



# **Victims' Voices:**

## **JRP Community Dialogues 2008**



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## Introduction

Societies undergoing transition from conflict to peace are often faced with the dual challenge holding perpetrators accountable for atrocities committed during times of conflict while at the same time striving to attain reconciliation and forgiveness between victims and perpetrators. As the prospect of peace grows in northern Uganda after more than two decades of conflict, communities are faced with a host of peace building and reconciliation challenges. Chief among these is determining how to restore relationships between perpetrators and victims of violence so that they can live side-by-side in peace. On the one hand, there is a need to hold perpetrators accountable for the crimes that they committed while on the other hand there is an even greater if not critical need to promote reconciliation between perpetrators and their victims and ensure lasting peace. Critical questions requiring critical answers prevail: Should perpetrators be granted total amnesty or should they undergo some form of prosecution? Who is responsible for the atrocities that were committed during the conflict? What mechanisms are the most appropriate for handling the crimes in question and for promoting reconciliation at the grassroots level?

This report presents the diverging opinions that exist among the war affected people in northern Uganda concerning how post conflict issues of justice and reconciliation should be handled. These responses were gathered by JRP camp focal persons from four community dialogues<sup>1</sup> conducted in the Kitgum and Amuru districts in the year 2008. The dialogues present opinions of participants about how reconciliation and healing can be promoted among the war affected communities in northern Uganda. They indicate that while many people in northern Uganda are of the view perpetrators of war crimes need to be forgiven, a significant majority would also like to see some form of accountability meted out. The views of war affected persons about the role of local mechanisms in post conflict reconciliation and healing in northern Uganda also feature in the dialogues. While it has always been assumed that war affected communities whole heartedly support the use of local mechanisms such as Mato Oput, it is also interesting to note that a significant minority have reservations about the effectiveness and relevance of these mechanisms. Equally interesting and controversial is the opinion of respondents about who is responsible for the conflict in northern Uganda.

As will be noted from the responses of participants, there is little consensus to the questions which were posed in the dialogues. For this reason, the report simply presents a summary of what was discussed in the dialogues, followed by the direct of participants in all the four dialogues. The report deliberately declines from attempting to analyze these responses but leaves it to the readers to form their own analysis. In a nutshell, it is a presentation of the voices of victims 'as they said it' and we leave it to our readers to form their own conclusions.

## Methodology

Community dialogues are routinely conducted by JRP camp focal persons and research officers in Internally Displaced Persons' camps in Northern Uganda to solicit the views of war-affected

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<sup>1</sup> The Justice and Reconciliation Project conducts innovative action-oriented research with war affected youth and their communities in an effort to strengthen locally owned approaches to reintegration, justice and reconciliation, and to improve policy and programme responses at local and national levels. Community dialogue is one of the research methods employed by JRP. These dialogues derive their meaning from the traditional *wang oo* which have been adapted by JRP to present community members with an open forum in which they can put forth their own perspectives on the pressing transitional justice issues they face. The purpose of the dialogues is to enable communities to express their views on healing, reconciliation and accountability and to gauge opinion in the communities to which ex-combatants are returning.

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community members on selected issues of public concern. A community dialogue is a forum that draws participants from as many parts of the community as possible to exchange information face-to-face, share personal stories and experiences, express perspectives, clarify points of view, and develop solutions to community concerns and opportunities. Community dialogues allow participants to express their own opinions in their own ways. The dialogues are usually conducted in open spaces within IDP camps and attendance is open to whoever wishes to attend. Four community dialogues were conducted in the Padibe camp and one in the Amuru camp. The Padibe dialogues took place on February 25<sup>th</sup>, April 28<sup>th</sup>, May 29<sup>th</sup> and June 29<sup>th</sup>. The Amuru dialogue took place on January 31<sup>st</sup>. The dialogues are organized by JRP focal persons – Arach Dolly in Padibe and Odong Geoffrey in Amuru – with the help of local volunteers who assist in facilitating, recording and transcribing the dialogues. The dialogues solicited 97 responses in total which were recorded by the focal persons and forwarded to research officers for typing and analysis. Focal persons identified topics for discussion and steered the discussion by developing key themes. Every effort is made to ensure that the dialogues are conducted in a manner and environment conducive to the expression of the original opinions of the participants.

### **SUMMARY OF MAIN POINTS & THEMES**

The common themes that cut across all the five dialogues include the following;

- a) There was a definite focus on identifying those responsible for the war in northern Uganda and how these people should be treated. While nearly all of the respondents identified the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) as bearing responsibility for the conflict, with many mentioning Joseph Kony by name, some participants assigned blame to the government or UPDF and one argued that the countries that hosted the LRA during the conflict should share the responsibility.
- b) The responses indicate little consensus on how to best achieve healing and reconciliation. Some respondents stated that the people of northern Uganda should simply forgive those responsible or reconcile with them voluntarily if it will bring about peace. Other participants argued that the LRA leadership should be tried by the International Criminal Court, two of whom also call for the execution of Joseph Kony. Other respondents call for compensation from the LRA and the government.
- c) The most popular reconciliation and healing mechanism among the respondents was Mato Oput, which was favored by several respondents. However four respondents in dialogue (two men and two of the youths) directly expressed their opposition to Mato Oput. Other participants, including two men, one woman and one youth, favored revenge or a military solution, while two women and one man expressly opposed this option. A number of participants discussed the value of prayer and religious guidance in achieving healing and reconciliation.
- d) Compensation: The need for compensation was raised by a number of participants. Those respondents discussing compensation generally believed that compensation should come from the government.

