

We are blocking Kony from re-entering DR Congo-UPDF



Col. Kulayigye believes Kony 2012 is a good venture other weaknesses notwithstanding.
PHOTO BY JOSEPH KIGGUNDU

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Posted Sunday, March 18 2012 at 00:00

In Summary

If the world's richest and powerful nations can take eight years looking for Osama Bin Laden, what about, a third world country like ours?

The release of Kony 2012 video that shows the atrocities committed by the notorious Lord's Resistance Army rebels in northern Uganda has attracted international attention. But there are those who question its timing. In this interview, UPDF spokesperson Col. Felix Kulayigye talks about the army's view on the video and how far they have gone with the hunt for LRA leader, Joseph Kony and his men in Central African Republic.

1. As UPDF what do you think of the Kony 2012 video that has attracted massive worldwide attention?

The video is good in terms of mobilising international attention and indeed if you look at it, there are over 76 million viewers of the video on Youtube. For those who did not know the monster we were fighting with called Kony, this movie helps to uncover him.

I only wish it had been done 10 or 15 years ago. It would have helped bring the plight of thousands of children and women that were abducted, raped, killed, maimed and also helped on recovery of northern Uganda. We would have saved thousands of children and women. It took a solo effort of UPDF to deal with Kony that was being backed by the Khartoum government that gave him everything from training to military hardware. They linked him up with Osama bin Laden on the banks of River Nile in 1996. So, for us, it was really a sorry effort.

At that time, we were required to spend only 9 per cent of the GDP which reduced us to depending on a peacetime budget. Therefore, this documentary would have attracted international attention to make them appreciate that we needed to get out of that. And indeed, if it was not for the government to make other departments fundraise for Ministry of Defence, we would not have been able to acquire attack helicopters and other equipment to support counter-insurgency operations. This movie would have helped to galvanise international support that early.

2. What do you say about those who argue that the movie does not portray the current situation in Uganda?

True, it's out of step with the current situation. Northern Uganda is peaceful and stable. The movie portrays the war situation of 2003 when children were commuting at night. This is not the current situation. In fact, I was seated with the lady judge on Saturday and her daughter who is in the UK asked her whether she was okay. She thought Uganda had gone back to war. It created anxiety among people who live abroad.

There is no question about it that timing was wrong. Thirdly, this amount of international attention will be put into practical terms in terms of supporting the LRA affected areas, especially rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation. There is also another aspect of old wounds. For example, in northern Uganda, people were beginning to heal from the conflict. But when you bring this film, it brings bad memories. Otherwise, it is a good venture other weaknesses notwithstanding.

3. The US support team that is establishing itself in Central African Republic is praised that they will capture Kony. As UPDF soldiers who have fought Kony for years and also interacted with Americans, do you think they have the capacity to get Kony?

They have the technology that we do not have, like satellite imaging but in terms of tenacity and resilience to capture Kony, well, I do not think we are matched. That is why we were able to chase him here, follow him in DR Congo and we are still following him in Central African Republic.

Maybe if we had the technology the Americans have, probably, we would not have gone on up to this time. It is a question of pinpointing where he is and get him. It is that technology that beats us. They are coming in as advisors to augment us. It is a force multiplier.

4. But there are those who say that Kony has abandoned electronics and it makes it hard to track him down. Second, the regional forces including UPDF have been portrayed as weak and cannot fight and off finish Kony. What's your take?

Satellites take images. They do not necessarily pick signals alone. The technology can detect the movement on the ground and will tell how many people you should expect before you attack. If it is a section or a battalion or few individuals, you can tell. It's laughable to say we cannot handle Kony. I do not speak for others but as UPDF, we are humane and put human rights first and foremost before we launch our operations.

We are mindful of people's culture which sometimes hinders our movement and progress. We never go with solution, we go with proposals. If that makes us weak, be it. But we are also aware that 43 powers of the world have been looking for Osama bin Laden until last year since 2003 when NATO tracked him to Afghanistan. If the world's richest and powerful nations can take eight years looking for Osama Bin Laden, what about, a third world country like ours? If we are inefficient, did he choose to go to Garamba for tourism?

5. Do you know the whereabouts of Kony?

The exact place, I cannot tell. He is Central Africa but wants to cross to DR Congo. We have been blocking him from entering DR Congo. On Monday, we wounded and captured one of his officers. He is now undergoing treatment in Gulu. In their ranks he is a captain. He is a young boy of 21 years.

6. If UPDF withdraw from this operation and come back to stop him from entering our border, what would happen in DR Congo and CAR?

That's speculation but there are challenges that would emerge in those countries. Let's wait and see because we have not been in DR Congo since the election time. But as far as I know, Kony can engage or disengage basing on tactical advantage he can enjoy. If he disengages, that gives him time to recover and plan fresh attacks. Is he going to be kept on tenterhooks even after we have deployed as African Union force? I don't know.

7. Why did you leave DR Congo during elections and do you plan to go back? There have been allegations that UPDF have been plundering resources in CAR. What's your comment?

We had almost completed our mission. We went in to fight the LRA and by last year, the Congolese said the remnants of LRA were manageable. Two, at the political level, there are those who said that our presence would interfere with the Congolese election process. For the goodness of the electoral process, we decided to pull out so that there were complaints. That's why we did it. We have not gone back since then.

As to whether we will go back, if the Congolese invite us, we will go back. But we have no mandate to be Congo. Some of these NGOs that go researching like Social Science Council in New York, they have talked to Wanainchi on the ground. They talk to some leaders who themselves see the presence of UPDF as a threat to their source of income.

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