



IN THE SERVICE OF THE LORD'S ARMY



National Memory & Peace Documentation Centre

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Written by Theo Hollander

"The Return of Happiness"

Synopsis

BACK COVER:

"At the age of fourteen, I had killed more people than some of the most notorious serial killers that the world has ever known. But that doesn't mean that I am an evil man, or that I am mentally ill. I never killed anyone out of pure cruelty or because of sheer hatred. I killed them because I had to. I had no other choice. It was either them or me. Or at least, this is what I keep on telling myself..."

In the service of the Lord's army tells the story of how the war in northern Uganda changed my life forever. It will show how, at the age of twelve, I was transformed from cheerful child into a cold-blooded killer in the so-called army of the Lord, otherwise known as the Lord's Resistance Army."

Summary:

"In the service of the Lord's army" is a biography about Norman Okello; a young man from northern Uganda who was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army at the age of twelve and forced to become one of its harbingers of death. This book will tell a true story of epic proportions, about severe hardships and extreme strength and resilience in events that happened in a strange but real world about fifteen years ago.

The book tells the tale of how one of the most brutal rebel groups in the world changed the life of one individual irreversibly. It will show how a young child was able to cope in this hostile environment and navigate through all the hardships. It shows the constant struggles that Norman had with himself trying to keep his humanity, while it is the very loss of humanity and the will to survive at all cost that makes him human. This book will tell about Norman's life and the extraordinary events in which he was directly involved. From his idyllic early childhood which reveals this part of Africa in its full beauty, to his combat, abduction and punishment missions which can be added to the blackest pages of human history.

Chapter 18

When I woke up the next day, I saw my new surroundings for the first time in daylight. I was sleeping in a large room that I shared with dozens of others. Each room had a leader and the moment I was awakened, our room leader came to me and welcomed me in name of all the people in the room. I knew perfectly well that this was a formality and that this would happen with any new kid, but still it made me feel welcome and less alone. To my surprise, the room leader introduced himself as Odong, which is an Acholi name. Although he was Sudanese, he was also an Acholi and despite the different accents, we understood each other perfectly well. As soon as I was out of bed, the room leader showed me around the compound of the school and gave me an orientation. I learned that the school was founded by the Torit Diocese in South Sudan. Initially, it was meant for only Sudanese children. Torit lay near the border of Uganda and this area in Sudan was tribally mixed between Acholis and Dinkas. Therefore there were quite a number of people who spoke Acholi. Yet, he clearly explained that Acholi would not be the language that we would learn here at school. Instead, we were taught English and Arabic, and English was the language that we supposed to speak amongst ourselves. This was still a problem for me. It was not that I couldn't speak any English, but it was generally very weak.

Therefore in the first few weeks I mainly hung out with Odong, and I really started to know him well. He told me about his past and his time spent serving in the SPLA to lib-

erate their country from the Muslim invader. Like me, he was also a soldier who knew all the laws of the jungle. He had entered the SPLA voluntarily when he was thirteen years old, because an Arabic militia had destroyed his village. Knowing that I had fled Northern Uganda from the threat of the LRA, as Sophia had told the students in my block, he included some encounters with the LRA in his story. He told me that the LRA were always the worst and most fearless enemy. Deep inside, I felt some pride as he told me this, but I was trying very hard to conceal any kind of emotion. From that moment onwards, I decided that I would never reveal my past at this school. Only Sophia and the teachers knew, and I really wanted to keep it that way, as I found myself surrounded by my former enemies.

It was all very weird to me to be talking with my former enemies like we were best friends now. Just over a year ago, I would have shot them without any remorse, and now we were laughing with each other. Of course, Odong also asked me about my past, but I just told him that I was a refugee from the war in Uganda. I never told him anything about my past as a soldier and although it didn't take very long for everybody to suspect that there was something more to my story than I had revealed, nobody ever asked me about it. In this school there were so many people with bad memories, that we all left them for what they were, relics of the past. If someone didn't want to talk about it, the rest wouldn't ask.

As school began I had great difficulty concentrating on the different topics. Somehow, my mind was always mired in the war. The brutal images and the memories of the sounds

completely took my mind away from the classes at hand, whether it was economics, English or mathematics. Sometimes, during the middle of classes, I felt this strong urge to destroy. Whenever this happened I would just walk out the classroom and I would start running, until my legs couldn't carry me any further. Of course, this behavior was noticed by my fellow schoolmates, but luckily, no one ever asked about it. Fortunately, the teachers had all been informed about my past and every time I seemed unfocused or if I would run out of the classroom, they understood and they never punished me for it.

Somehow, it felt a little bit like World Vision again. Even though the outside world was hostile to me, in school people seemed to understand. Every week I had an appointment with Sophia to talk about my past, my progress and my future. She really was wonderful to me. She never got angry and she was always very patient. I started to fully trust her and then I became very open with her. We only talked about the war when I wanted to and when I was ready to talk about it. Otherwise she never asked. Sometimes she would help me with my homework and other times we would just talk about nothing special. These were the conversations that I liked most. It wasn't long until I had told her almost everything about my past, even including the things that I hadn't dared to tell others, and somehow it comforted me. Every time we talked, no matter what topic, I felt better. Although the stories about the war always triggered nightmares, it felt good to share all this bad stuff with someone. The conversations actually helped me to focus better and to concentrate more on

the schoolwork. Slowly things were starting to get better.

My social life was also getting better. Although people noticed my strange behavior at times and they suspected that there was more behind my story, I was not unusual here. There were so many former combatants in this school that neither my behavior nor my treatment stood out. Even for the people who had never fought in the war, the vast majority of students had experienced it one way or the other. Everybody had some kind of war trauma. This shared trauma sometimes resulted in fierce fights between some students, but it also gave us a common identity and some strange feeling of belonging. Despite our unique individual experiences, we all had one shared goal, to forget about the past and to start concentrating on the future.