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- e) Several participants objected to the timing of this discussion, arguing that issues of healing and reconciliation should not be discussed until a peace deal has been reached.



Elders and JRP Research Officers listen attentively at one of the dialogues

## DIALOGUE A: AMURU CAMP, 31<sup>st</sup> JANUARY 2009

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### TOPIC: Community View on Reconciliation and Healing

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#### Summary

The Amuru community dialogue drew responses from nineteen individuals, including 8 youths, 5 men, 2 women, 2 elders, and 2 Megos,<sup>2</sup> This dialogue drew a number of responses from the war affected community in Amuru regarding the achievement of healing and reconciliation in Acholi. The dialogue touched on a number of topics and different questions were posed by the facilitator throughout the dialogue. The following key themes were discussed in the responses of several participants;

1. Forgiveness: Several participants emphasized forgiveness as a key tool in bringing about healing and reconciliation.
  2. Traditional ceremonies and ways of life: A number of participants suggested that a return to traditional values and institutions such as Mato Oput will lead to forgiveness and reconciliation.
  3. Compensation: The need for compensation was raised by a number of participants. Those respondents discussing compensation generally believed that compensation should come from the government.
  4. Several participants objected to the timing of this discussion, arguing that issues of healing and reconciliation should not be discussed until a peace deal has been reached.
  5. Several participants noted that the conclusion of the Comprehensive peace agreement in Juba will also bring about healing and reconciliation.
  6. A number of participants discussed the value of prayer and religious guidance in achieving healing and reconciliation.
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**(Youth) 1:** Healing and reconciliation can only be achieved among the war affected communities of northern Uganda if the people develop the heart of forgiving one another and forgetting the past. If this happens then a good relationship can be rebuilt among the war affected communities.

**(Youth) 2:** The bible teaches us that in the past when human beings sinned before God they were cursed but later on God sent his beloved son Jesus Christ to save us from our sufferings and sins. This means that we should desist from anything that compels us not to forgive and in this way healing reconciliation and restoration of relationship among the people will come by itself.

**(Elder) 3:** It is unfortunate that the people of Northern Uganda have been living amidst an intensive war situation and so many things have happened during 21 years of war. Almost all people suffered in one way or another. This is a fact that can never be denied. This means that everybody is a victim and we may all be in a state of mental trauma. For healing and reconciliation to be achieved, the traditional and cultural leaders should be engage in resolving post conflict disputes among the community. We have many issues to sort out such as land issues, cleansing of the areas where mass massacres occurred like in Atiak and Acolpii.

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<sup>2</sup> Mego is a Luo word which means an elderly respectable woman

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**(Woman) 4:** The government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army should work reach a comprehensive peace agreement so that it paves ways for healing and reconciliation to be achieved in this region. When peace in place everything else will be achieved. There will also be need for compensation of the many lives and properties which were destroyed during the 21 years of conflict. The government of Uganda should be responsible for payment of compensation because it was the obligations of the government to protect the lives of its citizens and the government also participated in the destruction of lives and properties. Houses were burnt down and livestock worth millions of shillings was looted. If compensation is made then it will contribute to healing and reconciliation in the war affected communities of Northern Uganda.

**(Elder) 5:** I would like to thanks the organizer of this dialogue. I am 76 years old and very happy to join you in this kind of discussion because they are issues that touch my heart. This is the first time I am attending such a dialogue. I have been hearing about JRP but I didn't know exactly what the organisation does but today it has been made clear to me. It is a long time since the people of Northern Uganda enjoyed peace and harmony like other people in the other parts of the country. Both the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army committed many atrocities against the people living in northern Uganda. The government committed the atrocities under the disguise of protecting the people and defending the country. The LRA also committed atrocities against the people because they claimed that the civilians refused to collaborate with them in the war against the government of Uganda. For healing, reconciliation and restoration of harmony to take place both the government and the LRA should take responsibility for their wrong deeds, apologize and make a commitment to never again commit such atrocities against the *wanainchi*<sup>3</sup>. Victims need to be compensated for the families whose loved ones were killed, those who sustained injuries and physical disabilities, and those whose livestock and other properties were lost or destroyed.

**(Woman) 6:** The healing and reconciliation we are talking about now is not yet feasible because the LRA are still in the bush. It is difficult to begin discussing what to do now because the peace talks may fail to succeed and we would have wasted a lot of time discussing this topic. I suggest that we refrain from discussing anything which may interfere with the outcome of the peace talks. All of us will be very happy if the peace talks succeed and within two days and nights, camps in Northern Uganda shall be abandoned and people who will return to their home villages. My concern at the moment is about land disputes which are so rampant and I request that a similar discussion be organized so that the local communities get involved in finding a solution.

