

**WAR AS NORMAL:  
THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON THE LIVES  
OF DISPLACED COMMUNITIES IN PADER  
DISTRICT, NORTHERN UGANDA**



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The Refugee Law Project (RLP) was established in November 1999 with the aim of protecting and promoting the rights of forced migrants in Uganda. The RLP operates as an autonomous project within the Faculty of Law of Makerere University, and focuses on three main areas: legal assistance, training, and research and advocacy. The Refugee Law Project works towards ensuring that asylum seekers and refugees are, as specified under national and international law, treated with the fairness and consideration due fellow human beings.

*RLP*

*Plot 10, Perrymans Garden, Old Kampala  
P.O. Box 33903                      Kampala, Uganda  
Telephone                              +256 41 343 556  
E-mail                                      rlp@infocom.co.ug*

The Refugee Law Project Working Paper Series is a forum for sharing information on issues relating to forced migration in Uganda. All comments are welcome and the RLP reserves the right to revise any Working Paper.

## **REPORT SUMMARY**

**This is the final report in a four-part series on conditions for refugees living in Uganda's northern settlements. It focuses on the impact of violent conflict on those living within Pader District and incorporates the testimonies of both refugees and Internally Displaced Persons. The report shows the extent to which, for the many displaced people in the district, violence has become an intrinsic part of their everyday lives. Such is the reach of the conflicts of northern Uganda and southern Sudan that even those who have fled violence continue to be vulnerable to further attack. In addition, given the brutal nature of the violence they have suffered, many of the victims no longer give credence to ideological rationales that are used to justify the use of armed conflict. Nevertheless, they have a clear understanding of the dynamics and root causes of the conflicts, and offer constructive ideas for their resolution.**

**The report is based on field research conducted in Pader District by Winifred Agabo, Lucy Hovil, Kirk Huff and Alex Moorehead from 17<sup>th</sup> April—1<sup>st</sup> May 2002. The report was written by Dr. Lucy Hovil, Senior Research and Advocacy Officer, and Alex Moorehead, Research Intern, Refugee Law Project. The authors are grateful to the Ugandan National Council for Science and Technology and the Office of the Prime Minister, Directorate of Refugees, for permission to conduct the research. Comments from Zachary Lomo and Dr. Joe Oloka-Onyango have been invaluable in the writing of the report. In addition, the authors are indebted to those individuals who agreed to be interviewed on subjects that were often deeply painful and personal.**

## **GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ARLPI: Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative  
AVSI: Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale  
EDF: Equatoria Defence Force  
GoU: Government of Uganda  
ICG: International Crisis Group  
ICRC: International Community of the Red Cross  
IDP: Internally Displaced Person  
IGAD: Intergovernmental Authority on Development  
IRC: International Rescue Committee  
IRIN: Integrated Regional Information Networks  
LC: Local Council  
LDU: Local Defence Unit  
LRA: Lord's Resistance Army  
OPM: Office of the Prime Minister  
RDC: Resident District Commission  
RWC: Refugee Welfare Committee  
SPLA: Sudan People's Liberation Army  
UN: United Nations  
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
UPDA: Uganda People's Democratic Army  
UPDF: Uganda People's Defence Forces  
USAID: United States Agency for International Development  
WFP: World Food Programme

## 1 INTRODUCTION

This paper considers the conflicts in the border region of Uganda and Sudan from the perspective of those who have been displaced by them and are currently living in Pader district, both refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The conflict that has been going on in northern Uganda since the mid 1980s has had an overwhelming impact on the lives of those in the region: violence has become a lived reality for a defenceless civilian population upon whom armed factions have waged a relentless war. As a result, thousands have been displaced from their homes and are living in harsh conditions in so-called 'protected villages' and unofficial camps. At the same time, there is a further dynamic that is specific to Pader district, namely the presence of 23,821 Sudanese refugees living in Achol-Pii Refugee Settlement.<sup>1</sup> These refugees have fled a protracted civil war in their own country, and are now caught up in another conflict: by living within northern Uganda they are targets of attack. The focus of the study, therefore, is on the communities of displaced persons living in the district, with a particular emphasis on Achol-Pii and the surrounding area, and the impact that violence has had, and continues to have, on their lives.

The nature of the wars in Sudan and Uganda reflect a wider trend that has been analysed by theoreticians of modern warfare.<sup>2</sup> Such analyses provide a theoretical backdrop to this study, as they trace changes in the nature of conflict since the Second World War and call into question many previously accepted assumptions. Thus while Clausewitz<sup>3</sup> viewed war as a rational instrument of national policy—war was something made by armies as the continuation of politics 'by other means'—Van Creveld contends that the pattern of international armies pitting their strength against each other is a thing of the past, and that a new form of warfare has emerged. It is characteristic of these conflicts that they no longer appear to have clear beginnings and ends, and death is no longer the domain of soldiers: the distinction is abolished between combatants and non-combatants as civilians are shown to be just as legitimate targets as soldiers, and battlefields have become people's homes, communities and schools.<sup>4</sup> This is what is commonly, and perhaps crudely, referred to as 'low intensity conflict' in which the vast majority of all war-related deaths occur among civilian populations.

It is crucial to understand the impact of such conflict on the civilian population. Nordstrom speaks of the 'everydayness' of violence, asserting that research studies on conflict have most frequently focused on ideology, on identifying the reasons for violent struggle. By contrast, she has sought to explore "the phenomenon of socio-political violence as experienced by average citizens, to examine how violence is played out in the larger contexts of the lives and life-worlds of civilians who find themselves on the front lines of

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR refugee population statistics for Uganda, April 2002.

<sup>2</sup> For instance M. Van Creveld 1991, *The Transformation of War* New York: The Free Press; and G. Balandier "An Anthropology of Violence and War," *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 10, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Van Creveld 1991.

<sup>4</sup> Van Creveld 1991.

today's dirty wars, wars they did not start and do not control."<sup>5</sup> This suggests a form of violence that tampers with every level of people's lives, from the individual household outwards into the wider spaces of society. Violence comes into people's lives at the most private of levels, and death becomes a major reference point for the communities. Consequently, no area of people's lives, at an individual or communal level, is left untouched as violence reconstitutes and reforms the whole society. Violence determines where they can live, which school they can attend, which markets they can use, and whether or not they can travel.

A further characteristic of such conflicts is the systematic use of terror. Such tactics have been a frequent ploy used by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and other groups in northern Uganda—and now southern Sudan—such that the impact that rebels have had is not so much a reflection of their military might, but on their ability to instil and exploit fear within the population. Similarly in the Sudan war, civilians have consistently suffered the impact of indiscriminate acts of brutality perpetrated against them by all armed actors.

Understanding the way in which those who are living in Pader interpret and judge the violence that has become such an intrinsic part of their lives is vital in gaining an understanding of what is taking place. This forms the focus of the study, in which the conflicts in the region are seen from the perspective of those who have been displaced by such conflicts. The analysis draws upon the testimonies of 49 refugees and 30 IDPs who were interviewed over a two-week fieldwork period.<sup>6</sup> Additional interviews were conducted with government officials, United Nations (UN) staff and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) representatives.

The report begins, in section 2, with an overview of the main sources of conflict within the region from which those currently living in Pader have fled. Although each conflict is introduced in turn, section 3 illustrates the extent to which the conflicts are closely inter related, and shows that such neat distinctions between sources of conflict are not reflected on the battlefield. The following section, section 4, looks at the impact that the numerous conflicts have had on the everyday lives of those who have been inadvertently caught up in them, and are now living in AcholPii and the surrounding area: not only have they fled from conflict, but they continue to live in an area that is vulnerable to attack. Against the background of the analysis of the impact of violence on people's lives, section 5 considers how the displaced communities perceive and judge the conflict. Section 6 looks at perspectives on how the conflicts might be resolved, while Section 7 concludes the report.

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<sup>5</sup> C. Nordstrom, "The Backyard Front," in Nordstrom, C. and Martin, J. (eds.) *The Paths to Domination, Resistance and Terror* Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1992, pp. 260–261.

<sup>6</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> April—1<sup>st</sup> May 2002. The research team was based in accommodation in the settlement provided by the International Rescue Committee. The team is grateful for their hospitality.