In the first few weeks Odong introduced me to many of his friends. It wasn't long before I became a member of Odong's group of friends, who were all Acholis. As some of the friends of Odong's were former soldiers, they sometimes talked about the war, at which time I would remain quiet or pretend to ask ignorant questions. Most of the time, however, we focused on the present and the future. Amongst ourselves, we were always talking about girls, joking about things which were in the news, and all the wonderful people we would become in the future. Most of our ultimate dreams were modest, ranging from being a farmer, a first grade teacher, a policeman, and an accountant, but there were two whose ambitions were a bit higher. One of the boys was certain that one day he would become the president of a liberated and independent South Sudan

and we would always joke about it. Another guy wanted to be something called an astronaut. He had heard about this profession from an American aid worker, and ever since then he wanted to become the first Acholi to walk on the moon. When he first told me, I had never heard of the profession before and I didn't even know that there ever had been a man on the moon. The first thing I did was to check this with Sister Sophia and to my great surprise she actually confirmed that it had happened, sometime in the sixties. Every day I learned new things in this school, yet my own goal remained modest. I wanted to become an accountant for one of the white-man organizations that worked in Gulu, until the day that I would inherit my father's farm and become a farmer again.

As the months went by my English improved significantly. Thanks to the patience of Sister Sophia and the friendship with Odong and his friends, I was really starting to feel at ease in this school. This in turn affected my performance. While my first report was riddled with 'weaks, pull ups, and try harders', all the ones that followed showed significant improvement. My second report had a lot of 'fairs' and the last report of the year actually had quite a lot of 'goods'. While my performance in most topics was above average, I really excelled in English and economics. It was only in Arabic that I kept failing.

As my grades went up, so did my spirit. The location of the school was on the safe side of the river Nile and although the war in the North was raging more intensely than

ever before, I rarely worried about it anymore. We sometimes read the newspaper and when I saw reports of increased rebel activity in and around Gulu, I really worried about my family, but at least I didn't have to fear for my personal safety anymore. Strangely, the crossing of the Nile was less than fifty kilometers away, but here we were completely safe. The longer I stayed in the school, the less my memories went back to the bush. The nightmares continued, but they were becoming less frequent and I began to also experience happy dreams. Sometimes I was daydreaming during the class and I imagined myself flirting with a girl or receiving my diploma at the university. At those times I always had a smile on my face. Also with my friends and I often joked and we always had a lot of fun. Slowly, after many years of misery, I started to feel happy again.

It seemed like my years at the Blessed Damien School flew by, much quicker than I had anticipated, and quicker than I liked. After several years I finished my primary level and afterwards Hervé Cheuzeville and Els de Temmerman paid for my senior one and my senior two. During the holidays I mostly went back to my parents and sometimes to Hervé in Kampala. I especially liked the times that I hung out with my parents. The school affected my behavior positively and my parents no longer feared me. After several holidays, they even let me to be in charge of my siblings again. There were times that I wanted to join my dad at the farm, but he always strictly forbade me to go with him. He told me that he never wanted me to come close to the war again.

In the weeks that I spend in Gulu and sometimes also in Kampala I did my interviews with

Els de Temmerman. As she started to pay for my school fees, I started to trust her. Yet, I never told her my entire story, just the bits that I wanted to reveal. So when Els published the book *Aboke Girls* in 2001, which was partly based on my stories, she didn't know that I was a commander or that I had previously ordered others to cut the male parts of our SPLA enemies.

It was also during my years in the Blessed Damien School that Hervé's contract with the World Food Program ended and he was transferred to the AVSI Foundation as a Program Manager for a landmine victim project. This meant that he moved from Kampala to Gulu town, although he maintained his house in Kampala. Thus, whenever I went to Gulu in the holidays, I spent time with Hervé and he even gave me a job as his gardener. During holiday breaks, while my parents were working in the fields, I made sure that Hervé's house was tidy. At the end of the working period, when my holiday came to an end, he always paid me some money and I brought my salary always immediately to my parents, who gladly accepted it.

The fact that I brought home some money really helped me in many ways, much more than Hervé could have ever guessed. Bringing home some money, although it wasn't much, meant that I mattered. Slowly people came to see me as a productive member of the society, rather than a mere child or worse, a rebel. Of course, the stigmatisation didn't stop overnight, but as I refrained from the use of violence, my status in the neighbourhood grew. The talking around my back slowly dissipated and people started

to appreciate me for who I was, not for what I had done. As I kept silent about my past, people slowly began to forget about it altogether. Not only did my status within society improve, but also within the family. When I was not working for Hervé, I was in full charge of my siblings again and my small contribution also really helped my family to provide us with a bit more food. I really started to like the benefits and the appreciation of helping people.

I graduated in 2001 and afterwards I continued gardening at Hervé's house. Graduation day itself was among the best days in my life. Because of the war and the poverty, many of our parents, including mine, couldn't make it to our graduation. In a way I felt really bad that my they couldn't be present, because I knew how extremely proud they would have been. But this didn't stop me from having fun.

After we received our diplomas, several friends and I snuck out of the ceremony with and we bought some small bottles of Ugandan Waragi, a very strong gin. I knew that the next day I would be back to Gulu, so this was my last day to spend with my Sudanese friends. Since the school was very religious, we did our drinking in the bush far from the school, where nobody could bother us. This evening was especially funny. At first everybody started telling what they would do next and where they would go, but soon even the astronaut and the president couldn't manage to remain standing. This was the first time that I was really drunk, and man, I enjoyed it. By the time we got back to school I had real difficulty walking in a straight line and everything seemed ridiculously funny to me, even the disapproving eyes of the sisters

and the teachers who saw us arriving late in the evening.

The next day early in the morning Sister Sophia awakened me and we had one last conversation. We mainly talked about my future and even though I had a headache, the conversation lifted me up even further. After our talk she wished me the best of luck in the rest of my life and she told me she would miss our conversations. As a last great act of compassion, she gave me the fare for the bus to Gulu and this was the last time I saw her.

As I entered Gulu it was clear that a new phase of my life was unfolding in front of me. It was the end of 2001 and somehow the war wasn't as intense as it had been in the mid-nineties or the period during my captivity and after my escape. In the first months after my return, life was easy and everything went the way it was supposed to. Once more I shared my hut with my siblings and because the threat of the LRA had lessened, I never commuted to the centre anymore. Every day my parents woke up before dawn and in the morning I would be in charge of feeding my siblings and bringing them to school. Afterwards I would go to Hervé's house where I made sure that the garden looked top notch. Hervé really helped me to settle down. He taught me how to cook and he always instructed me in a very friendly way how I should act and how to be a true gentlemen. At the end of every month, Hervé gave me my salary, which really helped to improve the quality of our lives. After work I always hung out with my friends, including Victor, who had moved from his village in Kitgum to

Gulu Municipality. Sometimes we managed to get some money together and then we would get drunk from the Waragi, but most of the time we just played some football and we joked about all sorts of things.