**(Youth) 7:** It is important that we remain focused on the topic for discussion. Healing can be achieved through forgiving of those who committed atrocities against us. I know some people may want to act according to the principle of "an eye for an eye" which is a very wrong philosophy that will lead to more death in the society. In short therefore, we should try as much as possible to avoid revenging against the perpetrators to avoid the recurrence of this war. Let us all preach the message of forgiveness in our communities in northern Uganda and beyond.

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<sup>3</sup> Derived from a Kiswahili word which means civilians

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**(Mego) 8:** There is need for proper guidance to be given to the young generation that was born in the IDP camps. The young generation needs to be taught that reconciliation through Mato Oput is very important in Acholi tradition. They need to understand the benefits that come with Mato Oput according to our traditional and cultural practices.

**(Man) 9:** We need healing and reconciliation because we have been living under terrible conditions as a result of the war which has lasted for over 22 years. There are many conflicts which are taking place in the communities. For example I heard of a conflict between two clans in Kitgum called Pubec and Pajong over a massacre which was conducted by the LRA on the Pajong after a boy from Pubec clan escaped with a gun. Compensation should be made to victims in order for healing and reconciliation to be achieved. The government should bear this responsibility.

**(Man) 10:** Mato Oput cannot be achieved in northern Uganda at the moment because the rebel leader Joseph Kony has not yet come back home. Until he does, I don't want to hear people discussing anything about Mato Oput or reconciliation.

**(Man) 11:** The Acholi and Langi have been more affected by the conflict between the government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army than any other tribe in Uganda. I feel we should try to forgive and forget what happened during the course of this war. It's only through forgiving and forgetting of the past that we will achieve healing and reconciliation in the war affected communities of northern Uganda.

**(Youth) 12:** I thank the organizers of this dialogue. Some youth who returned from captivity are continuously being stigmatized by other members of the community who never experienced life in abduction. This has created a lot of tension between some ex-combatants and some members of the community. In my capacity as a formerly abducted youth I want to assure all people who stigmatize us that it was not our wish to be abducted. Let us respect one another and avoid stigmatization in order to avoid conflicts in the community. Healing and Reconciliation will be strengthened when people leave the IDP camps and return to their home villages. This is because their former social life will be restored. The government should ensure that compensation is made for all lost property such as livestock that was confiscated by the armed forces

**(Man) 13:** Several things need to be done for healing and reconciliation to be achieved among the war affected communities of northern Uganda. Perpetrators who committed atrocities against the people should seek forgiveness and apologize to the victims. At the same time the victims should be able to forgive the perpetrators who have apologized to them wholeheartedly and revealed the truth about what they did.

**(Mego) 14:** Reconciliation is very important because it restores broken relationship among two conflicting parties in a community. Reconciliation can only be achieved if the two parties accept to talk peace and forgive one another. This can subsequently lead to good relationship and healing.

**(Youth) 15:** Why are we talking about reconciliation, healing, and restoration of relationships and yet the peace talks are still going on in Juba? Let's wait for the outcome of the peace talks

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then we can get engaged in a community dialogue of this kind. At the moment I think it is not yet the appropriate time to discuss this topic.

**(Youth) 16:** So many things have happened in this conflict that a lot will need to be done to ensure that the region recovers. However in Acholi tradition we have a saying that fire cannot be put out using fire. If I quarrel with you and you pick a spear to attack me and I also pick a spear to defend myself then this will only increase the conflict between us. Therefore we should try to forgive ex-combatants who have returned home despite the fact that they did many things that angered us. This is what I believe can bring healing, reconciliation and restoration of relationships in the war affected communities of northern Uganda.

**(Youth) 17:** One of the things that can bring healing and reconciliation is good understanding among between victims and perpetrators and peaceful resolution of disputes. In the past if a person took the life of another then such a case would be handled by the traditional or cultural leaders and even if the process was slow it was very effective in bringing healing and reconciliation. The family of the deceased Acholi traditional would report the case to Ker Kal Kwaro<sup>4</sup> who would mediate between the clan the perpetrator and that of the victim. Once the truth was established then the perpetrator's clan would pay compensation to the victim's clan and this would lead to reconciliation and restoration of relationships between the two conflicting parties. Finally the victim's family would forgive the family of the perpetrator.

**(Man) 18:** Our region has experienced war for a long period of time and as a result so many things have been destroyed. This means we need to work hard in order to regain those things. The government and local communities in northern Uganda need to cooperate and work together to ensure that there is unity among the people. At the moment there are many disagreements over land and many others conflicts which need to be resolved. If we fail to resolve them quickly then the situation will escalate and lead to further conflict. There is a saying in Acholi that "*cet gwok omyera kinguk ma pwud lye*"<sup>5</sup>. We need to revert to the good relationship we used to have before the conflict such as sharing wells, sitting at "*wang oo*" and communal farming. This will help to foster healings and good relationship among the people.