## 2 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Conflict in South Sudan—A Relentless War

The current war in Sudan, which is a resumption of the earlier conflict that ravaged southern Sudan in the 1960s, is now in its nineteenth year<sup>7</sup>. It has created untold human suffering and forced many to flee their homes. Some have been displaced within Sudan, and others have fled to neighbouring states and beyond. It is a war that has been characterised by a rhetoric of racial, religious and regional division although it has been argued that, at its heart, it is a conflict over resources, not least of all oil exploitation.<sup>8</sup>

Attempts to resolve the conflict have consistently eluded the national and international community. The division of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) along ethnic lines in 1991 saw the advent of some of the worst fighting of the entire war, and the recent reunification of opposition movements in Sudan should result in a reduction of factional violence within the south. Although no agreement appears to be in sight between the two main combatants, the SPLA and the Government of Sudan (GoS), it has been suggested that a window of opportunity for peace in the country exists, with an increasingly united opposition and the development of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and extra-regional initiatives to promote peace.<sup>9</sup> However, recent regional developments that allowed the Government of Uganda (GoU) to send troops into southern Sudan in order to defeat Kony and his rebels, have created a further source of conflict within the country: recent reports suggest that at least 4,000 people have been displaced in Sudan as a result of the Ugandan army pursuing the LRA in South Sudan, a new corollary to the ongoing civil war.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.2 Background to the Conflict in Northern Uganda

Across the border to the south, Uganda's northern region has suffered a series of armed uprisings and ongoing conflicts from a number of different rebel groups since the mid 1980s, of which Joseph Kony's LRA has had the greatest impact. In contrast to some of the earlier uprisings that commanded a degree of popular support,<sup>11</sup> the conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan government that has continued from late 1987 to the present day<sup>12</sup> has been characterised by its extreme brutality and consequent alienation of the Acholi

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<sup>7</sup> For more background, see Willard Burr, *Working Document II: Quantifying Genocide in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains 1983—1998*. December 1998.

<sup>8</sup> International Crisis Group, *Capturing the Moment: Sudan's Peace Process in the Balance*. Khartoum/Nairobi/Brussels ICG Africa Report No. 42., 2002, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> BBC Report, 19<sup>th</sup> May 2002, "Sudan Targets Former Allies." URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid\\_1996000/1996421.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_1996000/1996421.stm). Accessed: 19<sup>th</sup> May 2002.

<sup>11</sup> This is particularly true in the case of Alice Lakwena. R. Gersony, *The Anguish of Northern Uganda: Results of a Field-Based Assessment of the Civil Conflicts in Northern Uganda*. Kampala: US Embassy / USAID, 1997, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Since March 1986 if you include the time when the UPDA and, slightly later, Alice Lakwena, the precursors to Kony, were fighting the government.

people. Those living in the Acholi region<sup>13</sup> have been most drastically affected: unknown numbers of civilians have been killed, and thousands of others have been forced into 'protected villages' by LRA attacks, often at the behest of the UPDF. Additionally, thousands of children have been abducted by the LRA and indoctrinated and trained either as LRA fighters or, in the case of girls, as fighters' wives and concubines.<sup>14</sup>

There is a plethora of literature on the conflict in Northern Uganda. Much of it is primarily descriptive and focuses on ideas for conflict resolution.<sup>15</sup> There is an absence of detailed analysis that places the conflict within the wider regional context and the specific dynamics that it creates. Other authors have recognised the significance of the regional context—for example, Gersony,<sup>16</sup> Westbrook<sup>17</sup> and Weeks.<sup>18</sup> More explicit on the "web of conflicts in the region"<sup>19</sup> are Dolan,<sup>20</sup> and, more recently and in greater detail, African Rights.<sup>21</sup>

Gersony identifies two phases to the Kony conflict, distinguished by the breakdown of peace negotiations between the government and Kony in February 1994, and the advent of Sudanese military assistance to the LRA at around the same time. It could be said that the war is currently entering a third phase of insurgency given the Sudanese withdrawal of support for the LRA subsequent to the labelling of the LRA as a 'terrorist' group by the USA following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks.<sup>22</sup> This in turn has led to the consequent thawing of Sudanese-Ugandan relations and the present Ugandan military initiative in South Sudan. These political changes reflect a subtle shift in allegiances and power relations within the region.

### 2.3 The Karamojong and Northern Uganda

Another source of conflict within northern Uganda, and one that has its own specific characteristics, is that of cattle raiding by the Karamojong. The Karamojong have historically participated in reciprocal cattle raids against their neighbours, including the Acholi. However, in the past these disputes were restricted, for the main part because all the groups conducting raids used weapons such as spears that do not inflict damage on such

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<sup>13</sup> The Acholi region is comprised of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader districts.

<sup>14</sup> W. Weeks, *Pushing the Envelope: Moving Beyond 'Protected Villages' in Northern Uganda*. New York: UNOCHA, 2002, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, D. Pain, *The Bending of the Spears – Producing Consensus for Peace & Development in Northern Uganda*. London: International Alert & Kacoke Madit, 1997. Focusing more on human rights abuses there is Amnesty International 1999: *Uganda – Breaking the Circle: Protecting Human Rights in the Northern War Zone*. URL: <http://www.web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/index/AFR590011999>. Similar, but more recent, is Human Rights Focus (HURIFO): *Between Two Fires*. Gulu, February 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Gersony 1997.

<sup>17</sup> D. Westbrook, "The Torment of Northern Uganda: A Legacy of Missed Opportunities." *The Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution*. Issue 3.2, June 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Weeks 2002.

<sup>19</sup> C. Dolan, *What do you Remember? – A Rough Guide to the War in Northern Uganda, 1986-2000*. COPE Working Paper 33, ACORD, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> African Rights, *Operation Iron Fist: What Price for Peace in Northern Uganda?* Kampala, May 2002.

<sup>22</sup> US Department of State website, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2001, "The Terrorist Exclusion List." URL: <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01120613.htm>. Accessed: 13<sup>th</sup> June 2002.



a large scale. This limitation changed with the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979 when his army abandoned their posts in the face of the advancing Tanzanian army. The Karamojong took advantage of the vacant barracks, particularly in Moroto, and seized a sizeable arsenal of small arms.

Although the consequent military superiority of the Karamojong over their neighbours was originally held largely in check by a police Tracking Force, this force was disbanded as part of the overhaul of the army initiated after the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) ascendance and the need to send troops to fight the insurgency in the North.<sup>23</sup> The absence of adequate security prompted an unprecedented level of attacks when huge numbers of Karamojong conducted raids across Kitgum into eastern Gulu in 1987.<sup>24</sup> The lack of defence from the army that characterised these attacks created disillusionment in the army's ability to defend vulnerable communities. This perception was compounded when the government later supplied the Karamojong with more guns, supposedly to protect them from cattle raiders originating in Kenya and Sudan.<sup>25</sup>

The raids have continued but with less intensity, perhaps because the cattle population in Acholiland has been so severely depleted.<sup>26</sup> However, the Karamojong have managed to maintain a supply of guns through sources in Kenya and Ethiopia and from the ongoing Sudan war, and continue to generate fear in the region. The current disarmament process seems to have yielded few dividends so far, with raids reported during the second week of the field research.<sup>27</sup>

## 2.4 Achol-Pii Refugee Settlement and its environs

Achol-Pii refugee camp is situated in Pader, a newly created district that used to be part of Kitgum District (see map). It has a long history of hosting refugees, starting with Sudanese refugees in the early 1960s fleeing the first stage of fighting in the Sudan war.<sup>28</sup> A group of Congolese came to Achol-Pii in the mid-1960s, and the Sudanese were resettled to Karamoja following ongoing disputes with nationals. The Congolese remained until the fall of Amin in 1979 when they were attacked and forced to return to Congo having been regarded as allies of Amin. During the attack, the Camp Commandant, 11 police officers and an unknown number of refugees were killed.<sup>29</sup> The camp then remained empty of refugees until 1993 when brutal fighting between divided SPLA factions forced many

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<sup>23</sup> The NRA was confronted with insurgency in the Acholi region almost from the beginning of its time in power, as some soldiers from former president Okello's army, the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), began launching raids from Sudan. They were soon joined by Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement (though at one time the UPDA and the Holy Spirit Movement were fighting each other).

<sup>24</sup> Gersony 1997, p. 27.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, IRIN. "Uganda; Disarmament Exercise Leads to clashes in Karamoja." 21<sup>st</sup> May 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Numbers of cattle dropped from about 285,000 to 5,000 between 1987 and 1997. Gersony 1997.

<sup>27</sup> See *The New Vision*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002, "K'jong man shot dead," p. 13; and 7<sup>th</sup> May 2002, "Karamojong warriors raid Labwor," p. 9; and report from Acholi Religious Leaders' Peace Initiative (ARLPI), 2<sup>d</sup> May 2002, "Report on an Emergency visit to the Acholi-Jie border line." <http://www.acholipeace.org/emergencyvisit020502.htm>. Accessed: 16<sup>th</sup> May 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Deputy Camp Commandant, Achol-Pii Refugee Settlement, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Deputy Camp Commandant, Achol-Pii Refugee Settlement, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

Sudanese Acholi and Lotuko to leave their homes. There are now approximately 23,821 refugees in Achol-Pii settlement.

