

## **Call for Solidarity with the Populations of Central Africa April 2012**

We, civil society organizations of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, call on African governments, the African Union, the United Nations, human rights defenders, and other people of good will – from near and far – to demonstrate their solidarity with the populations of central Africa affected by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). We are decimated; join with us.

The LRA problem requires a multidimensional approach. First, the populations and governments of our region must prioritize the search for a durable and definitive solution to this problem. In fact, this should be this year's number one priority for the governments of DRC, CAR, South Sudan, and Uganda. We call on the international community to engage, in line with international principles, to assist persons at risk, protect civilians, disband the LRA, and reunite our communities. We invite you to seek out the advice of the affected populations themselves. Collaborate with us, and together we can build a lasting peace.

We have seen and lived with the LRA's atrocities: their attacks are fraught with kidnappings, mutilations, burned villages, looting, murders, rapes, and the destruction of sacred objects, places, and people. LRA forces have devastated our communities. But how have Joseph Kony and his fighters sustained themselves and their violent acts? Do they receive assistance from some invisible hand? We ask the international community to help us investigate these questions and hold accountable anyone who may be supporting the LRA.

Despite the efforts undertaken by our governments, we deplore the fact that some governments currently minimize the LRA problem, while others are indifferent to it, and still others even refuse to cooperate to put an end to the LRA phenomenon and movement. Are they seeking to gain political advantage? Is it easier to do nothing than to take effective steps to eradicate the LRA phenomenon? Our governments must understand the long-term risks if they fail to end the LRA crisis now, not only for the security of their populations, but also for the development and integrity of our affected region. We ask our governments to get to the core of the problem, and set aside political problems. We want to see the end to these atrocities, and the birth of lasting peace.

The work of a single country cannot end this crisis. We welcome the African Union initiative to encourage cooperation, and we ask them to take effective and efficient action to save lives. As such, the African Union should coordinate, facilitate, and mediate between regional governments, as well as collaborate with local civil society, all with the full backing of the international community. We support the efforts and mechanisms that the African Union is currently putting in place, and urge them, for better effectiveness, to collaborate with local civil society structures and affected communities.

Soldiers in our region have been tasked with pursuing the LRA, but to complete their mission they need to become more professional and responsible. The militaries of the Democratic Republic of

## CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic

the Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan, and Uganda must be protectors of civilians, and not predators.

We call on all capable countries and bodies to help improve our regional forces and support them in their mission to put an end to the devastation caused by the LRA. And all soldiers in the region who have committed themselves to stopping the LRA should be treated equitably. This will help avoid friction and enhance cooperation and mission efficacy. Help ensure that soldiers receive their pay, adequate food, usable and durable equipment, transport, and means of communication, so that their priority remains tracking the LRA, and not assuring their own survival. The United States trained one effective unit in the DRC, and similar efforts should follow and be extended across the affected region. We need responsible and professional militaries committed to protecting our communities.

United Nations peacekeepers are deployed in some of our main centers in northern Congo. However, we have noted that they are not in some villages and towns, where their presence is very necessary. Put them in the most vulnerable areas: in Bas Uele in DRC, and in eastern Central African Republic. Make them responsible and capable of accomplishing their noble mission. We ask the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the Congo, MONUSCO, to use its chapter 7 mandate to protect civilians. Currently, peacekeepers do not leave the main roads, while attacks often happen in the bush. The LRA has even attacked near MONUSCO bases, resulting in no intervention on their part to protect civilians. Use the power at your disposal to protect us and pursue our aggressors.

Our region is remote, far from big cities, with disparate communities, allowing the LRA to too easily attack our communities and escape in the difficult terrain. While high-frequency radios are being installed throughout the zone, it is imperative to call on other communication companies (Airtel, TIGO, CCT) to come to the area to improve and facilitate modern communication like elsewhere, and to make it accessible to the population. This will help us immediately transmit messages about LRA attacks and attempted attacks. We welcome USAID's commitment to put mobile phone towers in some of our communities, but it seems this project is delayed. Overcome this delay and expedite this process.

Help us rehabilitate our roads, which will improve protection and assistance to communities that are victims of the LRA's abuses. This will also improve the ability of the United Nations and regional militaries to quickly deploy a rapid reaction force to respond to incidents and attacks when necessary.

We hope for concerted, strengthened efforts to encourage LRA combatants and captives to defect and escape. Messages diffused on FM radio are helpful, as are DDRRR efforts to welcome returnees and provide them immediate assistance. DDRRR expertise in the region would be useful for psychological help and socioeconomic reinsertion. For all efforts, it is necessary to analyze risks and benefits, and to do so in collaboration with local civil society. Above all, work with local civil society organizations to sensitize as many local communities as possible to encourage returnees and welcome them safely.

Joseph Kony and the LRA have captured thousands over the years, and many of these victims require both immediate and long-term assistance. It is necessary to strengthen local civil society

**CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS**  
of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic

structures with training, infrastructure, and equipment so they can rehabilitate these members of our communities, with psychosocial assistance, family mediation, education, and socioeconomic assistance. A pilot rehabilitation center is being constructed in northern Congo, and others exist already in Uganda and South Sudan. But we point out that currently there are few rehabilitation efforts, and no rehabilitation center, in eastern Central African Republic.

We, civil society organizations of the affected region, thank in advance all persons of good will, African governments, the African Union, the United Nations, human rights defenders, and others who respond to this call for solidarity to save lives and empathize with the communities ravaged by the LRA.

**For civil society organizations of the affected region**

1. Action to Identify and Develop Reconstruction Efforts / AIDER (DRC)
2. Association of Handicapped Persons / APVH (DRC)
3. Catholic Justice and Peace Commission / CDJP – Dangu-Doruma Diocese (DRC)
4. Catholic Justice and Peace Commission / CPJP – Ango Parish (DRC)
5. Catholic Justice and Peace Commission / CPJP – Bangadi Parish (DRC)
6. Central African Human Rights Organization / OCDH (CAR)
7. Conscience (DRC)
8. Coordination of Civil Society in Mopoy Chefferie / SOCICOMO (DRC)
9. Farmers' Association of Haut Uele / ASSAHU (DRC)
10. LRA Victims Association (CAR)
11. Maman Bongisa / MABO (DRC)
12. Orphan Assistance Union of Zemio / UAOZ (CAR)
13. Solidarity and Integrated Assistance to Vulnerable Populations / SAIPED (DRC)
14. Solidarity for Mutual Assistance and Community Development / SEDEC (DRC)
15. Women's Movement for Peace (*Dynamique Femmes pour la Paix*) (DRC)
16. Youth United for the Protection of the Environment and Community Development / JUPEDEC (CAR), in association with 55 partner organizations