

Is Kony's luck running out as USA joins the hunt for him?

Written by By Kyle Beaulieu
Tuesday, 13 April 2010 14:11



On March 28, 2010, Human Rights Watch released a horrific report that documented the massacre of over 321 civilians by the LRA, alongside the abduction of over 250 individuals. Innocent civilians were hacked to death by machete or clubbed to death by an axe. HRW called for an international, comprehensive strategy to finally apprehend Joseph Kony and the LRA. To contribute to this strategy, HRW publically endorsed and called for passage of the "Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009" in the U.S. Congress.

The Congressional bill will allow the United States to provide "political, economic, military, and intelligence support for" multilateral efforts that seek to protect civilians from the LRA and attempt to apprehend Joseph Kony, in the absence of a negotiated solution. The bill also calls on the United States to respond to the humanitarian needs of those affected by LRA activities, especially the needs of people in Northern-Uganda.

The bill unanimously passed by the Senate and has thus far received very little opposition in the House of Representatives. Once passed by the House, it only needs President Obama's signature. After that, it is only a matter of time until the United States gets more intimately involved in the reconstruction of northern-Uganda and the pursuit of Kony.

"Trail of Death"

The Human Rights Watch report "Trail of Death: LRA Atrocities in Northeastern Congo" gained headlines throughout the world. It reported one of the largest massacres ever carried out by the LRA, despite their supposedly weak state. They killed a 3-year-old girl and a 72-year-old man, ransacked at least 10 villages, and covered around 105 kilometres in a four-day operation. During this trek, they were not challenged whatsoever.

The UPDF spokesperson, Lt. Col. Felix Kulayigye, as reported in the Daily Monitor on March 29, doubts that such an atrocity could have occurred without previously being revealed. He claimed such an attack could not have taken place in a few hours and believed that Congolese

Is Kony's luck running out as USA joins the hunt for him?

Written by By Kyle Beaulieu
Tuesday, 13 April 2010 14:11

forces would have responded to the attacks.

After hearing his criticisms, Human Rights Watch senior Africa researcher, Anneke Van Woudenberg, doubts Kulayigye even read the report. The massacre "definitely happened," she said. As mentioned in the report, the attack took place over four days and the Congolese army did respond (but not till it was too late). In fact, the Uganda army also responded to the attacks; they arrived on December 18, 2010.

Anneke Van Woudenberg attests that the Ugandan government helped HRW with its investigation and she was confused as to why Kulayigye questioned the report as he did. The Chieftaincy of Military Intelligence was in regular communication with Human Rights Watch while they were gathering data, according to Van Woudenberg. Specifically, they disclosed to HRW that the UPDF has rescued a number of individuals, including one who was abducted in the Makombo area and attested on the LRA atrocities. *The Independent's* attempts to discuss these discrepancies with Kulayigye were futile as he was unavailable to comment.

Call for regional strategy

In order to stop these atrocities, HRW and other research/advocacy groups have called for a more comprehensive, regional strategy to defeat the LRA. The LRA is currently active in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and Sudan. Without a comprehensive effort, the LRA will just continue to slip between borders as they have done for years.

The main problem, as argued by Moses C. Okello, Senior Research Advisor at Refugee Law Project in Kampala, is that the "states are unmanageable." Kony has survived all these years by living in ungovernable areas. In order for a regional strategy to work, states in the region must first admit that they cannot control their own territory and ask for help.

It seems, as a source made available to *The Independent* reveals, the Ugandan government is very much aware that they need help, even if they are often reluctant to acknowledge it publically. The primary reason the Ugandan government called on the ICC was because "without international cooperation and assistance, it cannot succeed in arresting those members of the LRA leadership and others most responsible" for the crimes that have

Is Kony's luck running out as USA joins the hunt for him?

Written by Kyle Beaulieu
Tuesday, 13 April 2010 14:11

occurred during the last 23 years.

Since Uganda's self-referral to the ICC in 2003, it has gained some international cooperation. The United States, the DRC, and Sudan were all involved in Operation Lightning Thunder, a joint military offensive against the LRA in eastern DRC in December 2008. It's an unprecedented amount of cooperation in the pursuit of one man; however, when it comes down to it, the UPDF is still the only formidable force against the LRA. Even in joint efforts, the UPDF primarily handles the military operations.



It is difficult for states to react when they have their own homegrown chaos; however, they cannot continue to ignore the presence of the LRA. The UPDF has had a decent amount of success in these other countries, yet, the recent HRW report reveals its limitations. Â

Supporters of the U.S. bill, such as Resolve Uganda, a U.S. based advocacy group, believe the report demonstrates that the LRA still "continues to have the capacity to perpetrate brutal atrocities against civilians." That is why they are eager for a greater regional effort to settle the dispute once and for all. The UPDF, which is the strongest force in the region, has shown for over 20 years that it just does not have the capabilities necessary to defeat the LRA or elicit full cooperation from regional actors.Â

The entry of America

The world's superpower may be about to step in and try to fill this capabilities gap. On March 11, 2010, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed S.1067 "The Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009." The bill had 64 cosponsors in the Senate and it has gained the endorsement of over 20 international and Ugandan organisations. It seeks to stabilise and achieve peace in areas affected by the LRA through a regional strategy that "support[s] multilateral efforts to successfully protect civilians and eliminate the threat posed by the LRA."

Is Kony's luck running out as USA joins the hunt for him?

Written by By Kyle Beaulieu
Tuesday, 13 April 2010 14:11

Senator Russ Feingold, the sponsor of the bill, believes that this bill sends a message that the United States will no longer stand by and watch the Lord's Resistance Army terrorise innocent civilians across Africa. The bill will require a concerted effort by President Obama to protect vulnerable communities and seek a viable strategy to apprehend Kony and other LRA leaders.

Even without the bill passed, Joann M. Lockard, Public Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Kampala, attests that the United States will support the effort to apprehend Joseph Kony as long as it takes. The United States has mainly supported the effort by working with the UPDF, whom they believe is the most effective military force against the LRA. In operations such as Lightning Thunder, the United States provided nonlethal equipment, logistical support, and military aid.

International organisations do not see this support as satisfactory because Kony and the LRA are still active. Woudenberg believes that a greater, more concerted and comprehensive effort by the U.S., as called for in S.1067, could help regional governments neutralise the LRA leadership. Human Rights Watch is very hopeful that the current legislation will encourage coordination among states in the region and help end the problem once and for all.

Poffenberger, of Resolve Uganda, would welcome the United States playing a more serious role, yet, he stresses that action should be multilateral, in line with international law, and should minimise risk to civilians.

Moses C. Okello is not as positive about the U.S. bill. He is pleased that the bill emphasises regional action; however, he is concerned that the language of the bill is fairly militaristic. Okello believes the bill must resist the militaristic language for two reasons. First, according to him, the language does not truly reflect the aspirations of the people in northern-Uganda. Second, it reinforces the government position [of using military force], which has failed for over 20 years.

It is unclear at this point whether the United States would reinforce the military option as Okello fears or would try to use its international clout to seek a negotiated solution. The bill allows the United States to choose either option. The Presidential strategy, due not later than 180 days after the bill is signed, will determine the strategies the United States is going to pursue.

Is Kony's luck running out as USA joins the hunt for him?

Written by By Kyle Beaulieu
Tuesday, 13 April 2010 14:11

It's worrisome that the increased presence of the United States could further complicate this 23-year conflict. Even groups that agree on the need for an international strategy disagree on what that strategy should be. President Obama's strategy will not end the debate; it will only contribute to it. Ultimately, the United States just wants what everyone else wants: to bring Joseph Kony to justice.