Achol-Pii and the surrounding area has also been, and continues to be, host to a number of Ugandan displaced communities, or Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). A group displaced by the Karamojong arrived in 1979 and remain today at the far eastern part of the camp (known as Achol-Pii, as opposed to Agago at the western end). Living in the midst of the refugees are a number of people who have been displaced by the LRA, concentrated in Arum trading centre. Furthermore, just six and a half kilometres from the settlement, along the Lira-Kitgum road, is Corner Kilak, a trading centre where a significant number of IDPs stay in a congested cluster next to the road and near the barracks.<sup>30</sup> They were encouraged by the UPDF and district administration to leave their villages and move to this location following regular attacks by the LRA.

Perhaps the most significant event in the history of the camp and surrounding area was a two-day rebel attack on Block 14 of the settlement and the camp administrative centre, Agago, 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> July 1996. On the first day, two drivers and two police officers were abducted and an estimated 22 refugees were killed. The following morning, approximately 76 refugees were rounded up and systematically shot, hacked or clubbed to death. An additional 21 were seriously wounded.<sup>31</sup>

### 3 THE INTER-RELATIONSHIP OF CONFLICT IN ACHOL-PII AND ITS ENVIRONS

What this brief history indicates is that since its creation, there have been regular mass movements in and out of the settlement, caused by rapidly evolving political climates and temporary military successes. The involvement of those in and around the settlement with broader political and military developments, whether by choice or not, is evidence itself that Achol-Pii is situated in the middle of a maelstrom of interrelated conflicts. At the same time, the physical presence of those who have been displaced by the violence in the region mirrors the numerous complex and interrelating conflicts. As Chabaz and Daloz comment,

One of the striking features of Africa today is the extent to which violence crosses borders. It is not just the millions of refugees who flee strife in their own countries and in the process contribute to the destabilisation of the societies within which they settle... it is also the extent to which armed opposition to regimes operates, overtly or covertly, from neighbouring countries.<sup>32</sup>

This analysis can certainly be applied to the Uganda/Sudan border region, as will be illustrated below.

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<sup>30</sup> Corner Kilak was also the scene of intense fighting between the NRA and Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement in the late-1986 and early-1987.

<sup>31</sup> Gersony 1997, p. 40.

<sup>32</sup> P. Chabal & J-P. Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. Oxford: The International African Institute, 1999, p. 88.

### 3.1 Fleeing from one war to the next

In the first instance, this interrelationship is seen in the journeys of those who were forced to flee their homes as a result of conflict, but were unable to reach a point of safety due to the wider instability within the region. Refugees in Achol-Pii spoke of having fled from a whole host of different actors, moving from an area controlled by one warring faction to another under the control of an opposing force. Often they would be accused of collaboration by both sides and be persecuted as a result. When they finally crossed the border into Uganda they found themselves surrounded by further violence, usually relating to the LRA insurgency—an apparently Ugandan war but with wider ramifications.

For example, one man who was suspected of collaborating with the SPLA managed to escape from the Government of Sudan's forces to an SPLA area, only to be accused of being a spy and consequently tortured and beaten.<sup>33</sup> He managed to escape once again, only to find himself in territory held by the Equatoria Defence Force (EDF)<sup>34</sup> and again be accused of spying. There he was put in jail and tortured. A guard finally helped him escape, and he came to Uganda where he was re-united with the remnants of his family at Achol-Pii. However, three months after arriving

the rebels came... they caught us and put us under the mango trees... they shot us with guns. I was among those sprayed with gunshots. The gun didn't touch me, and [the] LRA went... but my mother and sister were killed. My brother was also killed in Block 2.<sup>35</sup>

Having fled three different armed actors in Sudan, he had come to Uganda and Achol-Pii refugee camp for safety, only to find that he was once again surrounded by violence. Those members of his family who had not been killed in Sudan were killed in Achol-Pii leaving him alone and still amidst war.

This story, although extreme, is not an isolated one. Another refugee described how his family was forced to leave Juba after the GoS tortured his father: "We ran away from the government to the SPLA side in Yambio... They started torturing my father, asking why he was living on the government side." Later, soldiers came to their house and tried to rape his sister: "The soldiers argued over my sister, and started shooting each other. They shot and killed my sister at our home." As he fled, he was separated from his family and eventually came through Kajokeji to Adjumani. Alone in Adjumani, he travelled to Achol-Pii where he found his parents in 1995. A year later, "these rebels here, the LRA rebels, or Kony,

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<sup>33</sup> Male refugee, Block 6, Achol-Pii, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>34</sup> The Equatoria Defence Force is a splinter group originally allied with the SPLA. They signed the Khartoum peace accord with the Sudan government in April 1997, which allowed them to occupy the eastern bank of the southernmost part of Sudan, the same region in which the LRA were allowed to establish camps by the GoS. See, for example, Reliefweb, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002, "Uganda's rebels cause havocas they flee bases in southern Sudan." URL:

<http://www.reliefweb.int/w/rwb.nsf/6686f45896f15dbc852567ae00530132/d1dd496c174575d2c1256ba70057bf2f?OpenDocument>. Accessed: 4<sup>th</sup> June 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Male refugee, Block 6, Achol-Pii, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

they came at night on July 14 1996... All the houses were burnt, all materials and [they] killed my father in the same incident.<sup>36</sup> Having fled the conflict in Sudan where his sister had been killed, he reached the apparent sanctuary of Uganda to see his father murdered by rebels who attacked from their base in his home country. The new arrivals to AcholPii had been placed in Block 14, the most isolated part of the settlement, and this was where the bulk of the killing in July 1996 took place.

The diversity of sources of displacement extends to the displaced nationals in Pader district. A man at Corner Kilak initially explained the cause of his displacement as being “LRA frequently coming,” but then described how “we were advised by the LC to leave—government sent information to LCs to bring people nearby to the barracks.”<sup>37</sup> Another IDP from the same village, Ongany, described both the rebels and the government’s behaviour in more forceful terms: “we left because of rebels. Rebels conquered that place, and we got report from government we should be transferred because they wanted to make like a bomb at that place.”<sup>38</sup> These accounts correspond with UNOCHA’s assertion that, in some cases, “the Acholi were given the option of displacing themselves or remaining in their homes and being mistaken for LRA.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, many from Ongany had also experienced attacks from the Karamojong and, although one cannot say that the Karamojong were directly responsible for their current displacement, their earlier attacks may have contributed to the atmosphere of insecurity that eventually caused so many to flee their homes.

### 3.2 Conflict in Northern Uganda—war without borders

What these testimonies show is the extent to which fleeing one’s home, moving to another part of the country or, in some cases, crossing an international border, does not ensure safety. People have little choice but to move within illdefined zones of conflicts that are not geographically restricted. With the consequent movement of combatants and displaced that is characteristic of the region, conflict crosses borders and moves with those who are trying to flee it. Sudanese who have fled to northern Uganda quickly find that their problems extend beyond the national borders. As one refugee commented of his experience whilst fleeing into Northern Uganda, “Kony rebels...beat us on the way. We also met SPLA in Northern Uganda who grabbed some boys to go and fight for SPLA.”<sup>40</sup> The impact of this was summed up succinctly by the Deputy Camp Commandant: “this is not an easy place to have refugees—there is the war in Sudan, the LRA, the Karamojong problem, and then they run away from their problems in Sudan and bring their problems to uhere.”<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the movement of people—both displaced and combatants—has its inevitable counterpart in the arms trade within the region. The flow of arms mainly into, but

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<sup>36</sup> Male refugee, Block 11, Achol-Pii, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>37</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Conference on Internally Displaced Persons: “Lessons Learned and Future Mechanisms,” Oslo 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2001: Uganda Case Study, cited in Global IDP Database, *Profile of Internal Displacement: Uganda*, Norwegian Refugee Council, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2001, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> Female refugee, Block 14, Achol-Pii, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Deputy Camp Commandant, AcholPii, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002.

sometimes out of, northern Uganda was referred to in many of the interviews. For instance, IDPs repeatedly made links between the Karamojong and the war in southern Sudan, as it seems they now sustain their supply of weapons through contacts involved in armed struggles in the Horn and East Africa.<sup>42</sup> As one IDP explained:

The war in Sudan makes it much easier for Karamojong to get guns and even there are nomadic tribes in Sudan getting guns from neighbouring countries, from Ethiopia. When they have excess [guns], they sell them to Uganda... there are black market dealers who get guns in Sudan, because the war in Sudan makes the guns in great numbers there, and they come and sell them here.<sup>43</sup>