Most of the friends that I had were from World Vision and had shared similar pasts, but in a matter of weeks my group of friends extended to include non-former child soldiers, as we were now being called by all the NGOs. We weren't combatants or soldiers anymore, but child soldiers, as if we were somewhat less than a soldier. When I came home after dark, I would have dinner with my entire family and afterwards I often enjoyed long conversations with my parents. Occasionally, they asked me about the time I had spent in the bush, but we mostly avoided this topic. The months following my graduation were really nice. I did everything that I wanted and nobody told me to do this or to do that. I was earning my own salary, people started to accept me for who I was instead of what I had done.

One great surprise was that there were actually quite a number of former LRA high commanders living in Gulu, who had taken advantage of the Amnesty Act and escaped from the LRA. The Amnesty Act was implemented by the government in 2000 and it was meant to weaken the LRA from within. The act meant that any soldier or commander who would return from the LRA would receive blanket amnesty. They pronounced the message for weeks on the radio until they were sure that it had reached the LRA camps in Sudan as well. It wasn't long after the broadcastings that the first commanders started to return. We would hear them on the radio, urging others to es-

cape as well, and pleading the case that they were not being harmed and that they were really forgiven. Sometimes when I was walking in Gulu, I would meet former captains whom I had known very well when I was in the LRA. Sometimes I would meet people that had commanded me through the various missions in Uganda and I was reminded about these days. These men had been terrible killers, much worse than I ever was. They had done monstrous things against civilians. But now they walked freely among them. The Amnesty Act meant that they were forgiven, no matter what grave crimes they had ordered people like me to do. Although I clearly remembered how these people used to treat us when I was still there, I was always friendly towards them. I always stopped to have a conversation with them and they clearly remembered me as well. Would I have met them two years earlier, they would have killed me and any relative of mine they could find for the act of escaping, but now we talked about the things that were in the news, the latest gossip, the places where one could find a good pork chop or a good hairdresser, and sometimes we even talked about the war. At first it was strange to come across these men that I used to fear, but I got used to it very quickly. I didn't fear them anymore. Here in civilian society, we were equals. No one of us held a rank here and no longer could they tell me what to do and what not to do.

Thus in the first few months after I graduated my life was very enjoyable. I really felt like a rising star within my community, I was one of the few in my neighborhood with an income, and I was gaining new friends by the

day. Yet, as my life entered a new era, so did the war. I still lived in a conflict zone and in the years following 2002 this would become painfully evident once more.

It was in March 2002 that the UPDF started an offensive called Operation Iron Fist. The intent was to wipe out the LRA for once and for all in a grand military campaign. This operation was intended to last for only three months. When I first heard about the offensive, I couldn't help myself but to laugh. Three months to end a war that had lasted for almost 17 years was a ridiculous notion. It was such an on-going shadow that had loomed over my life, and I refused to believe that it would end so easily. I really thought that somebody in the higher echelons of the Ugandan government had gone mad.

Earlier that year, Museveni had managed to make the government of Sudan agree to stop supporting the LRA. As an act of faith and goodwill, Sudan allowed the Ugandan army to operate deeply within Sudan to finally defeat the LRA. The governments managed to agree on a so-called 'Red Line of Operations,' which allowed the UPDF to go all the way to Torit and Juba. This was in itself remarkable, as the war in Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan had partly been a proxy war between the governments of Sudan and Uganda, with both countries supporting the adversaries' rebel movements. Yet, it appeared that this era had now come to an end. Officially, the Sudanese government stopped supporting the LRA and as a result the LRA saw no other option but to call for a ceasefire, which was completely ignored by the Ugandan government. Instead, the UPDF decided that Kony

would never agree to peace and they saw an opportunity to finish the job, deep into enemy territory.

Although I really wanted this war to end, I held a very ambiguous position towards this great offensive. As the newspapers started to herald the bravery of the Ugandan soldiers and the great successes of defeating Kony's strongholds, I couldn't help but to recall the days when I had been a soldier myself. It sounds like a bloody cliché, but that army is made up of children who are forced to be soldiers against their will. Whenever newspaper heralded another success, I thought about all those dead, putrefying bodies of girls and boys who had barely reached the age of ten. I had to think about the mothers who were fleeing with their babies in one arm and their gun in the other, while the bombs were falling all around them.

All the stories that the newspaper reported about Kony's defeat in Kit Valley and in the Imatong Mountains, I realized one thing. Kony cannot be defeated. He can be weakened, yes. He can be pursued and hunted. But he will not be defeated. The spirit Lakwena is strong and he always knows when the next attack will come. The spirit knows all too well how to repel the attack or where to hide. While the articles reported that the UPDF had the winning hand, I knew all too well that civilians were the ones who would suffer the consequences of this UPDF stupidity.

I had been in the LRA long enough to know what would happen next. Whenever the UPDF or the SPLA attacked us, we would re-

taliate against the civilians that they were supposed to protect, just to send our adversaries a clear message. We can harm you more than you can ever harm us! Even before the first LRA retaliation began, I already pitied the victims, just like I pitied the LRA soldiers whose hardships I knew all too well. Although I had spent the worst years in my life there, I did feel sympathy for all those souls who would find their deaths at the various battlefields.

The LRA was hit hard, that was clear. They fled from one base to another, until they hadn't any bases left to fall back to. But I knew that the LRA didn't need a base. If necessity dictates, they could live in the bush and prey on the local population, which the UPDF systematically forgot. In any military campaign, they would concentrate fully on destroying the LRA, forgetting to protect all the civilians who lived in harms' way. The newspapers soon began to doubt whether the mission was successful.

For sure, the LRA lost its bases in Sudan, but they were far from defeated. As the LRA withdrew deeper into Sudan, the UPDF pursued, causing tensions between the governments of Sudan and Uganda. It was not long before the LRA was so far into Sudan that they crossed the Juba-Torit red line. As a result the supply lines of the UPDF became stretched to its limit, making their military campaign difficult to sustain and furthermore they had to be careful not to violate the agreement with Sudan.

For several months we heard one success story after another, but we never saw the words that so many people were hoping for

-“Kony is captured, the war is at an end.” Instead, events unfolded exactly according to my predictions. The three months that were promised to end the war, turned into six, and six months turned into a year. In the meantime, LRA forces started to trickle into Uganda once more, carrying out brutalities of an unprecedented scale and reaching further than they had ever done before. From 2002 till 2006, the war entered its worst phase of escalation. Exactly as I had suspected, the LRA retaliated against the civilian population. To make up for the losses that they had sustained during Operation Iron Fist, they abducted young people at an incredible rate. One of the aims of the UPDF had always been to save the abducted children, but far more children were abducted in these years than they could ever rescue. Of all the tens of thousands of children who were abducted during the war, more than half of the abductions occurred during this phase. In majority of cases, these children were never to be seen again. They were either killed, or still serve the LRA today.

