. Purongo
2. Wii Anaka
3. Anaka
4. Koch Goma
5. Alero

(d) Omoro County

1. Koch Kweyo
2. Palenga
3. Bobi
4. Opit
5. Odek
6. Acet