**(Youth) 19:** We need to develop the culture of forgiveness so that peace can prevail and lead to the attainment of healing in the community. We may need to go back to our traditional lifestyles prior to the conflict. Our parents used to live together and whenever there had problems in one village, they would jointly work together to resolve such problems. This is the life we need to adopt so that we create a peaceful society.

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### DIALOGUE B: PADIBE IDP CAMP 25<sup>th</sup> February 2008

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<sup>4</sup> Ker Kal Kwaro is the Acholi cultural institution.

<sup>5</sup>This saying is interpreted as 'The earlier, the better.' Meaning that when something has just occurred you need to address it immediately to avoid further repercussions.



### **TOPIC: How Can Healing and Reconciliation be Promoted Within the War Affected Communities in Northern Uganda?**

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#### **Summary**

This dialogue drew responses from 13 individuals: 10 men and 3 women. There was a definite focus on identifying those responsible for the war in northern Uganda and how these people should be treated. While nearly all of the respondents identified the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) as bearing responsibility for the conflict, with many mentioning Joseph Kony by name, three of the participants, all men, also assign blame to the government or UPDF and one argues that the countries that hosted the LRA during the conflict should be held accountable. The responses indicate little consensus on how to best achieve healing and reconciliation. Three respondents; one man and two of the three women, stated that the people of northern Uganda should simply forgive those responsible or reconcile with them voluntarily if it will bring about peace. Three participants, all men, argue that the LRA leadership should be tried by the International Criminal Court, two of whom also call for the execution of Joseph Kony. Three respondents; two men and one woman, call for compensation from the LRA, government or both while three, all men, call for apologies from the LRA or the government. In addition to these groups, one man claimed that healing and reconciliation would come about as a result of UN involvement in the peace process, one man, as mentioned above, argued that the countries that hosted the LRA during the war should be punished, while one respondent cited the return of formerly abducted persons as evidence that healing and reconciliation is already occurring. Some of the responses fell into more than one of these categories.

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**Man (1):** Uganda has experienced many civil wars but none of these wars can be compared to this one of Northern Uganda. If I had a child who was a thief, it would not be okay for me to kill that child because he stole some important things. Kony is like a prodigal child who keeps on doing bad things. He has stolen peace from Northern Uganda but now that he is willing to return it back to us, are we going to refuse the peace because he is a thief? If Kony is willing to give us peace through the on-going peace talks then I feel that we should all embrace it so that we can be in a position to heal from the wounds that are deep down in our hearts.

**Man (2):** I am an orphan because my parents were all killed by the LRA when they were digging in their garden. I feel hurt when I hear some people saying that Kony should come back home alive. What can bring healing and reconciliation to a person like me is to see Kony and his commanders prosecuted by the ICC for killing people like my innocent parents. He should be made to pay the death compensation for all those people he killed. Now some people will ask where Kony will get the money to pay compensation. My answer is this; given the fact that Kony can purchase expensive guns means he is rich enough. Many of the rebels have relatives to whom they used to send the money and property they had robbed from civilians. These relatives should also be made to contribute towards the payment of compensation.

**Man (3):** The day I will wake up in the morning to hear that Kony has been arrested, prosecuted by the ICC, found guilty of crimes against humanity and sentenced to death is the day I will believe that healing and reconciliation can begin taking place.

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**Man (4):** The world should direct its attention towards formulating laws that will punish countries that host rebels. For example if Sudan had not allow Kony to operate in her territory the conflict would not have taken this long? Who bears the greatest responsibility? Is it the rebels or the one who supplied the weapons to them? Reconciliation can also only be attained if the rebels come out openly to confess to the public about their acts of forcefully abducting, killing, and violation of human rights.

**Man (5):** I blame the Government of Uganda for the suffering of the people in the North. How possible was it for the rebels to move from Sudan up to Gulu killing civilians without any opposition from the U.P.DF? There was fighting in other parts of Uganda such as Kasese but it did not take the UPDF long to restore peace in those areas? This is an indication that there is tribal segregation in Uganda. Do you think if any war breaks out in Mbarara the UPDF will allow the situation to deteriorate to the level of northern Uganda? For healing and reconciliation to be achieved, the Government of Uganda should learn to be accountable for the atrocities committed in Acholi land. It should compensate those who lost their dear ones through building good roads, and more hospitals and schools so that the development gap left by the conflict can be filled.

**Man (6):** I feel that the involvement of the UN envoy Joachim Chissano in the peace process will bring the healing and reconciliation that is very much needed. For a long time, the UN has been very silent as though the people of Uganda were not human.

**Man (7):** I was abducted from Lukung with my brother and when he tried to escape, he was recaptured and beaten to death by the LRA. What would therefore bring healing and reconciliation to me is the acceptance of individual responsibilities by both the LRA and UPDF of the crimes they committed. This acceptance should be accompanied by public confession to the victims.

**Woman (8):** As a parent who lost two sons to the LRA, I can only heal and reconcile with the perpetrator who killed my son when the LRA compensates me for the death of my two sons.