Also for the first time, the war reached other parts of Uganda, such as the most southeastern parts of Lango and the Teso region, which had previously remained largely untouched. This led to a gigantic surge in the numbers of IDPs. Once more, Radio Kabi was broadcasting overtime and there was not a day that went by, that we didn't hear new stories of brutal massacres. On the 15th of June, in 2003, the LRA entered the Teso regions and in its wake, local defence units sprang up everywhere. The first ones to have successes against the LRA were the Arrow-boys, yet their success came at high

costs. Although initially they were very poorly equipped and also largely made up of units of young boys, as their name suggested, the government started to arm them. As a result they managed to make LRA operations in that part of the country very difficult. In Lira District a local defense unit called Amuka, the Luo word for Rhinoceros, was also beginning to make life difficult for the LRA.

Newspaper articles, once heralding the UPDF, started to criticize Operation Iron Fist. The damage reports did not live up to Museveni's promise to end the war, quite the contrary. Within one year after Iron Fist, the number of IDPs had doubled, areas which had previously left untouched by the war were now embroiled in it, the rate of abductions had never been as high, and never had there been so many deaths to mourn as in the year 2003.

In the following year, the situation grew even worse. In February, Okot Odhiambo, one of the leading figures within the LRA, commanded a massacre in Barlonyo that was even worse than the one in 1995, when Vincent Otti burned Atiak to the ground, killing more than 200 members of his own clan. Only half a day after the Barlonyo massacre, reports from Radio Kabi and other official media started to appear. Barlonyo was an IDP camp in Lira that was under the defense of the Amuka boys. They proved to be of no match to a full LRA battalion. At around five in the evening, the LRA began bombing the camp. We heard stories that the camp was defended by about forty to sixty Amuka members, who had bravely stood up against Odhiambo. Being outnumbered and outgunned, they were quickly overrun. What followed was a ter-

rible onslaught. Rebels executed people on a massive scale and afterwards they set the entire place ablaze. In the carnage over 300 IDP's were killed. Then as sudden as the attack had begun, Odhiambo had given the order to retreat, long before the first UPDF soldiers managed to reach the camp.

Not long after, on the 19th of March, another large massacre took place in Lukodi, less than 20 kilometres outside of Gulu. The LRA had surrounded Lukodi camp with hundreds of soldiers, making sure that nobody was able to escape. They looted the huts and killed the people who tried to run away. A group of men and women were assembled who were abducted with the sole purpose to carry away all the looted goods. In less than an hour the LRA was on their way again. As they left, they set the camp ablaze while making sure the flames killed all those who were still alive. In this onslaught, 53 people were killed. They forced the abductees to carry all their stolen goods. When they were finally at their destination, all the men were executed. Massacres like these continued throughout the year.

As the rebels infested Acholiland once more, my siblings and me were forced to commute to the centre of town once more every evening, to spend our nights on the verandas. We slept without mosquito nets and on mattresses that would become soaking wet during the rainy season. As the war intensified, I left the happy years of the Blessed Damian and the months following my graduation behind me. The atmosphere in Gulu became extremely tense. People began to discriminate against the former rebels again, espe-

cially the ones who had returned recently. Luckily for me, it had been years since my escape and I knew perfectly well how to behave among the civilians. The stigma on other rebels was not applied to me. Every day new rebels returned, causing a lot of suspicion among the people of Gulu. The friendliness that I had experienced during the months after my graduation slowly disappeared.

As the war intensified, my parents went less often to our fields in the village, which meant that we were slowly growing hungry again. By now I was twenty years old and in any normal circumstances, I would be earning a living or going to a university, but the war once more paralyzed life in the northern part of Uganda. The food supply on the markets dropped, prices went up drastically and some NGOs even closed their offices, as they could no longer go to the field. Although I continued to work for Hervé, my movement became restricted.

It was also during this time that the Ugandan army started to harass people. People were being arrested on a massive scale and detained for months, without any trials or justification. A curfew was established that prohibited movement after a certain time. Those who moved around after the curfew were seen as rebels and arrested, or sometimes even shot. My suspicion of the UPDF had never ceased, so I tried to limit my movement as much as possible, meaning that I wasn't able to continue to go to Hervé every day. During these years the UPDF started to encounter heavy losses. As a large section of the UPDF remained in Sudan, they were unable to defend the entire north and this gave Kony to

opportunity to spread havoc.

I still met my friends now and then, but our meetings were always short as there were new regulations in Gulu prohibiting assembly. The one person that I still met pretty often was Victor. Every time we met, we talked about the dire situation of those people who had only recently managed to escape the LRA. They were really treated badly. Because the rehabilitation center was overcrowded with new escapees, their guidance was generally very poor. As soon as they left the rehabilitation center they entered a very hostile world, where they were left to fend for themselves. There was nobody telling them how to behave and how to deal with their problems in a non-violent way. The more Victor and I talked about it, the more we realized that something needed to be done to help these poor people.

We noticed that there were many NGOs in northern Uganda, yet none of them employed former child soldiers or managed to do something for them in a really constructive and lasting way. So the more often Victor and I met, the more we came to realize that we needed to start an organisation that would help other child soldiers. At that time, we believed that as former combatants ourselves, we were the best ones to fully understand and help other child soldiers.

It was also during this period that we met some Dutch people who recorded a documentary about some of us and our stories, after having been inspired by the book of Els de Temmerman. There was a woman named Maaïke Engels, who recorded a documen-

tary about us called Strictly Eighteen. We presented our desire to establish an organisation to help former child soldiers, and it was she who helped us in setting it up.

It was in the early months of 2004, at the same time that Kony was wreaking his worst havoc, that we founded an NGO called the War Affected Children's Association. Initially, we had very little funds, but nevertheless we did manage to make a real difference for many escapees. One of the first things we did was to start registering people. Before long, we had registered 1898 members, all former combatants in the LRA. Initially, we had nine members on the executive board and all of us had a past in the LRA. We had all managed to escape in the mid to late nineties and therefore we had all experienced how difficult life can be when you first return to civilization.

