

**“The Continuing Crisis in LRA-Affected Regions”**  
**Tom Lantos Congressional Human Rights Commission Hearing**  
*Testimony by Michael Poffenberger*  
*June 18, 2012*

Before beginning my testimony, I want to first thank Representatives McGovern (D-MA) and Wolf (R-VA) for their leadership of the Tom Lantos Congressional Human Rights Commission and for convening this timely discussion. It is also a privilege to sit side-by-side with some of the most dedicated and inspiring peace builders I've encountered in seven years of working on this issue. Fr. Kinalegu's and Sr. Namaika's efforts in areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) are saving lives and bringing new hope to their communities. We all stand to learn much from the enormous sacrifices they have made on behalf of peace.

The past months have witnessed a level of attention to the ongoing crisis caused by LRA atrocities that is unprecedented in the more than 25 years that the crisis has now stretched. In October, President Obama's announcement that the United States was sending approximately 100 military advisers to help bring LRA leader Joseph Kony to justice made front-page news and sparked serious examination of an issue that has never been at the forefront of the public consciousness. This move undoubtedly helped spark renewed engagement from other actors as well, including the United Nations and African Union, who are due to issue a joint strategy to address the LRA in the coming days.

However, against all reasonable expectation, this peak of attention was dwarfed in March of this year, when the viral spread of the KONY 2012 film exposed the world to the brutality that continues to be the hallmark of the LRA. More than 100 million viewers of the film found themselves questioning how it could be possible that such a small group of people could be allowed to cause such devastation for so long. Two million Americans alone signed a pledge calling on their leaders to do more after viewing the film.

Kony has long benefitted from operating in the shadows. His violence is inflicted on the margins of our world. He targets communities in remote and underdeveloped areas, where mustering a response is both highly challenging and largely unappealing to those with the tools needed to stop him.

In this regard, the spike of attention brought to the dire human rights and humanitarian consequences of LRA activity – while long overdue – is nonetheless most welcome. Congress in particular has been seized of this issue since, and building on the leadership you first showed, Chairman McGovern, in introducing the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act along with Representative Ed Royce (R-CA), has continued to call for increased resources to help see this situation brought to an end.

But I am deeply concerned at the disconnect between rhetoric and reality on the part of the President and his Administration. Since taking the serious step of deploying military advisers to help apprehend top LRA commanders and protect people from the group's violence, little further progress has been made. No impartial estimate of current efforts could conclude that what is now occurring is likely to solve the problem without additional measures being taken, and yet there seems to be no vision or leadership for doing so at present.

Through the LRA Crisis Tracker, a data monitoring project started by Resolve in partnership with Invisible Children, we recorded 165 separate attacks on civilians carried out by suspected LRA fighters in the first five months of this year. These attacks were carried out in the remote border areas of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan. In the same time period last year, we recorded 157. Though the group may be small in number, they continue to pose a grave threat to civilians. Fear sown by these attacks has forced over 400,000 people in the region into displacement.

Before discussing the gaps in current efforts, I want to first acknowledge what is being done well by the Administration, and the progress that has been made since the adviser deployment in particular. U.S. advisers are helping their counterparts in the region to pursue disparate bands of LRA fighters and protect vulnerable communities. While just over half of the 100 advisers are based in Uganda, where the LRA has not operated since 2006, the rest are deployed to four bases in CAR, DRC, and South Sudan.

In the first seven months of their deployment, the advisers have had a significant impact. They have helped streamline logistical and intelligence support to the Ugandan military forces – now acting under an authorization by the African Union (AU) – that are focused on pursuing senior LRA commanders, largely in southeast CAR. This has led to more intense military pressure on LRA groups and enabled more LRA combatants there to escape. The advisers have established operations and intelligence “fusion centers” in forward operating locations, and have worked with State Department field staff to improve cross-border information-sharing on LRA activity among both military and civilian actors, and to strengthen civilian protection efforts.

In May 2012, Ugandan forces struck the first significant blow to the LRA's senior command structure in over two years by taking Maj. General Caesar Achellam into custody after weeks of tracking him through the forest. Dismantling the LRA's command structure is the key to decisively ending the LRA threat, and Achellam's removal demonstrates that targeted military operations can still be effective as one of several tools needed to do so. Information that Achellam shares will provide Ugandan forces with better insight into the LRA's inner dynamics and strategies, and his departure from the LRA also can be leveraged to encourage the defection of other rebel commanders and combatants.

Yet unless further steps are taken to address shortcomings in existing efforts, Achellam's removal is likely to be a positive outlier in the midst of years of inconclusive military operations instead of an indication that regional efforts are finally turning the tide against the rebel group.

The first and most important step that must be taken is to complement ongoing military efforts with aggressive diplomacy to deny the LRA safe havens. Our latest reports place Kony himself in South Darfur. If these reports are true, Kony is potentially being protected by the Khartoum government, which provided open support for the LRA from the mid-1990's up until at least 2005. Furthermore, due to tensions between the Ugandan and Congolese militaries Ugandan forces are no longer allowed to pursue the LRA in the DRC, creating de facto safe havens in that country as well given the poor track record of the Congolese military.

It would seem unimaginable to send U.S. soldiers on a mission that includes helping bring Kony and other top LRA commanders to justice without a strategy to ensure that the forces they advise can access the areas where those commanders are operating. And yet there is zero indication that the Administration has such a strategy. The President and Secretary of State should be engaging directly with governments in the region and multilateral bodies to address this issue and ensure that the mission can be accomplished.

Additional tools will also be needed if the current efforts are to succeed where past ones have failed. I leave some of the details to my esteemed colleague John Prendergast, but in short, this means dedicating adequate funding to implementing other elements of the President's own LRA strategy, released in November 2010.

This strategy was notable for putting forth a very comprehensive vision for how to address this crisis, utilizing both military and non-military means to end LRA atrocities and close the space in which the group can operate. We applauded this approach, which was missing for many years. But it is only meaningful if it is actually implemented, and so far, the Administration's record in this regard is poor.

It won't take much to have a significant impact, and Members of Congress from both parties have already banded together to make such funds available. In the 2012 budget, Congress allocated funds to address a number of gaps in current efforts, ranging from tactical mobility for military forces to HF radio community early-warning systems to reintegration assistance for people who escape from the LRA. The Administration hasn't taken full advantage of any of those authorizations and allocations. That needs to change.

Congress should also make new funds available to expand aerial surveillance over areas of suspected LRA activity. Regional governments lack the capabilities needed to locate and track LRA groups in such difficult terrain. Timely information about the locations and movements of LRA groups provided by aerial surveillance can help prevent LRA attacks on civilians, enable early warning for civilians at greatest risk,

and increase the prospects for bringing Kony and other top LRA commanders to justice. The Senate version of the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act calls for an expansion for such efforts; these funds should be included in this year's defense appropriations bill itself to ensure they are actually used.

In the long-term, investments in promoting an end to LRA atrocities and security for communities being targeted by the LRA should be augmented with additional support to reduce the space in which the LRA and other armed groups can operate. This should include expanded funding for road and mobile phone infrastructure, as well as support for economic development and improved local governance institutions in LRA-affected areas. Such efforts can contribute to the effort to defeat the LRA while also addressing the conditions of poverty and marginalization that attract predatory groups such as the LRA to this troubled region in the first place.

Thank you.