**Woman (9):** For the sake of peace, I would forgive Kony and his fighters for all the bad things they have done. If people continue insulting him or saying bad things against him then he might end up not signing the peace agreement.

**Woman (10):** The guns have fallen silent and all I want to do at the moment is to leave the IDP camp, go back home and cultivate my own crops on my land without any threat of anymore war. Because of the peace I am seeing, I am more than ready to reconcile with the LRA.

**Man (11):** My only need is an apology from the UPDF for their failure to protect my three daughters from LRA abduction. If they apologize it would set my heart free and enable me to reconcile with them. Equally, Kony should come out openly and apologize to the people against whom he committed atrocities during this course of the conflict.

**Man (12):** Why should we waste time talking about healing and reconciliation with the LRA? Can someone answer my question? If you had a wound on your head and it gets healed, won't

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the scare remain there? People of Padibe, it is difficult to reconcile with the LRA rebels because those killed by Kony can never ever be brought back to life again. Some elderly people lost their children who would have been supporting them in their old age. Now the killers are nowhere to be seen and yet the elderly are helpless. Do you people enjoy their suffering? Kony should not be reconciled with; he should be left to die. The ICC should just get him and sentence him to death like they did to Saddam (Hussein).

**Man (13):** I feel that healing and reconciliation is already taking place because if we look around, the FAPs have already been reintegrated into their communities without being asked to pay compensation for the mayhem they caused against the people during their stay in the bush.

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### DIALOGUE C: PADIBE IDP CAMP, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2008

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**Topic:      How Can Healing and Reconciliation be Promoted  
              Within the War Affected Communities in Northern  
              Uganda?**

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### Summary

This dialogue drew responses from 21 individuals, 13 men and 8 women. As in Dialogue A, the responses focused primarily on how those responsible for the war, such as the leadership of the LRA should be dealt with. Nearly all of the respondents identify the LRA as primarily responsible for their suffering, while a few assign some blame to the government and UPDF. Half of the participants; seven men and four women, suggest that the best approach to healing and reconciliation is to forgive and accept the return of the LRA leadership so that there can be peace. Seven of these responses indicate a genuine belief that this is the best approach to achieving peace and reconciliation, while the remaining four seem resigned to it as the only option given their inability to affect the peace process or impose conditions on the return of the LRA. Six respondents, five men and one woman argue that reconciliation and healing are impossible while three; two men and one woman say that compensation is required. Three respondents; one man and two women argue that it is too early to talk about reconciliation, suggesting that a peace agreement must be reached first. Finally, only one man argues that Joseph Kony should be prosecuted and hanged. Again, some of the responses fell into more than one category

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**Man (1):** Let me start by reminding everyone present here that we all know exactly who we are, where we are from and what we did either in secret or in public. When you look back at what has been happening in northern Uganda in terms of atrocities such as ambushes and killings by the LRA, reconciliation and healing is not possible because one cannot easily forget a crime intentionally committed against him or her. Many people were killed innocently while others were forcefully abducted and many were forced to leave their homes and settle in the IDP camp. Many of the victims are like toothless dogs that cannot bite and they therefore have no option other than to accept reconcile and forget. To conclude, I am saying that reconciliation, forgetting and healing may not be possible especially in northern Uganda.

**Man (2):** In Uganda if you are not armed with guns you will not have any influence in government. For example the opposition members of parliament talk, talk and talk but their opinions are never taken into consideration when drafting laws. Personally, it is not possible for me to reconcile and forget what the LRA rebels did to my family but since I am powerless to take revenge against them, I would rather heed the calls to reconcile with Kony so that the conflict is resolved and people live in peace again. He has guns and even the UPDF has failed to kill or capture him. It is only the ICC that is posing a threat to him. However the ICC should accept the peoples' plea that the charges against Kony be dropped so that we don't see any more bloodshed in our land. We the victims have now accepted that Kony should be forgiven. The ICC prosecutors did not suffer in any way so why are they adamant about dropping the indictment against Kony? Let them [ICC] set him free so that we are sure of peace returning to our land again.

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**Woman (3):** We have been enslaved in our own land because of having been confined in the IDP camps since 1997. As slaves, do we really have any opinion that can be taken seriously? Obviously no! Now as slaves we are being asked our opinions regarding healing and forgiveness. Do you think we are in a position to influence the decisions which will eventually be made? I will just agree with the views of the majority because I cannot say no to reconciliation. But much as it is possible to reconcile with Kony, it is not possible to forget what he has done to us like killing our people, abducting our children and burning our huts. The wound is still in our hearts.

**Woman (4):** Let us build the culture of learning how to forgive one another instead of focusing on revenging for the negative acts that were committed against us. It is very possible for reconciliation and healing to be built in our hearts especially in northern Uganda where the perpetrators against whom we are bitter are our very own sons. Even in our own homes we make mistakes, we quarrel, fight and at times even some people kill their own brothers and sisters. But what normally follows is a meeting by elders to solve those problems. Since our son is now ready to stop fighting us, let us reconcile with all the rebels and even UPDF who killed some people in Padibe here.