Again, another mentioned “the war in South Sudan makes it easier for the Karamojong to get guns.”<sup>44</sup> Or, as another stated, “if there was peace in South Sudan it would make it easier to disarm the Karamojong.”<sup>45</sup> The Deputy Camp Commandant additionally implicated some of the refugees as being involved in the gunrunning: “we have even taken some guns from refugees. They are gun traffickers some of them. They sell them on to the Karamojong mostly.”<sup>46</sup> A similar incident was mentioned by an IDP who described how six Sudanese men were caught selling guns to the Karamojong in Kotido in 1998 and were subsequently deported. He also mentioned a specific market in Sudan where the Karamojong go to buy guns.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, the GoS, until recently, has been supplying the LRA with weapons, the scale of which is coming into the open as the UPDF allegedly discover caches of weapons in southern Sudan abandoned by the LRA.<sup>48</sup>

Thus the arms trade in northwestern Kenya, Somalia and southern Sudan sustain Karamojong disturbances. The money spent on arms by the Karamojong in turn helps the SPLA continue its operations there, which ultimately displaces some Sudanese into Uganda. The LRA, whose support from the GoS has apparently now disappeared, still maintain bases in Sudan as small units continue to carry out attacks within Uganda despite the UPDF’s military initiative in Sudan. The UPDF’s decision to move into Sudan to try and trap the LRA is further evidence of the inter-dependency of regional conflict. It appears the LRA are killing Sudanese in South Sudan and the SPLA want to involve themselves in protecting their people.<sup>49</sup>

The extent to which conflicts within the region are neither containable nor isolated means that arriving in the camp and surrounding area does not guarantee security for the displaced.

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<sup>42</sup> These observations have been substantiated by Wairagala Wakabi, a journalist who specialises in small arms movements in the region. He stated that “the Karamojong have maintained their arms by buying guns cheaply from the SPLA and other sources in Somalia and northwestern Kenya.” IRN, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2000, cited in Global IDP Database 2001, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Male IDP, Arum, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>45</sup> Male IDP, Camp Ward village near AcholPii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>46</sup> Deputy Camp Commandant, AcholPii, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002.

<sup>47</sup> Male IDP, ‘Camp Ward,’ AcholPii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *The New Vision*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2002, “Kony’s bad dream: Operation Iron Fist,” Feature section, p.2.

<sup>49</sup> See *The East African*, 27<sup>th</sup> May—2<sup>nd</sup> June 2002, “SPLA threatens to join Kony fighting,” Front page.

Indeed the presence of a concentrated population of displaced people can become a focus for attack or conflict as the camp becomes a centre of resources, people and information. With the countryside emptied, both as a result of violently induced displacement and the 'protected villages' strategy, the rebels have few areas they can attack to gain resources. As one woman at Corner Kilak put it

All those places where they used to get food, there are no people there now, so they will automatically come where the people are to get food... I think they will definitely come back again to get food and information, as all the villages where they normally go are gone.<sup>50</sup>

She expresses the vulnerability felt by those living in an area that is within the reach of the rebels. As will be seen in the following section, this feeling of exposure was prevalent throughout the displaced communities.

#### **4 EVERYDAY VIOLENCE: ONGOING INSECURITY WITHIN THE DISPLACED AREA**

The horror of the 1996 massacre appears to have been a particularly defining moment in the minds of the refugees and IDPs living in the area. It was the point at which they no longer felt safe living in the camp or 'protected village' to which they had fled. As an NGO worker put it, they were "attacked in a place where they were supposed to be safe."<sup>51</sup> Whether they had initially escaped the Sudan war, Karamojong attacks or the LRA, they had now become potential targets for the rebels. Although the 1996 massacre is the most serious attack that has taken place in terms of the numbers killed and the consequent displacement, sporadic but persistent attacks have taken place subsequently, reinforcing notions of insecurity within the communities: the majority of those interviewed were able to relate the dates of a series of attacks that had taken place since their arrival and the impact of each attack. One refugee showed the researchers an 'incidents book' in which he had kept a record of all the deaths that had happened within Agago, serving as a reminder to the community of those who had been killed by violent means.

##### **4.1 Living with fear: the expectation of further attacks**

The continued attacks within the area have created an environment of fear and insecurity within the displaced communities. The implications of living in an area of potential danger are constantly reinforced by attacks, abductions and death. In particular, the presence of a mass grave for the victims of the 1996 attack serves as a constant reminder to the community of what has taken place, reinforcing notions of insecurity and the possibility of future attack. Violence, or the expectation of violence, has become a dominant feature of their everyday lives. Although the last attack mentioned by the informants in which people were killed and abducted was in August 2000, there is nothing of significance that has changed in the wider political and social sphere of northern Uganda subsequently to suggest that such attacks will not happen again.

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<sup>50</sup> Female IDP, Corner Kilak, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Dr. Lucia Castelli, AVSI, Kitgum, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2002.

Thus the interviews revealed communities continuing to live in a state of fear, waiting for the next attack. For instance one refugee said, “It is really not safe because any time there can be destruction and killing. I saw my father killed here. The same might happen to me.”<sup>52</sup> Or, as another said, “Any time, any hour, they might come for us. The LRA can enter from Sudan and disturb us. That makes us not sleep day and night fearing they will come. . . I came here to be safe, but when I heard of movement of LRA it is not safe for me here. Anytime my remaining children might be abducted.”<sup>53</sup> Likewise as one IDP said, “We are so fearful of Kony’s people, they are like mad people. They can come any time. They take children, make people carry things, rape, kill, even old people. We know any time death might come.”<sup>54</sup>

The extent to which the communities were living with the expectation of further attacks was further illustrated by stories of the creative ways in which the communities maintain hiding places for their children in the event of an attack.

## 4.2 Other sources of insecurity

In addition to the LRA, some informants identified a number of other sources of physical insecurity from which they believed they were at risk. These included: tension between land-owning nationals and refugees/IDPs; occasional ‘criminal’ looting by *boo kech*—a local term that identifies the perpetrators of such attacks as being ‘criminals’ rather than rebels;<sup>55</sup> and the presence of members of the SPLA within the camp. Although they are all different in terms of their origin and impact, the combined effect of such additional sources of physical insecurity contributed to the general environment of vulnerability and fear within the camp.

### 4.2.1 Tension between displaced and non-displaced

Many of those interviewed felt somewhat threatened by the non-displaced nationals around them. This was particularly the case amongst refugees: the majority of IDPs did not see them as a physical threat, but did refer to the existence of tensions within their relationship. Seen in the wider context of living in an area vulnerable to LRA attacks, the consequences of such tensions were portrayed as being a lesser threat, and complaints were not universal amongst the refugee population. However, a problem clearly exists, particularly in the form of women being raped when they leave the camp to collect firewood.<sup>56</sup> One refugee woman described such an incident,

Now we move to collect firewood in a group of ten women. This is because the nationals used to beat us and rape us. I was raped twice. Even this child of mine is of a

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<sup>52</sup> Young male refugee, Block 11, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>53</sup> Male refugee, Block 1, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Female IDP, Corner Kilak, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>55</sup> Literally translated it means ‘bitter vegetable’ in Acholi.

<sup>56</sup> This does not seem to be an isolated problem as is shown from reports of the experience of refugees in camp situations in Kenya. See CASA Consulting (Montreal, Canada): *Evaluation of the Dadaab firewood project, Kenya*. UNHCR, Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, June 2001.

national. My husband is very bitter but there is nothing I can do because it was not my fault.<sup>57</sup>

In addition, it was generally understood within the refugee population that it was a minority of people who were perpetrating violence against them—they did not necessarily see the whole surrounding population as a threat to their physical security. Furthermore, such tension was often understood within the context of being foreigners living on nationals' land.

#### 4.2.2 *Criminal attacks*

Sporadic attacks attributed to *boo kech* were referred to by many of the informants, refugees and IDPs alike. Although they are seen as being distinctive from the rebels in that, although they steal and loot, they do not additionally abduct, kill and rape, they appear to play on the fear created by the rebels and mirror their method of attack in order to wield power over those they are robbing. As one refugee said, “The *boo kech* are there. They come at night, some with pangas, one or two with guns, others collect trees to resemble guns.”<sup>58</sup> Or, as another said, “They make wood to look like guns so that we are scared, and then they just come in and take our things. They do not come often. They do not kill us in the same way as the rebels.”<sup>59</sup> Although such attacks are not a dominant feature of their lives, they contribute to the impression of insecurity within the displaced communities.