With the help of Maaïke we managed to rent an office and set up a computer center. Using old computers donated from the Netherlands, we taught the escapees how to operate a computer, so that they would at least gain some skills that could come in handy later in their lives. Apart from the computer center, we also supported little micro-financing initiatives based on an idea that actually came from another group of former child soldiers that we were working with.

It was during the registration that we came in contact with this group. It was made up of twenty former child soldiers who each had very small businesses, in which they managed to earn about half a dollar a day, if not less. Nevertheless, the group came up with the idea that they would try to save a few shillings a day, which would be put into the savings of

the group. This group met every week and during the meetings, all the group members would put an amount of 100 or 200 shillings in a pot. Every week, one member of this group would borrow this amount, so that he or she could extend his or her business. In this way, everybody in the group got the opportunity to invest in their business and expand it, without acquiring a loan from the bank or without seeking the help of outside organisations. Once we saw the brilliant way this practice worked with one group, we started to teach other groups how to do this. At first we focused mainly on groups that operated in Gulu town, as it was too dangerous to go outside, but later we started to take the risks to also visit groups in camps nearby. On several occasions, we also managed to get sufficient funds to buy a lot of food. We distributed this food among our members in the camps surrounding Gulu, as it was the former child soldiers in these kinds of camps that suffered most from the food shortages. Although the distribution of food was really the work of the World Food Program, their aid did not always reach the people who were in most need of it. This is not to criticize what the WFP has done for the people of northern Uganda, but in the camps the former child soldiers stood on the lowest step of the social ladder, and by the time that the food provided by the WFP was distributed, there was very little left for them.

This situation also clearly resonated during the needs assessment, which we conducted at the same time as the registration. It was especially the young women who had returned from the LRA with children that suffered the most. As they returned from the

LRA, raped and pregnant, the society collectively turned their back. The general perception was that they had indulged themselves in sinful behaviour. In other words, they had screwed the LRA commanders, indulged themselves in satanic orgies, and now they bore and nourished devilish children. Of course, there were no satanic orgies in the LRA, but this was still the perception that many people had. The girls who returned from the LRA pregnant or with children, were believed to be unfit for marriage. They were social outcasts who had lost their value since their parents could no longer claim a dowry. These girls often found themselves rejected by the community and even their own families.

On some occasions, parents were willing to accept back their girl, but not the grandchild that she had brought back with her. In this case the girls had the difficult choice of either abandoning their child and let it die, or to try to survive without the support of their families. For sure, some girls just decided to throw away their baby to secure their own existence, but most couldn't bear the thought to kill their newborn child. Even though their children were the direct results of months and sometimes years of sexual abuse, it was still partly theirs; even though they had been trained to kill, they couldn't harm their own offspring. The direct result of this severe stigmatization was that these women were so extremely hungry and lived in such abject poverty that they weren't even able to breast-feed their own children as their breasts were completely empty. In this way quite a number of children died from malnutrition. With the funds we received from compassionate

people in the Netherlands and Belgium, we were able to distribute some food to help these poor child mothers, which in some occasions might have meant the difference for life and death of their new born.

Even though these were some of the visible successes we logged in the first year of our operation, our main success was invisible. Apart from the computer center, the microfinancing projects, and the food distribution, our main task was to give peer counselling. Many of the new escapees had a lot of difficulty to adapt to the civilian life and they caused a lot of problems. It was something of a downward spiral in which they found themselves, very similar to my own situation. The moment that the escapees returned, their behaviour was very violent. Their violence as partly a result of the discrimination they encountered from the local population. Whenever they acted violently, the bias of the local population was confirmed, which led to further discrimination from the local population and further violence of the escapees. The other staff members of the War Affected Children Association had been through the same ordeal.

Although it had taken me several years, in the end I could talk from experience on how to reverse this negative spiral. I counselled people that the key was self-control. Whenever somebody would be finger pointing at you, you have to ignore that. When people are talking badly about you, treat them kindly. When you want to destroy, go for a walk and turn your aggression at a tree or some other thing, but not at other people or their possessions or their animals. Our office was

a place where people could tell their story, and they had several pairs of ears that would listen and could understand. When people needed to cry their lungs out, our office was the place where they could do so. When people wanted to laugh, we welcomed them. Even though the direct effects of this endeavour were largely invisible, we met many former child soldiers who were really grateful to us.

Every day we had several child soldiers come to our office to tell us their stories. Some even came from places far away, like Opit or Awach. By the time they left our office, they were always happy that they could tell their story without being judged and without being pitied in a patronizing way. We listened, we understood and we gave them good advice. Often we took our own stories as examples. Of course, we could not change their lives in a single visit, but every time we gave them counselling, their own behaviour became less aggressive which resulted in more acceptance by the community.

Thus while hell was reigning all around us in those dreadful years from 2002 till 2005, we managed to do some good. Once we founded the War Affected Children's Association, I became so extremely busy that I gave up my work for Hervé. I started to work full time for WACA. As I had envisioned during my years in the Blessed Damian, I had indeed become an accountant of one of the aid organisations, even though my dream had never included the possibility that the organization would be my own. Despite of all the suffering and the hardships the work involved, I always felt proud when I walked to our office each morning. We had climbed up out of our miserable

situations following our escape and now we were able to give the escapees the help that we ourselves needed so much, just a few years earlier.

Although I was doing a lot of good, giving up my job at Hervé meant that I didn't have an income anymore and our funds with WACA were generally quite low, and we couldn't charge wages for all the hard work we did. All the work we did for WACA was voluntary. Despite the great years of deprivation, the busy work with WACA, caused time to fly by once more. My life took on a normal routine. In the morning I would return home with my siblings, hoping that my parents had managed to get enough food to allow us a breakfast. Often this wasn't the case, but there was always the hope. If my parents went to the field I would leave my siblings with our neighbours and I would walk to the center once more, where I worked throughout the day. The work consisted mostly of counseling in the early years, but I also had to do the accounting, reconciling our income with our expenses, and keeping the budgets. Whenever we received funding, usually from the Netherlands, and later also from supportive groups within Uganda, I would be really busy. Not only did I have to do all the financial accounting, I also helped with buying the food and organising transportation, something that was very difficult during the war years. After work, I always went back to my home, where we had some dinner with my parents. Later I would take a mattress and commute with my siblings to the city center where we would spend the night.