**Man (5):** Let no one be deceived by those who are saying that reconciliation and healing especially with Kony and his rebel fighters is possible. It is rubbish talk like that and I am not ready to reconcile with Kony and his soldiers because of two reasons. Firstly, can any of you who are saying that Kony should be forgiven tell me who among the people living in the camp had a quarrel with Kony which led him (Kony) to fight us as his enemies? None of the people that Kony and his fighters are killing insulted Kony at any one moment. Can Kony really be forgiven and be reconciled with in a real sense? The answer is no. Let him face the ICC and be hanged. Secondly why should Kony not face the UPDF other than targeting mainly the innocent civilians? Is he really a person who deserves a piece of land to settle on among the aggrieved people that he made to suffer a lot? I need some answers.

**Woman (6):** Let me give you the answers to your questions. First of all even if you have focused only on Kony (as the only perpetrator), the prisons and police cells in Padibe are full to capacity which is an indicator that people are bound to make mistakes which are punishable by the law. This punishment is given not to destroy a person's life but in order to make a person reform from bad to good. So my answer to you is that Kony has now realized his mistake and he wants the peace talks to succeed which means that he has now reformed. The only thing left to do is to welcome him back home and reconcile with him. He is going to serve as a good example that should be emulated by other people.

**Woman (7):** My children, forgiveness and only forgiveness alone will make anger evaporate from one's mind and heart. After having a misunderstanding, it is useless to continue being angry against a person or a group of people? Immediately after forgiving a person, you will feel better. Reconciliation and healing is very possible from the victims towards Kony and his rebel fighters. If we continue being angry with Kony and what his rebels have done, then we will continue having the wounds in our hearts forever. My appeal to Kony is that he comes back home because we have already forgiven him. You did not kill the people who want to arrest you but you killed us who are willing to forgive you. Stop killing us please.

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**Woman (8):** It is not possible for true reconciliation and healing to take place. Those who are calling for reconciliation and healing are those who were not affected at all by the conflict. They talk out of fear that if Kony is not reconciled with, he will come back to kill them too. In my opinion even if Kony is killed, I will never get healed of the wounds that he left in my heart. My brother was abducted and he died in the bush. He (Kony) is responsible for the loss of his life. Even if other people say compensation would bring healing, that is a total lie. Compensation will never be equal to the productivity of a person if he is alive. The bad things that Kony did against the Acholi people will never be forgotten. He killed many people and nobody can tell me that even after a hundred years, he/she will be able to forget that. I will not forget but I can reconcile with the rebels despite what they have done. Thus healing is impossible.

**Man (9):** I am a parish priest and I believe most of us who are here are Christians. You were all baptized in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died for the sin of mankind and so whoever repents shall be forgiven. Reconciliation and healing is very possible since we are Christians and we all know why Jesus Christ died for us. Let me tell you my brothers and sisters. Forgiving someone fully without any reservation will relieve one from the pain that one has. If you slap my cheek, and I give you an opportunity to slap even the other cheek without any intention on my side to revenge, I am not going to have any pain that will make me bitter. I want to end by requesting all of you here that let us have the heart of forgiveness for the suffering that Kony has created for us. Let us reconcile with them (rebels) and forget what they did to us so that we get healing in our hearts. Amen.

**Man (10):** For reconciliation and healing to be possible keeping in mind the atrocities which have been committed in the northern conflict, the following should be done. If at all Kony and his fighters are accepted back into the community a by-law should be put in place by the local council of every area aimed at stamping out stigmatization. When the community is well aware of the dangers of stigmatization they will not engage in the vice. Secondly, for reconciliation and healing to be realistic, government through the many existing NGOs should create a means that would better the lives of the victims. For example instead of the amnesty commission giving packages only to the ex-combatants, even victims should receive the same packages because all of them have suffered in similar ways. Free education up to university level should be given to the victims and the children who were unfortunately born in captivity. Houses should be built for the orphans whose parents were killed by the LRA. If the above is put in place, I think reconciliation and healing, and even forgetting will be very possible.

**Man (11):** Reconciliation and healing to me is not possible with Kony and his fighters because even now as people are talking about peace, Kony is forcefully abducting people in Congo. Who are we going to reconcile with then? Reconciliation and healing cannot be considered now because the time is not ripe. People are still in doubt whether there will be peace or not because Kony is buying time using the cessation of hostilities agreement in order to get more organized and come back to kill us. If reconciliation and healing is to be possible, the suffering committed against innocent civilians must stop first and people should get assurances of cessation of human rights violations by Kony himself who should sign the peace agreement in Juba and not in the bush. Mr. Museveni should say sorry to the victims of the northern conflict. Only then will I

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believe that there is peace. When we have peace then no one will have intentions of revenging against the rebels.

**Man (12):** In my opinion, there is nothing which is impossible in the world. Reconciliation is very possible and if you are angry, dialogue is the best way to calm down. But on a personal note, reconciling with somebody who voluntarily decided to shed human blood is impossible. If the rebels need reconciliation then let them pay compensation. Only then will I consider reconciling with them.