#### 4.2.3 *The presence of the SPLA*

The existence of SPLA (ex-)combatants within the camp is inevitable, given the nature of the war from which the refugees have fled and the camp's proximity to Sudan. In addition, many of those fighting in Sudan have family members in the camps, and appear to visit them on a regular basis. For most refugees this is not perceived to be a problem. However, a minority of refugees interviewed identified the presence of SPLA within the camp as a serious source of physical threat to their lives. This alleged risk was predominantly amongst men who had fled from the SPLA for some reason, and believed that they were in danger of being taken back to Sudan, either to return to the war, or to be punished as traitors.<sup>60</sup> Such refugees stressed that they believed their lives to be in serious danger. One man talked of how he had come across his former torturer in Kitgum hospital:

I reached the hospital and found a man there who had tortured me under [name withheld]. I think the SPLA come there. I start[ed] to fear and think about what has happened to me.<sup>61</sup>

He went on to relate an incident in which an SPLA ‘delegation’ came into the camp in an unmarked vehicle and took three men away who were suspected of being members of the EDF. Corroborating stories of this event were told in several other testimonies. Another

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<sup>57</sup> Female refugee, Block 5, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>58</sup> Male refugee, Block 1, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>59</sup> Female IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Similar complaints were made in Adjumani. See L. Hovil, *Refugees and the Security Situation in Adjumani District*. Refugee Law Project Working Paper No. 2, June 2001.

<sup>61</sup> Male refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.



young man, who was living in Block 1—a location where those who are believed to be more at risk are housed—told of his predicament:

I came here because I was hunted [by the SPLA] and accused of being a spy... I am not feeling safe. Those SPLA people are still hunting for me now. Up to now they are still asking for me... When that happens, I have to hide. I have seen SPLA in the camp. They used to take people away from the camp, especially last year... It is not safe for me to be here, even going back to Sudan. I cannot because I would be sentenced to death by the Arabs and the SPLA all both.<sup>62</sup>

Another man spoke of the fear that he currently feels:

Since I escaped narrowly from SPLA side, that history will not escape from me. What they want is to send security from the SPLA in order to find where I am staying. If they manage, they will finish my life in this settlement or take me back to Sudan to finish my life. I have just to hide myself, not to show myself.<sup>63</sup>

What these testimonies suggest is that the context in which people fled from Sudan dramatically affects their safety within the camp. In other words, those who fled the SPIA, in particular those who have been accused of being spies for the Sudan government, do not feel protected within the camp despite having crossed over an international border. For these individuals, the threat of being 'taken' by the SPLA transcended all other threats to their physical security. It was a personalised threat, however, for the majority of refugees, and certainly for the IDPs, the SPLA was not seen as the primary danger to their lives.

The extent to which Sudanese refugees are unable to escape the conflict in Sudan was further highlighted when the research team witnessed a visit by representatives of the Government of Sudan to the camp.<sup>64</sup> A subsequent discussion with the DCC on the visit revealed that the GoS had sent the delegation to investigate allegations that the settlement was being used as an SPLA training camp, claims which they saw to be unfounded.<sup>65</sup>

#### **4.2.4 UPDF protection?**

Given the insecure nature of the area, the question arises as to how the most vulnerable view the mechanisms that are in place for their protection. There was a general consensus amongst the displaced that the presence of the UPDF acted as a deterrent for rebel attacks. This was clearly evident as refugees and IDPs expressed their concern about the recent drastic decrease in UPDF presence since the beginning of the offensive in southern Sudan. However, there was also ambivalence in people's attitudes towards the UPDF: although their presence was seen to be a deterrent to rebels attacking, their ability to protect during an attack was seriously called into question. One of the probable reasons for this, perhaps, is that the 1996 incident was the first major rebel attack on the camp and, therefore, happened at a time when the UPDF presence was minimal. Not surprisingly, therefore, there was consensus within the refugee communities that the scale of attack was a direct result of

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<sup>62</sup> Male refugee, Block 1, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>63</sup> Young male refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>64</sup> The visit took place on Monday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with DCC, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002.

inadequate defence. As the DCC said, “1996 was really a turning point for us. The scale of death was really incredible. So now I am in touch with the military all the time.”<sup>66</sup>

The inability of the UPDF to respond during the attack and save lives has not been forgotten by the refugees. As one man said with reference to the massacre, “they wait until they count the number of refugees who have died before they act.”<sup>67</sup> Another man echoed this sentiment: “that time UPDF became like a woman. You are someone with a gun, why do they fear someone with a gun?”<sup>68</sup> This inability or reluctance to respond to attacks in such a way as to prevent the rebels from acting with impunity is an ongoing grievance for many of the displaced.

More worryingly, however, are accounts of soldiers violating their position and being the direct cause of harm to refugees and IDPs. As one refugee claimed, “The soldiers have killed a refugee. It was last year and in 1999, one was also shot... They shot him because they were staying around the market, they called him, they started torturing him, he ran, then they fired the gun, dead.”<sup>69</sup> Similarly an IDP said:

The UPDF are guarding us. They just protect us, but little. But sometimes they turn upside down, raping women and killing children. On Christmas Day, 2000, they killed two men. 2001, they also killed one person... Last year they entered here, collected people, went into barracks and were beating people... We reported it, but there was no result. People don't know if it will happen again... so I don't know if soldiers offer protection against rebels.<sup>70</sup>

Another recognised such incidents in the light of the context in which soldiers have to operate:

Soldiers, if they are still deployed outside the barracks, they can disturb. Once you have a gun in your hand, you disturb, especially when you are not paid properly, sometimes four months not paid, circumstances force them to do what they do.<sup>71</sup>

Although it was hard to verify the accuracy of some of these accounts, what they do reveal is the extent to which the civilian population has an ambiguous attitude towards the UPDF. On the one hand they are grateful for their presence, knowing that they act as a deterrent to rebels. On the other, the UPDF is seen as a potential source of physical violence within the communities that has, at times, abused its power. This is clearly a widespread problem in the region as has been documented in other sources.<sup>72</sup>

An additional source of protection is supposed to come from Local Defence Units (LDUs) that were set up to supplement the UPDF. However, some IDPs suggested that LDUs are

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with DCC, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002.

<sup>67</sup> Male refugee, Block 11, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>68</sup> Male refugee, Block 11, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>69</sup> Male refugee, Block 1, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>70</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>71</sup> Male IDP, Arum, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, HURIFO 2002, pp. 43—55.

increasingly being used as a source of recruitment for Uganda's foreign wars. This has undermined faith in the defence mechanisms in place, and shows, furthermore, how a war in one area can be a drain to resources in another. In the case of the IDPs in Corner Kilak it not only diminishes the communities of some of their most productive members, but also reduces the protection they often seem to so badly lack in the so-called 'protected villages' where they now reside.

Many of the IDPs living around Corner Kilak and AcholPii complained of the problems caused by the removal of the LDUs to other areas, particularly as they saw the recruitment, training and arming of their own people to protect them as the safest and most effective way of ensuring their safety. As one man said "they [the government] recruit children as Home Guards to protect your subcounty. After a few months or one year they are taken to Corner Kilak and Zaire."<sup>73</sup> Similarly, a man at Corner Kilak expressed disillusionment at the subterfuge used by the authorities in the recruitment process—"They [government / army representatives] come, tell us since we don't have enough soldiers [to protect us], advise your youth to come and train, they give them guns, and they can become homeguards. But they disappear soon after."<sup>74</sup> The re-establishment in 2000 of an effective homeguard defence unit, commonly called the *Acholi Okecho*,<sup>75</sup> only led to the same thing occurring and now the group displaced by the Karamojong at 'Camp Ward' fear "if Karamojong come, even if they are three they can overpower the ones in the barracks,"<sup>76</sup> as the barracks are now so empty and the community itself is short of young males.

### 4.3 Trapped in an unsafe environment

Thus, given the nature of the settlement and 'protected villages' structure and the lack of adequate defence mechanisms, refugees and IDPs present a visible target for attack. It exemplifies, again, the extent to which the presence of large numbers of people in a relatively condensed area provides a tangible and obvious resource base for feeding the war economy within the region. Despite this vulnerability the displaced communities have little option but to stay in their current location. They are trapped in an environment of insecurity for as long as their homes continue to be battlefields in the ongoing wars in the region.<sup>77</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Sudan refugees: trapped by the war in Sudan

Sudanese refugees stated that they would not be able to return home until the war in Sudan had been resolved, and yet showed their dissatisfaction with their current situation. As one man said,

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<sup>73</sup> Male IDP, 'Camp Ward,' AcholPii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>74</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>75</sup> Literally translated as 'the Acholis are annoyed.'

