

Church of Uganda Responds to Kony 2012 Campaign 15th March 2012

The Church of Uganda has been made aware of the Kony 2012 campaign initiated by the US-based organization, Invisible Children.

Joseph Kony and the LRA left Uganda in 2006 at the beginning of the Juba peace talks and haven't been in Uganda for more than five years. Since then, the people of Northern Uganda have been returning to their homes and have begun the long and difficult process of healing and rebuilding their lives, their families, and their communities. The Church of Uganda has been deeply involved in that process at every level. While there are the normal challenges of any country, Uganda is a country at peace, working hard on development, and takes pride in its description as the "Pearl of Africa."

Under the leadership of the Archbishop of the Church of Uganda, the Most Rev. Henry Luke Orombi, the Church of Uganda made advocacy for the end of the war in Northern Uganda a primary concern. The Archbishop and Bishops of the Church of Uganda led a delegation of 70 people to Gulu and the Pabbo IDP camp in February 2004, immediately after his enthronement as Archbishop, as an act of solidarity with them and to offer encouragement. The Archbishop spoke out repeatedly on the need for peaceful resolution to the conflict, and met on several occasions with the President to advocate for peace and an end to the war. Through the Uganda Joint Christian Council, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, and our Dioceses operating in the affected areas, the Church of Uganda has worked with many other community leaders to restore peace in Northern Uganda and engage in the process of healing and rebuilding the North from the lingering effects of Joseph Kony.

Although the Juba Peace Talks did not produce a peace agreement, life without the threat of LRA attacks returned to Northern Uganda in 2006. The Church of Uganda, however, seriously regrets the failure of the peace talks that has resulted in Joseph Kony and the LRA continuing their brutal attacks on the people of Congo, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. It grieves us deeply to know that others are still experiencing the brutality we lived through for twenty years.

The Church of Uganda has consistently advocated for peaceful means of conflict resolution. Archbishop Henry Orombi wrote in a January 2006 editorial to *Christianity Today*, "When you read reports of a certain number of LRA rebels killed by the Ugandan army, remember that these rebels are our abducted and brainwashed children. When reading about LRA 'rebels,' always substitute the word 'children' for rebels. The military solution has failed for 20 years; only genuine dialogue and negotiation has come closest to ending the war."

Invisible Children have been a good partner with the Church of Uganda, and we thank them for standing with us when we were working to keep the need for a peaceful resolution to the war before the government. We also thank them for standing with us in the long and still ongoing process of rebuilding families and communities in Northern Uganda. They have helped us rebuild schools, send children to school, and build capacity among our teachers through training and exchange trips. It is unfortunate, however, that there was not a wider consultation with the local community on how to portray the *current* challenges facing the people of Northern Uganda and to accurately let them speak in their own voice.

The successful use of social marketing to get out a message is commendable and we urge Invisible Children to empower Ugandans with these tools and skills to enable their voices to be heard and appreciated.

While Invisible Children have been a good partner with the Church of Uganda, they are not the only organization working in Northern Uganda. The Church of Uganda, through its dioceses working in the affected areas, has a number of programmes related to rebuilding educational infrastructure, improving health services, providing water and sanitation services, orphan care, and community development projects. The Church is in every village with schools and health centres, is in touch with needs at the grassroots, and has a solid accountability structure. Some people may want to support the ongoing efforts

to restore normal life to the people of Northern Uganda through other organizations. Tax-deductible contributions for Church of Uganda projects that address *current* concerns in Northern Uganda can be sent to the US-based Anglican Relief and Development Fund, with a notation marked "Northern Uganda Rehabilitation" – www.anglicanaid.net.

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