With all the people that entered our office,

new stories came to us on a daily basis and soon our office started to assemble one of the broadcasting stations of Radio Kabi. We heard so many rumors of terrible things that sometimes at night I would just cry over all the misery in our country. If we were indeed the chosen people as Kony always used to tell us, than why was God testing us so much? My busy schedule during the daytime meant that I had little time to think back about my own war experiences, but at night, when everything was quiet and the people around me were asleep, all the images came back to me, triggered by all the terrible stories that had deeply entered my mind from the new escapees. I always hated the night, not because I am afraid of the dark, but I was afraid of the silence and the idleness. Most of all, I was afraid of the images of war and the spirits of the dead that came to haunt me.

When I was awake I would often become sad by remembering all the things I had been through in my life. Yet, when I slept, things were getting worst. The worse the situation surrounding Gulu became, the worse my nightmares became. I still suffered from my sleeping disorder, which meant that during the daytime, I could just doze off, in a matter of seconds. Despite the heavy workload at WACA, my colleagues would often find me deeply asleep over the accounting books. At those times they made fun of me and when I finally woke up, I laughed with them. But deep inside I felt how my sleeping disorder really disturbed my biological clock.

Little less than a year after we founded WACA, in January 2005, something happened that would have a profound impact on the war. In January 2005, the longest war on the conti-

ment of Africa came to an end. Even before the insurgency in northern Uganda began, the people of Southern Sudan had risen up against their Muslim government who wanted to introduce sharia law to its mainly Christian population in the south. After having suffered years of harassment by the Khartoum government and the Arabic militias they sponsored, the people of the south stood up and initiated the largest rebellion that has ever unfolded in Africa. The war that followed was as devastating as the war in Uganda, with the main difference being that the rebel movements of southern Sudan finally became a great success. In early 2005, the government of Sudan realized that it could no longer sustain the fighting. Their battle had come to a stalemate years earlier and even though neither side had any big victories, the losses suffered on both sides were immense.

In January 2005 the warring parties signed a comprehensive peace agreement, which would give the SPLA some autonomy to govern the south of Sudan. This had a great effect on the LRA, and thus the war in Northern Uganda. Even though the Sudanese government had officially stopped arming the LRA in 2002, it was clear that the LRA remained well armed during 2003 and 2004. But after the comprehensive peace-agreement, it became almost impossible for Sudan to continue supplying the LRA without gravely violating the peace agreement. The peace deal also meant that southern Sudan was now governed by the SPLA and all the troops of North Sudan withdrew from the battlefield. This meant that the LRA could no longer maintain their bases in Sudan.

Yet, the LRA kept on fighting and slaughtering. Throughout northern Uganda, Kony's soldiers had hid large stockpiles of weapons and ammunition, which enabled them to keep up the war effort for a while longer. Throughout 2005 massacres continued to occur, even in the vicinity of Gulu town. Without the support of the Sudanese government and the loss of its safe havens, however the LRA was unable to uphold the intensity of dreadful years before. Slowly, Kony was losing ground. As the ammunition of the LRA was running down and resistance of the local defence units and UPDF, especially in the Teso and Lango sub-regions intensified, the LRA faced increased difficulties to sustain their war effort.

Museveni had made an effort to fully arm the Arrow and Amuka boys, and at a growing rate, the once unorganized militias started to win their battles. It was in September the 29th of 2005, that the last LRA commander died at the hands of the Arrow-boys at Iyalakwe. Initially, Radio Kabi and also the national media reported that it was Brigadier Dominic Ongwen who had been killed, one of the highest commanders who I knew very well, but later it appeared that this was a lie to boost morale. But no matter whom this commander was his death marked the end of LRA activity in Teso.

After that, the retreat from Lango sub-region also became imminent. The Arrow-boys had shown that the LRA could be defeated in battle and this inspired the Amuka boys in Lango. Soon afterwards the LRA also started to sustain losses in Lira and Apac district and they were forced to retreat from Lango as well. Even though there were still many pockets operating in Acholiland, they no longer had

the strength to penetrate Gulu, which was now heavily fortified by the UPDF.

As the war lost its intensity in the last few months of 2005, the atmosphere in Gulu was slowly improving. As the threats decreased, I stopped commuting to the city centre with my siblings. Somehow I felt safe enough to stay on the edge of town. The schools opened again and businesses slowly started to flourish once more. We began to realize that the years of real hardship might come to an end, and people slowly started to pick up their lives again.

It was also during this year that another dream of mine came true. Thanks to the book *Aboke Girls*, Els de Temmerman was able to find some sponsors to pay for my university degree. When Els came to me to tell me this news, I was as excited as a small puppy. Four years earlier, it would have been utterly inconceivable for me to receive a university degree and now this opportunity was in reach.

I started my studies in accounting at Makerere University, Gulu department. It was a part time study program and most of my classes were in the weekends, making my life even more demanding than it already was. On the weekends and in the evenings I studied, and during the weekdays I worked at the office. Escapees were returning every day, and with the improved security situation, we were also able to move to the camps more often.

While I was fully focused on my studies and my work for WACA, the LRA was in search

for a new home. Somewhere in September of 2005 we saw in the newspapers that Vincent Otti and Abdema, two of the most senior LRA commanders, had crossed into the Congo, where Otti sought political asylum for the LRA. In the weeks following the LRA's decision to go into the Congo, tensions between the governments of Uganda and Congo flared up, as the UPDF wanted to pursue the LRA deep into Congolese territory without the consent of its government. International pressure kept Uganda from following the LRA, and considering the dreadful backfire of Operation Iron Fist, we were all happy about this.

In 2006 the war completely lost its intensity. By then the rebels operated in groups of just several rebels, and even though we still heard stories of terrible killings taking place in the rural areas, the LRA at large no longer posed a serious threat. It was during this year that the remainder of the LRA crossed the Sudan-Congo border. With that move the war virtually came to an end. In August 2006 Vincent Otti declared a unilateral ceasefire and to show that the LRA was serious about this, they completely withdrew from northern Uganda.

Without the support from Sudan, Kony could no longer keep up the war effort. He had difficulty of resupplying and he could no longer use Sudan as a base for his operations. This seriously weakened the LRA. Kony saw no other option but to suspend operations and move to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. There the government was fighting numerous rebellion movements and couldn't be bothered with the LRA, as long as they stayed far away from the mineral mines. In the safety of Garamba National Park they started the peace

talks that were mediated by Riek Machar, the new vice-president of South Sudan.