<sup>76</sup> Male IDP, 'Camp Ward,' AcholPii, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2002.

<sup>77</sup> This has been expanded upon in various reports including Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, *Let My People Go – The forgotten plight of the people in the displaced camps in Acholi*. Justice & Peace Commission of Gulu Archdiocese, July 2001. This states that there are "many cases [of] women being raped, people being beaten by both rebels and government soldiers or even being caught in the middle of gunfire." (p. 15).

I want to go to a place where there is no looting, killing people. We are here as a prisoner, we don't have a choice. It comes to the problem of war, the war in our country, between SPLA and Sudan government. If the big elephants are fighting the grass will suffer.<sup>78</sup>

Similarly comments such as, "I have decided to remain because if I go back, I will die. Even if I stay here it is the same, but it's better I die here..."<sup>79</sup> and, "all the world is corrupted. I don't know when Sudan will get peace; I don't know when Uganda will get peace. It has all been corrupted", suggest a hopelessness prevalent amongst the refugee population. One woman summed up this frame of mind succinctly:

I don't want to return to southern Sudan because of the SPLA and Kony rebels. In our tradition it is said, 'when you run away from death, you don't go back again to death.' Our chances of going home will not be there if Kony defeats UPDF and the war in Sudan continues. We shall suffer again here Kony's abductions, especially our few remaining children we are trying to bring up now.<sup>80</sup>

#### **4.3.2 IDPs: battlefields at home**

Likewise for IDPs, the lack of resolution in the northern Uganda conflict continues to prevent them from returning to their homes. In the first instance this is due to the ongoing threat of rebel attacks. One IDP talked of how, if the situation at home was good, he would return home, subsequently defining 'good' as being "if the rebels are not there disturbing us."<sup>81</sup> Another felt safer remaining where he was: "It is safer here than [at home]. Here at daytime rebels cannot come, but in my home they can come any time. Only at night rebels are here, and so I change my position, hide in the bush."<sup>82</sup> Others knew of friends who had gone home but were subsequently killed by the rebels, acting as a fundamental deterrent to their own return.

A second factor that prevented IDPs from returning was the fear of landmines in their home areas. As one IDP stated, "people fear landmines in their homes because they do not know if that thing is underground."<sup>83</sup> Another talked of how his nephew had been killed by a landmine two years previously.<sup>84</sup> Fear of landmines also prevented people from returning temporarily to dig their land, and there were several stories of women returning to their land in order to harvest food and being killed by landmines that had been placed in the vicinity of their homes. The potential hazard of landmines in people's compounds shows the conflict being brought into the heart of people's lives, rendering their homes completely inaccessible.

Inextricably linked to the fear of both rebel attacks and landmines, the interviews further suggest that IDPs are prevented from returning due to an absence of formal permission from

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<sup>78</sup> Male refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>79</sup> Female refugee, Block 11, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>80</sup> Female refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>81</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2002.

<sup>82</sup> Male IDP, Arum, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>83</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>84</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

the government. As one IDP said, “We cannot go home until we have the order from the government and mines are gone from that area.”<sup>85</sup> Or, as another claimed,

The government still wants the IDPs to stay. Once Kony learns that we are in the villages and have food, he will just come and loot and kill and disturb us. The government is ruling that we should stay here. Those areas are still bad. Not until the war is over can we go back.<sup>86</sup>

Those displaced by the Karamojong also felt unable to return home due to the ongoing potential for Karamojong attacks. As one young man said, “There is nothing the government has done to weaken their power... I heard government is trying to weaken their power, but it is not yet safe although government are there. The Karamojong still has many guns . . . they can come back any time.”<sup>87</sup>

Other IDPs did not want to go home because of the psychological impact past atrocities had had on them. As one woman who had been displaced by the Karamojong said,

I don't think I'll go back to Lira Katoo while it is like this because all my people were killed. I have seen with my own eyes what the Karamojong did and I fear to return. If necessary, let the Karamojong kill me here. Since I came here I have never visited home because I fear too much. We hear from people who visit that our village is now a forest and there is nobody left there.<sup>88</sup>

Another woman who fled from LRA attacks in her home talked of how she felt traumatized by seeing her children abducted from their home, and did not want to return: “I feel so much traumatized. I still feel shaken with fear to move.”<sup>89</sup>

Thus the findings suggest that, despite the apparent ongoing insecurity within the displaced communities, refugees and IDPs are unlikely to leave and return to their homes before there is unequivocal change within the wider arena of conflict. They face the dilemma of living in an insecure environment, yet knowing that their homes are also dangerous. As a result, they have to make calculated judgments about the relative safety of different locations and are living with the knowledge that whether they stay or return home, they will not be safe from the threat of armed conflict. This dilemma was brought into sharp focus in accounts of the aftermath of the 1996 massacre, a moment of such intense violence that many refugees were shocked into trying to leave the camp. Although most were stopped by the DCC and the UPDF before getting further than Corner Kilak and subsequently returned to the camp, they adamantly refused to continue living in Block 14 where the attack had taken place, and were relocated within the camp. The horror of the massacre continues to resonate in the collective memory of the communities and, through the physical presence of a mass grave, acts as a constant reminder of the potential for future attacks.

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<sup>85</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>86</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2002.

<sup>87</sup> Male IDP, ‘Camp Ward,’ Achol-Pii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>88</sup> Female IDP, ‘Camp Ward,’ Achol-pii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>89</sup> Female IDP, Corner Kilak, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

## 5 PERSPECTIVES ON CONFLICT: PERCEPTIONS AND JUDGMENTS

As the previous section illustrates, violence has entered people's lives at the most personal, everyday level. Unarmed civilians have been the main targets within the conflicts and none have remained untouched by the presence of war. As one refugee observed, "Those people are not really fighting the government, they are mostly fighting the civilians."<sup>90</sup> Violence may have become routine within the everyday lives of the displaced, but its regularity makes it no less horrific. Indeed, it is the *impact* of the conflict that has become the primary means by which refugees and IDPs alike judge the wars from which they have fled and in which they continue to be caught up. Although they showed an understanding of the dynamics underlying the conflicts, they credit them with little, if any, ideological legitimacy: the means by which combatants justify the use of physical violence for a specific cause is not given credence by the communities most affected by such methods.

### 5.1 The brutal nature of warfare

In particular, the nature of the violence unleashed against civilians by all the different actors has been deliberately brutal, ensuring that lives have been profoundly torn apart. The narratives of brutality related by refugees and IDPs as their stories pass from one location to the next, are relentless. This is the story told by one young man:

The [GoS] security forces came to my home and captured my parents. They took them away. They tied me up. They tortured and killed my father, they beheaded him in front of me. They took me with my mother to an underground prison. They raped my mother repeatedly... She was in a terrible condition, she was bleeding. I was eager to finish my life with her. Then I was badly tortured. They took us to collect firewood and I escaped to SPLA side... They received me in a good way, but then they asked me questions and accused me of being part of Sudan government. They tortured me because of my father... they raped me.<sup>91</sup>

A refugee woman told her story like this:

I left my home because of shooting by SPLA. . . Some people were locked in their huts and houses set ablaze. They died. Food and properties were looted. I ran with some of my children into the bush... I passed through a forest. Two of my children died because of the rain and cold. I left them under a tree. I covered them with leaves. There was no tool for digging a grave... and then when I came here, I found it is the same thing that is happening, and I fear for my remaining children.<sup>92</sup>

Another woman talked of how the GoS forces had raped both herself and her two daughters aged 10 and 12: "those who tried to bury the dead were shot there and then, so everyone left... It seemed safe here [in the camp] but then Kony rebels came and killed my 10 year old son."<sup>93</sup> An IDP woman related an attack by the Karamojong: "they set houses on fire,

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<sup>90</sup> Male refugee, Block 15, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>91</sup> Young male refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>92</sup> Female refugee, Block 1, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

girls were raped and taken away and killed on the way. Those who resisted were killed. Women were raped and stomachs were cut open and they were left to die. I was raped by seven Karamojong men. My husband rushed me to the hospital and I received treatment.” This same woman was attacked again while fleeing to Acholpii, and witnessed many more people being killed.<sup>94</sup>

The desperation created by the attacks is exemplified in a horrific account of how women have to keep their babies silent when they are hiding in the bush:

Some mothers covered their baby’s mouths and nose to keep them silent... the smaller children would start crying because they were hungry. But if they were heard, the whole village would be in danger, so they had to be kept quiet. I know of five babies who have died in this way. Then they have to just throw them in the bushes if they are dead.<sup>95</sup>

A painful characteristic of the conflicts that evokes particular horror is the scale and regularity of the abduction of children.<sup>96</sup> There were countless stories from IDPs and refugees alike of their children being taken either to fight or to be used as ‘wives’. One man told of how he had lost his three children to the rebels, and had heard that all had since been killed.<sup>97</sup> Indeed it was rare to find someone who had not experienced a family member being taken by the rebels, or SPLA or GoS.