**Man (13):** What Kony is doing at the moment is sad to hear. How can you kill your own people with whom you have been together for so long? There is going to be no peace through peace talks. Kony is playing with people minds.

**Man (14):** I don't think Kony is a human being. He is a ghost who feeds on human blood. If you reconcile with a ghost, you also become a ghost. That is my opinion.

**Woman (15):** You will talk, talk and talk, but nothing will happen. We waited for the day the peace agreement would be signed but that did not come to pass. If you are still alive, eat and drink and enjoy life in the camp. I am not going back home because Kony is only deceiving people. He is even abducting people in Congo. So enjoy life before he comes back to kill you.

**Man (16):** Very many bad things happened during the conflict in the north. However as an Acholi who is familiar with our culture, I believe that fire cannot put out fire. Let us forgive those who killed our people and they will one day be punished by God. It is possible to forgive them.

**Man (17):** Why should people waste their time here? Do you think if you talk Kony and Museveni will listen to you? The two thrive on war and they will never accept anything that will make them stop fighting. I am praying that the war shifts to another area outside northern Uganda so that Museveni sees the need to stop fighting.

**Man (18):** Don't you think if the war shifted to another area it will lead to even similar loss of lives?

**Man (17):** It is enough for us here. Let it change at least to another location.

**Woman (19):** It is pre mature to talk about healing and reconciliation because I think the person who is responsible for the northern conflict is Kony who took our children and erased any thoughts of peace from their minds. So it is not realistic to talk about reconciliation now. Let us wait for the right time which would be the time when Kony has come back home and then we shall see if we can reconcile with him. Acholi culture says that you cannot make clothes for a child who is still in its mother's womb.

**Woman (20):** Reconciliation and healing is only possible if the alleged perpetrators' clans pay death compensation for all those lives they destroyed. If this is done, it will lead to true healing

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and reconciliation. When the peace agreement is signed and Kony has come back home we can start talking about reconciliation and healing.

**Man (21):** I would like to disagree with the view that it is not yet the right time to talk about reconciliation and healing. If we do not discuss the issue of reconciliation and healing early enough before the return of peace, people will have the heart of revenge. If our children who are in the bush come back home before us having come to terms with the idea of reconciliation, more lives are going to be lost. It is not bad to talk about reconciliation now. Let us the victims get prepared for reconciliation before the peace agreement is signed. JRP engaged us in a very good discussion which is going to help us to open our minds and educate us about how to deal with future problems.

**DIALOGUE D: PADIBE CAMP, 29<sup>th</sup> MAY 2008**



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<b>Topic</b>	<b>Community View on Local Mechanisms of Reconciliation and Accountability versus Other Mechanisms in Bringing Reconciliation and Healing in Northern Uganda</b>
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### Summary

Dialogue D drew responses from 15 participants, including 8 men, 4 women and 3 participants identified as “youths.” As in the previous dialogues, the responses suggest little consensus. The most popular reconciliation and healing mechanism among the respondents was Mato Oput, which was favored by eight respondents, including four men and four women. Four respondents; two men and two of the youths directly expressed their opposition to Mato Oput. Four participants, including two men, one woman and one youth, favored revenge or a military solution, while two women and one man expressly opposed this option. The two remaining youths favored ICC prosecution as the best means of bringing about healing and reconciliation, a mechanism opposed by three of the men involved in the dialogue. Finally, one man argued that compensation was the best approach.

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**Man (1):** Victims are powerless to talk about what armed men did to them in Northern Uganda. We are left with no option other than to accept any idea that is presented to us in the interest of peace. For those who are going to say Mato Oput is the solution, let me kill your brother now and see if you will tell me to Mato Oput without any revenge and compensation. I advise people to stop telling Kony to reconcile with us before Kony himself comes up voluntarily and pays for what he has done to the people.

**Man (2):** I feel Mato Oput with Kony will bring complete healing and reconciliation in Northern Uganda. What is threatening the success of Mato Oput at the moment is the presence of the ICC which is making us pursue two ways (peace and justice) in a bid to attain peace. The Acholi have a saying that two roads made the hyena confused and lost. Kony is confused because he believes that even if he reconciles with the Ugandan Government, the ICC will continue to pursue him. Otherwise had the ICC not been there, Kony would have already signed the agreement.

**Youth (3):** Mato Oput alone is not enough if complete healing and reconciliation is to be achieved in Northern Uganda. It is an out dated practice, fit for only elders and not the youth. Secondly, Kony has become an international problem. He has committed atrocities in Congo, Central African Republic, and Southern Sudan and even in Uganda. So even if the people of Uganda reconcile with him, do you think the people of Sudan will do the same? I do not think so. Learn to believe therefore, that Mato Oput is good for us in the local setting but will never work internationally. Kony is a wise man and he has seen that even if he reconciles with the government of Uganda, he will still be needed by the other Countries where he has committed atrocities. Allow me therefore to propose that other mechanisms should be explored such as taking Kony to international court.