It was during the years that followed that happiness truly returned to my life. The curfews of the UPDF were lifted and once more we were allowed to assemble in public places. As the situation normalised, we started to mourn our missing and our dead. I started to meet up with my friends and once more the Ugandan Waragi occasionally started to flow in my veins. When I was not studying, sleeping or working, I hung out with my friends and although all of us had lost relatives and endured the dreadful years of 2003 to 2004, we managed to smile once more. If this war had taught us Acholis but one thing, it was that life continues, no matter what has happened in the past.

As the years went by, WACA was slowly growing into a professional organization. Post-war rebuilding began, and our services continued to be required. In Acholiland, many people remained in the IDP camps as they expected the war to return any moment. This meant that people remained hungry. As before, it was the former child soldiers who suffered the most. In WACA we started to sensitize the communities about what was done to us and our members in the LRA, and we sensitized them about the effects of stigmatisation. Together with our members, we made it clear that it was the failure of the government and the community to protect us, which had caused us to become what we were. We never wanted to kill anyone, but we were forced to.

Everywhere in and around Gulu, our mem-

bers started to organize themselves into community-based organizations. They quickly learned that as former child soldiers, you stand much stronger together. In a group, you can help your weakest members to become strong once more and above all, you will always have a group of friends who will understand where you are coming from. The groups started to write songs, and to perform dances and theatrical plays that, besides being fun and entertaining, also served to sensitize the community about their member's past, and the way they were being treated by the civilian population. Slowly, these efforts started to bear fruit.

As the peace prevailed for months on end, people once more dared to go to the fields to start growing their own food. These fields were located a distance from the IDP camps. By early 2007, there were some people who started to believe in the peace talks and who returned to their villages. Soon others started to follow. Although Northern Uganda was completely ravaged by the war and remained one of the poorest regions on earth, people were slowly picking up their lives again.

But of course, many hardships remained. The life in the IDP camps remained hard and bleak. Drought, disease and floods continued to affect the population. Harvests failed and the seeds that people had somehow managed to collect got spoiled. As a result children and elders continued to die because of malnutrition. Many people remained idle and there was a lot of alcohol abuse in the camps. These factors caused men to mistreat their women; rates of domestic and gender based violence soared. Another problem with the IDP camps

was that all kinds of diseases were rampant. The disease that people feared most was Ebola, which had broken out earlier in 2005 near Gulu town. Even though this was the scariest disease of them all, other diseases killed too. Typhoid, cholera and malaria continued to claim many lives, especially within the IDP camps because of the terrible hygienic situations and malnutrition in these camps. Also the numbers of people infected with HIV/AIDS were higher in Northern Uganda than anywhere else in the country, with Kampala and Sesse Islands being a possible exception. Yet, nevertheless, life was slowly improving for most of us.

Throughout 2007, people continued to move back to their villages. Cows slowly started to re-emerge on the Acholi landscape and extreme hunger slowly became a relic of the past. Cultural traditions that were lost in the war started to re-emerge. Once more I saw people dancing the Larakaka and I saw elders telling stories around the campfire. The sounds of traditional songs that I hadn't heard in a very long time floated in the air.

At the end of the year, we collectively celebrated Christmas for the first time in a very long time. This was really wonderful. I spent Christmas night with my entire extended family and for the festivities we had slaughtered several ducks. The food was accompanied by several bottles of beer and Ugandan Waragi, which made the general atmosphere very cheery. This was so beautiful. The next day everyone in Gulu went to church. It was the first Christmas sermon that was full of hope. It had been peaceful now for one and a half years and slowly people started to be-

lieve that the peace would last.

In my personal life things also continued to improve. Beginning in the year 2008 my life started to transform. I managed to let my old life go and to embrace my new life. The numerous interviews that were carried out for the writing of this book played an important role in my recovery process. Never before had I told my story in such detail. Usually, the stories that I told during the day came back to me in my sleep in all their horrible details. However, several weeks after I recorded the last interview I noticed that the bad dreams slowly started to disappear, and also that my anger and trauma lessened. While I told my entire story, memories that I had suppressed but not forgotten came back to me and this must have helped me to come to terms with my the past. It is a strange thing, but thinking back about my past and sharing it with others, I kept on forgetting. By visualising my past I was able to give my suppressed memories a place. Of course I will never forget what happened, but I managed to rid the memories of bad feelings and of trauma.

That year I went back to many of the places where my story took place. I visited the place where I was abducted, the village where my colleagues almost shot me, St. Mary's High School in Aboke, and several of the massacre sites in Kitgum and other districts. In Kitgum I managed to find the cave where I hid during my escape and the LRA's long search. I had hoped to find all the things there that I had left behind so long ago, but someone had taken them. I even crossed the border of Uganda and Sudan once more to visit both Palataka and Pajok. Walking around these areas rekin-

dled memories that had been deeply suppressed. In Palataka I could still see the ravages of the battle now long ago. The rusting ruins of the tanks and the mamba's that had been blown up 13 years earlier were still there. A close look revealed many empty shells on the ground. As I saw these things flashes of memories came back to me. I once more saw the large hordes of our enemies coming towards me. I remembered the explosions in which the tanks and the mambas were blown up. A few days later I visited Pajok. Once more I crossed the river in which I had seen several of my former colleagues drown. I remembered the white mercenaries that we fought there. It all came back to me in vivid detail. At the time I found it very difficult to let my mind dwell on my past. However, it was exactly this remembrance that cured me. As I visited these places I was finally able to let the bad memories rest, to give them a special place as some might call it.

Also my friends helped me a lot. Out of all the former child soldiers working for WACA, I think I was the most traumatized. I was the only one who suffered from occasional depressions, rage attacks and chronic insomnia. Of the three of my best friends there, I was the only one who still couldn't handle large crowds of people. This was also one of the reasons why I never went out clubbing. Too many people always made me aggressive.

Victor and Richard helped me to move through this. They always gave me advice, they were always ready to listen, and whenever I felt depressed they were there to cheer

me up. The three of us could always talk about what transpired in the LRA and we even managed to laugh out loud about some of the silly things we had encountered. My story about the beehive is a constant source of amusement. Richard joined me when I went to visit the places of my story and together with him I managed to talk about what happened there. All of this helped me to get over my traumas. While the severity of my trauma's disappeared, other things in my life also improved. On the 23rd of May in 2008 I managed to finish my diploma in Strategic Procurement and Logistic Management at Makerere University, Gulu Branch. Ten years earlier I had been a highly traumatized kid with behavioural problems and an uncertain future. Now I held my university diploma as one of the very few in Northern Uganda, and I founded and managed an NGO. The contempt that I had for women disappeared and I found a wonderful girlfriend who deeply cared for me, and with whom I could also share my dreadful memories. My father gave me a considerable piece of land and I went back to the village where I built a hut and cultivated the land. I was really starting to build up my own independent life and it felt good.