## 5.2 Violence devoid of ideological content

Acknowledging the brutality of such forms of violence is vital in understanding the extent to which many refugees and IDPs have ceased to attach ideological credibility to the conflicts around them. As one refugee said, “we are the innocents they are killing. We don’t have guns, power. Why don’t they go to the government? They come to kill us. This is not war, this is only looting. This is not war, it is their job.”<sup>98</sup> This statement interprets ‘war’ as criminal activity, therefore denying any justification for the actions of the perpetrators who are labelled as career criminals. Such interpretations of the northern Ugandan conflict are not surprising given the well-documented evidence that shows how little support Kony has enjoyed amongst the civilian population in the region. What is more surprising, perhaps, is the extent to which so many refugees who have fled Sudan view the Sudanese conflict in a similar way. As the majority of refugees are from the south, they might be expected to have retained sympathy for the cause of the southern Sudan rebel movements. However, many of the interviews suggest the extent to which this is not the case: little distinction is made between the different actors within the Sudan war, as many have fallen victim to the GoS and southern rebel movements alike.

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<sup>93</sup> Female refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>94</sup> Female IDP, ‘Camp Ward,’ Acholpii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>95</sup> Elderly female IDP, ‘Camp Ward,’ Acholpii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>96</sup> See for example Human Rights Watch, *The Scars of Death – Children Abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda*. New York, September 1997; Williamson, J. & Sevino, C. *The Displaced Children and Orphans Fund’s Report on Northern Uganda Children Affected by Violence*, USAID, September 1998.

<sup>97</sup> Male IDP, Arum Trading Centre, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>98</sup> Male refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

Some refugees did show sympathy with the SPLA's cause, such as the comparison made between northern Uganda and Sudan below:

Every war is independent. The Government of Uganda has its own rebels. . . it is the same in Sudan, the rebels are against the Sudan government. But I do not understand why the Ugandan rebels are doing what they do. I can understand the SPLA fighting because they are against the Arabs who are just a killing machine.<sup>99</sup>

However, such comments were in a minority. By contrast, observations such as, "there is no difference between the conflicts because what these conflicts involve is dying and suffering. SPLA, Garang, Omar Bashir, UPDF and Kony are responsible for the disturbance"<sup>100</sup>; "they are all bad because of killing and looting people's properties. Others, especially soldiers, rape women and force our daughters as wives."<sup>101</sup>; and "there is no difference between the conflicts because they all involve human lives, many deaths"<sup>102</sup> show the extent to which the perpetrators are judged similarly by the impact they have on people's lives. Not only are the different combatants within the Sudan war grouped together, they are further categorised alongside the Kony rebels.

This lack of ideological recognition in the actions of those playing a role in the conflict, extends to the Government of Uganda. Comments such as, "Museveni has seen that Kony is only taking the children of Achol, so he does nothing"<sup>103</sup>, and, "people think that their suffering is a result of government [policy]. They see suffering as intentional, it has been lasting so long."<sup>104</sup> exemplify the extent to which those who have been inadvertently caught up in the conflict have lost their belief in the ability of the government to offer them any real protection.

In other instances, distinctions were made between the Uganda and Sudan conflicts, but the difference was seen to lie not in their ideological underpinnings, but in the nature of their impact. For instance one woman talked of the Sudanese and Ugandan conflicts in this way: "the northern Uganda war is somehow simple, but the one of Garang and Omar Bashir is tough, because these Kony rebels don't attack people daily, but in Sudan the attacks and torture, killings, rape, abductions, are on a daily basis."<sup>105</sup> A parallel discrepancy is reflected in the words of a man who had been displaced by the Karamojong: "The only similarity between Karamojong and Kony is that they all kill. The difference is that with Kony they abduct, but with Karamojong it is not."<sup>106</sup>

For the victims of the conflicts, therefore, the senseless brutality they have experienced negates the relevance of a wider ideological context. The experience of those most impacted by war on the ground differs from external understandings of the conflicts in

<sup>99</sup> Male refugee, Block 5, 29<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>100</sup> Female refugee, Block 1, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>101</sup> Female refugee, Block 1, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>102</sup> Female refugee, Block 11, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>103</sup> Male IDP, 'Camp Ward,' Achol-Pii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>104</sup> Acting RDC, Pader District, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2002, Pader Town.

<sup>105</sup> Female refugee, Block 14, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>106</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.



which there are clear categories of combatants. Thus it is the impact created by the death of a child or the rape of a mother that is of primary significance, not the identity of the perpetrator or the ideological reasons behind the act.

### 5.3 The displaced: Forging a new identity

Rather than identifying themselves with one of the parties of combatants, the displaced showed mutual sympathy for those who had had similar experiences, regardless of nationality. In a context in which previously accepted forms of belonging are no longer possible, refugees and IDPs alike showed an empathy towards each other that recognised similarities in their experiences of violence and displacement.

For instance, many of the IDPs spoke of their shared experience of displacement with the refugees: “We left our houses because of the war, they left because of war. We share our homes with them, though we don’t get anything.”<sup>107</sup> Another IDP echoed this comment: “I feel bad about the refugees because they left their home. I stay with them as brothers and sisters. They are good people. They assist me with maize flour. We both beg for gardens from the nationals. We have a lot in common. Kony attacks us both.”<sup>108</sup> The mutual understanding generated has been translated into practical cooperation between them. Some spoke of how the refugees had helped them when they first arrived, and how they continue to exchange food for firewood. Another talked of how her husband had gone to help bury some of the refugees, ‘our friends’, after the attack in 1996.<sup>109</sup> As another said, “We mix very well with the Sudanese. They are good people. We have market days both here and there.”<sup>110</sup>

Refugees showed a similar sympathy: “They fear and I fear. We stay together. They came here because of fear. We are all displaced because of war.”<sup>111</sup>; “I sympathise with the Ugandans who have left their homes and are living nearby. They are suffering in their land and have nowhere to go.”<sup>112</sup>; “I don’t see the difference between us and them except we are Sudanese. But the suffering is the same. We both face abductions, killings, looting, rape by Kony and Garang. I have heard from others what Kony has done to them.”<sup>113</sup>

Thus it is the scale of destruction in people’s lives and its consequent impact that has become the lens through which the violence is viewed and judged. As a result, the majority reject the credibility of ideological motivation behind the conflicts and have created their own framework for understanding and coping with the violence: rather than identifying with one of the actors within the conflict, their shared experience of violence has produced a new community of displaced.

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<sup>107</sup> Male IDP, ‘Camp Ward,’ Achol-Pii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>108</sup> Female IDP, Corner Kilak, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>109</sup> Female IDP, ‘Camp Ward,’ Achol-Pii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>110</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2002.

<sup>111</sup> Male refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>112</sup> Female refugee, Block 1, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>113</sup> Female refugee, Block 6, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2002.

## 6 RESOLVING THE CONFLICTS: MILITARY SOLUTION OR DIALOGUE?

Despite the prevailing perception of the conflicts as being void of ideological credibility, both refugees and IDPs alike showed a clear awareness and understanding of the different dynamics that fuel the wars that so brutally impact upon them. This was particularly apparent when asked their opinion on the UPDF's recent presence in Sudan, an initiative that has revealed the GoU's determination to pursue a military means to end the conflict in Northern Uganda. The recent labelling of the LRA as a terrorist organisation by the United States government, has perhaps been the catalyst in destroying any remnant of political will to negotiate with Kony,<sup>114</sup> (although it might be said that previous diplomatic attempts were more 'sabotaged' than 'exhausted.')<sup>115</sup>

### 6.1 A Military Solution?

Refugees and IDPs alike showed profound pessimism about the future possibility of the resolution to the conflicts that have forced them to leave their homes, not because they think that peace is impossible, but because they view the current political and military initiatives with scepticism. In addition, there was a difference between the Sudanese and Ugandan displaced: the former were less explicit about how the war in Sudan would be resolved, perhaps due to the more prolonged nature of the war<sup>116</sup> and a greater sense of stalemate. They showed a war-weariness that often verged on hopelessness. In addition, the current UPDF military initiative in South Sudan was often seen as an additional source of conflict. As one refugee said, "I feel there will not be peace in Sudan, especially as Omar Bashir, Kony, SPLA, and now Ugandan government has joined the war. This is terrible, our country will never be at peace."<sup>117</sup>

Both IDPs and refugees expressed extreme cynicism when speculating about the outcome of current UPDF operations in Sudan. The prevailing belief, with few exceptions, was that "if Kony is not defeated, we shall continue suffering maybe in a worse manner because Kony will come and abduct more of our children to replace the dead ones in the war."<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> See, for instance, Westbrook 2000.

<sup>115</sup> The Betty Bigombe peace overtures in 1994 broke down after President Museveni suddenly issued a 7-day ultimatum to the rebels. The LRA were also excessive in their demand for a 6-month period to reflect on the situation. It has been alleged that they requested such a lengthy break in the negotiations in order to pursue parallel discussions with the Sudanese government. See Gersony 1997, pp. 33-5. More recently, at Pajule mission on April 26<sup>th</sup> 2001, a peace delegation led by Fr. Pazzaglia was ambushed by the UPDF having previously been assured no such intervention would be made. The UPDF have since claimed that it was a result of bad communication within the army. See African Rights 2002, p. 6; Weeks 2002, p. 25; ARLPI website, URL: <http://www.acholipeace.org/chronology191.htm>. Accessed: 28<sup>th</sup> May 2002.

<sup>116</sup> Particularly as for many the present war may be seen as a continuation of the 1962 to 1972 war. The peaceful period in-between is seen as a brief interlude.

<sup>117</sup> Female refugee, Block 11, Achol-Pii, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>118</sup> Female refugee, Block 1, Achol-Pii, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2002. This fear has become frighteningly real with reports that, despite UPDF operations in southern Sudan, some LRA units have found their way back into Uganda. See for example BBC, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2002, "Uganda rebels launch attack."

Furthermore, there was severe scepticism as to whether the UPDF would succeed. Stories of deaths in Sudan have filtered through to the displaced communities, and rumour as to the nature of the war is rife. These sentiments extended to a deep-rooted lack of faith in the government, particularly amongst Ugandan nationals. This is coupled with the realisation that they would be the ones most affected by a failure to resolve the conflict. In addition, the presence of many Acholi children in Kony's army undoubtedly was one of the factors that made IDPs angry at the government's tactics.<sup>119</sup> Engaging him through military confrontation has become the final twist in the intrusive nature of the conflict—people's own sons and daughters are assumed to have become indistinguishable from the enemy and be treated accordingly. As one woman put it

Why should [the] UPDF attack Kony when long ago they have failed to contain Kony before? If Kony defeats UPDF then Kony will not go to Kampala to revenge there, but will come to revenge on the civilians. I am saying this as most of [the] children Kony took are now being killed, as they are fighting with the UPDF.<sup>120</sup>

Thus the current initiative is expected to aggravate rather than resolve the situation: "Kony's attack in Sudan can make things worse because Kony rebels might attack people in Uganda to revenge. He will kill, abduct, rape, defile and burn our homes as he did in 1996,<sup>121</sup> "Kony will be forced to come back and take our kids who we try and bring up, and recruit them to keep fighting,"<sup>122</sup> he "will even come and revenge on us in the worst manner."<sup>123</sup> The continuing, low-level attacks by suspected LRA in Northern Uganda are seen as a warning that if Kony does manage to survive, he is likely to try and make a show of force in order to underline his continuing presence in northern Uganda.<sup>124</sup>

Although the government's recent initiative to disarm the Karamojong was viewed with similar scepticism, there was general approval amongst the Acholi IDPs of the government's efforts, perhaps because they do not bear so directly on the Acholi population. However it was a process that was seen to be fundamentally flawed: the prevailing view was that the Karamojong would only return a small percentage of their guns and hide the others, thus enabling them to continue their raids.

## 6.2 Alternative Solutions

While rejecting the current military initiative against Kony, both IDPs and refugees in and around Achol-Pii had many creative ideas about how to resolve the conflicts that have forced them to flee their homes. Implicit within some of the solutions put forward was the recognition that these conflicts—though perhaps now lacking ideological content—have root causes that cannot be resolved only by military means.

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URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid\\_2036000/2036707.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/africa/newsid_2036000/2036707.stm). Accessed: 10<sup>th</sup> June 2002; also *The New Vision*, 11<sup>th</sup> June 2002, "Otti burns disco hall in Kitgum," p. 1.

<sup>119</sup> See also African Rights, May 2002.

<sup>120</sup> Female IDP, Corner Kilak, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>121</sup> Female refugee, Block 14, Achol-Pii, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>122</sup> Female IDP, Corner Kilak, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>123</sup> Female IDP, 'Camp Ward,' Achol-Pii, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>124</sup> See, for example, *The Monitor*, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2002, "LRA kill one, loot in Gulu," p. 2; and 21<sup>st</sup> May, "UPDF shoot rebel suspects," p. 3.

Instead they are tired of war and have lost faith in the military. There was a rational sense of desperation evident in the wish for dialogue: “if only Kony could sit with government and they could end the war... if only there was a way of stopping the fighting,”<sup>125</sup> and the statement that “peace talks are better than war—there is too much war in Northern Uganda, we have lost too many of our children now.”<sup>126</sup> A military solution will only generate more violence: if “the Presidents [of Uganda and Sudan] don’t discuss the war... the war will be continuous, and our babies born now will grow old and this war will still be there. Let peace talk.”<sup>127</sup> As another IDP said, they should “leave using [the] gun and treat those who come back from the bush well... [they] should find out from those who have come back why they went into the bush, and all those things that forced them to go into the bush should be corrected.”<sup>128</sup> Recent reports on the conflict in northern Uganda and southern Sudan substantiate these views.<sup>129</sup>

Thus for those who have been displaced by the war, there is little support for military solutions, not least of all because such a resolution is seen to be ultimately flawed as it does not address the root causes of the violence. Furthermore, there was a belief that increased military action will only breed further conflict in the region. As one refugee put it “I don’t know about UPDF attacking Kony in Sudan but what I know is that there is no end to Sudan war because the war is increasing everyday, UPDF, Kony, SPLA, Bashir.”<sup>130</sup> Thus, military solutions currently undertaken are seen only to exacerbate the problems of the people and places most devastated by the ongoing bloodshed, and to create further displacement.

## 7 CONCLUSION

This study has sought to show the extent to which forces of violence have become a dominant feature in the lives of refugees, IDPs and non-displaced nationals living in Achol Pii and the surrounding area. Not only have they been forced to flee their homes as a result of war, but they continue to live in fear of future attacks. The impact of violence is compounded by the extent to which different sources of conflict interact with each other at a variety of levels: wars that are commonly referred to as civil wars are international in their impact, both in terms of the people they affect, and the locations they reach. Thus the neat distinctions and divisions that casual observers try to impose on the conflicts in northern Uganda, southern Sudan and the region, prove to be largely artificial in the eyes of those most affected by them. Instead, the conflicts that afflict northern Uganda represent a tangled web of political interests that ultimately impacts upon a long-suffering population who have neither the power nor the resources to escape an imposing and seemingly uncontained war zone.

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<sup>125</sup> Female IDP, Corner Kilak, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2002.

<sup>126</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>127</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Male IDP, Corner Kilak, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

<sup>129</sup> See for example African Rights 2002; ARLPI 2002: *Seventy times Seven*. Cited in *The New Vision*, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2002, “Acholi clergy rap UPDF operation,” p.3.

<sup>130</sup> Female refugee, Block 11, Achol-Pii, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2002.

In the light of these findings, three main considerations emerge.<sup>131</sup> First, the victims of the conflicts overwhelmingly prefer a negotiated settlement of the conflicts: non-military options provide a more promising end to the conflict as they reduce loss of lives to both civilians and the military.

Second, the unilateral military-driven approach to ending conflict taken by the government of Uganda has not provided resolution. It is suggested, therefore, that initiatives for achieving peace should be broad-based and participatory, and sensitive to the concerns and interests of the following groups: those who have been most impacted by the conflict, namely IDPs, refugees and non-displaced communities; non-military, civil society actors within Uganda as a whole; and regional and international actors of the conflict such as the Organisation of African Unity, the East African Community, IGAD and the United Nations.

Third, and from the perspective of policy and practice, the study points to the fact that confinement of refugees and IDPs makes them vulnerable and exposes them to further human rights abuses. Given the wider context of conflict within the region, there is a need to re-examine the methodological approaches for protecting refugees in settlements and IDPs in 'protected villages', and, furthermore, to question whether this is a structure that is appropriate and sustainable.

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<sup>131</sup> The issues raised in this paper and in the previous three working papers, will be translated into a policy paper by the Refugee Law Project in order to bring together the findings of the four-paper series, and to make concrete recommendations.

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