At WACA things also started to go really well. Our years of hard labour and voluntary work started to pay off. An organization in the Netherlands managed to secure funds for a traditional agricultural project that we implemented. Together with Uganda Women Finance Trust and with funding from TROCARE we trained over 40 groups of former child soldiers and war victims in savings and loan concepts.

CARE International took an interest in our organization and they started a huge project with us called 'Hope': Harnessing Opportunity to Protect and End violence. This was a project that was mostly built around micro-financing and vocational skill training. Because of this project I became Sub-county Coordinator in Patiko Sub-county for which I received a meagre, but decent salary. It was my job to train the community in village savings and loan associations and to train groups in selection, planning and management. Because of this job I spent most of my days in Patiko sub-county where I adopted the community life once more. Up to that point, I had almost forgotten the virtue of rural community life, the freedom and the helpfulness of the people around. It felt wonderful to help other war victims and to be embedded in a rural community once more. Every weekend I returned to my own land on my brand new bicycle, which bears the name Prado Two-By-Two, to see how my harvest was doing and to visit my girlfriend. In November 2008 I collected my first harvest of cassava, which I managed to sell at a good price.

The year 2009 was even better. My job at WACA continued which meant that most of the time I was posted in Patiko and that I had a steady income. With the money from this job combined with my first harvest I bought one she-calf, several turkeys, 12 chickens and some ducks. I also bought two pigs, but this was mainly for my own joy, as pigs always make me happy because of their constant smile on their faces. I bought some more land and even though there was a bad drought, I managed to plant and cultivate

some good crops. With my income, the profit from my harvest and the help of my family, I even managed to get a dowry together and in October 2009 I married my girl friend.

This was another defining moment. Marriage meant manhood and now that I had a family of my own, it was my responsibility to feed and protect them. Even though my wife didn't really need my protection in her function as a police woman, it was a nice responsibility to carry anyway. No longer was I a boy and with this symbolic notion, I managed to let the boy soldier inside me disappear.

Two months after we married, on the first of December 2009, Emily gave birth to the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. We called our baby boy Lovis Arthur. Lovis Arthur had all my features and I fell in love with my baby from the moment I first laid eyes on him. As a proud father I showed off my child to all my family members and my friends and I organized a big party to celebrate Lovis' birth.

During this party I made a promise to Lovis. I promised him that at all times he would get all the love and opportunity that I could possibly provide him and I promised him that he would never have to go through what I had been through. I am planning to keep this promise.

December 2009 was the happiest month in my life. Three weeks after the birth of Lovis we celebrated a fourth peaceful Christmas in Acholiland. Besides celebrating the birth of Jesus, we celebrated that the Acholi people had rebuilt the country in an amazing pace since the end of the war. We celebrated that

the prospects for the future of Northern Uganda looked very bright. Where there used to be nothing but bush, gardens were flourishing and severe, chronic malnutrition was a thing of the past. Even victims and perpetrators started to reconcile their differences. On New Years' Eve, I went to celebrate in the clubs in town for the first time in my life. It was also the first time that I saw fireworks. All the clubs in town joined in the celebration with some really nice fireworks to announce the New Year. I realized then that gunpowder could also be used for good things. I spent that whole night in Havana Club where I kept on dancing and drinking until very early in the morning. My fear of crowds had completely disappeared and this was one of the happiest nights in my life.

When I woke up the next day I couldn't help but recall that it was exactly the same day, fifteen years earlier that my true hell had begun and that my life was changed irreversibly. I wondered what would have happened in my life if I had decided to tag along with my mother that day. For sure, if I would have done so, I wouldn't have been abducted that day. But what was there to say that it wouldn't have happened at a later date or that I would have been killed in those years as a powerless civilian. The only thing I know is that it did happen. I was abducted, I was a soldier and I have witnessed and done terrible things. I know that I will have to live with this for the rest of my life. No matter what, the memories will never disappear and also the nightmares will continue to haunt me for the rest of my life, even though they occur less often now than they did several years ago.

What has been done cannot be changed and even if it could, I wouldn't know whether I want it to change. The story is a part of my life. It formed me into who I am today. I hold no regrets for the things I have done, I only regret that at certain times my choices were so limited. But fortunately, this is no longer the case. I am a loving father now, a husband to a wonderful wife, and a satisfied employee of WACA. Every day of my life I can choose to improve the lives of others, first and foremost that of my son and wife, but also that of others who have suffered the same as I have. This is the thing that makes me happy now.

The most important reason why I have told this story is to make sure that my children will read it when they are old enough so that they can learn about the consequences of war and the value of peace. However, I will keep the promise that I gave Arthur Lovis and I will extend this promise to any future children. They will never learn it from first hand experiences as I did. I hope that this book will help people to understand the effects of war and make a contribution to a peaceful society. Let us all pray that the story you have just read will one day be a story of the past, no longer applicable to the modern world.

In memory of all those who have died and suffered in the twenty years or insurgency in northern Uganda and southern Sudan.

Love,

Norman

About National Memory and Peace Documentation Centre (NMPDC)

The National Memory and Peace Documentation Centre (NMPDC), a collaborative initiative of the Refugee Law Project, School of Law Makerere University and the Kitgum District Local Government.

The NMPDC is located in Kitgum district town council in Northern Uganda an area ravaged by over two decades of armed conflict and is struggling to recover in the post-conflict era.

As a country emerging from conflict, Uganda remains highly divided, with a weak sense of national identity, low societal solidarity amongst constituencies, a lack of information and transparency about historical events and little or no accountability for past wrong doing and acknowledgement for suffering. Uganda has a fragile democracy where unaddressed divisions and grievances can easily ignite new conflict. These deficiencies pose significant obstructions to national reconciliation, transitional justice and rule of law in the country; this is what the NMPDC aims to primarily address.

About Refugee Law Project (RLP)

The Refugee Law Project (RLP) seeks to ensure fundamental human rights for all, including; asylum seekers, refugees, and internally displaced persons within Uganda. RLP envision a country that treats all people within its borders with the same standards of respect and social justice.

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