**Woman (4):** Let us talk like people who know God and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was sent by God to remove all our sins and he died on the cross. Kony is a human being like you and me. He should not be left to die in sin because Christ already did that

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for us. I propose that we explore the Mato Oput option. Whoever is against Mato Oput should be the one blamed for Kony's prolonged rebellion.

**Man (5):** My fellow people, I do not support the idea of Mato Oput. I want those who are providing money to support Mato Oput ceremonies to stop doing so. Let that money be used to increase the salaries of the UPDF so that they can be committed in their work and defeat Kony.

**Woman (6):** I am not educated but from what I have heard, the UPDF are in Somalia fighting. Why did the UPDF go to Somalia and yet there is problem back home? This shows that Kony has defeated them; they can't fight him anymore. I want everybody to come and support the idea of Mato Oput. It is the only option that will solve our problem.

**Man (7):** I would like to remind everybody present that Mato Oput means forgiveness which everyone including Kony craves for. Exploring this option would bring us the peace we so much need and put an end to all the suffering that we underwent such as killing, abduction and displacement. To the young people, please do not confuse us. Follow the mechanisms that the elders have always used.

**Man (8):** If the ICC were sending its own troops to come and fetch Kony from his hideout then I would support it. But since ICC is only interested in the court proceedings but not the actual battle before them, I would choose to go for Mato Oput since it has worked for reintegrating formerly abducted persons who now live with us freely in the society. Even Kony will benefit from this forgiveness if he comes back. Let us forgive all the wrongs he committed against us. Today if I go ahead and kill Kony, it will make his relatives upset and they will think revenge is the best option. Punishment only breeds the cycle of violence.

**Woman (9):** Mato Oput is the best option. For example if your goats go and destroy crops in my garden it does not mean I should also release mine to go and graze in your garden? Kony Killed many people and if we want him to continue killing then let us continue saying we shall not forgive him. To stop more death from occurring, let us forgive him and reconcile.

**Woman (10):** Mato Oput will never reconcile the two great enemies - Kony and Museveni. Even if Kony decides to come out and say sorry, Museveni will arrest him at night and kill him. This indicates that the problem arises out of the fact that we have leaders who are weak, arrogant and war mongers. Without war they are unable to survive. Since they are interested in war, let them fight to the end and the weaker one will get defeated.

**Youth (11):** I am strongly against the idea of Mato Oput. We have to revenge for what happened to us since this is the only way through which lessons can be learnt. If I had the means I would order the army to kill all the relatives of Kony so that he too can get to feel the pain. Had this been done earlier, Kony would have abandoned the rebellion.

**Man (12):** Kony and Museveni are the ones involved in this conflict. If Museveni persists in saying he wants to defeat Kony with guns, then why should the elders waste their time going to Juba for peace talks? Kony and Museveni should be the ones to be blamed for the suffering of the people in Northern Uganda.

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**Man (13):** The ICC is not good because it is posing a big threat to Kony and that is why he is not signing the peace agreement. Let us embrace Mato Oput.

**Youth (14):** I prefer the ICC to take the lead. Let them arrest Kony, kill him and we will be happy. Even if reconciliation takes place, Kony won't bring back the lives of the people he lost.

**Man (15):** Youth should not be given chance to express their views because their minds have not yet developed. They are pro revenge as if they are not victims themselves.

## DIALOGUE E: PADIBE CAMP, 29<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2008

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**Topic: Community View on who should be Held Responsible for the Atrocities Committed in Northern Uganda for the 21 Year Old Conflict**

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### Summary

Twenty-nine people participated in Dialogue E, including 10 identified as “youths,” 5 identified as “elders,” 6 described as men and 7 as women. This dialogue produced a broad range of responses and indicated little consensus regarding who should be held responsible for the atrocities committed in northern Uganda over the course of the conflict. 11 participants; 5 youths, 3 elders, 2 women and 1 man, implicated the government, specifically naming the UPDF, President Museveni or simply ‘the government.’ 11 participants blamed the LRA or its commander Joseph Kony. Among this group were 5 youths, 3 women, 2 elders and 1 man. 3 respondents, 1 youth, 1 man and 1 woman blamed the LRA collaborators in the Ugandan Diaspora. Sudan and Alice Lakwena were each blamed by 2 respondents, 1 woman and 1 man in the case of Sudan and 1 youth and 1 elder in the case of Alice Lakwena.

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**Youth (1):** Whoever decided to solve the problems of Acholi in a violent way stands responsible for the suffering of people in Northern Uganda. Kony is responsible for the atrocities committed in Northern Uganda. The reason why I say so is because of the fact that Kony never turned his gun on the UPDF whom he considered his number one enemy. Instead he turned the guns on harmless civilians, carrying out indiscriminate abductions, killings and other crimes. How can one kill his own brothers, sisters and parents unless such a person is a trouble causer?

**Youth (2):** Tribalism is the main cause of the suffering in the North. There is no love for one another in our country Uganda and based on this, I entirely blame the government for the atrocities committed in the North. Take a look at Kony; he started his rebellion as a small uprising and due to the laxity of the Ugandan army, Kony managed to expand. The Government army left him to freely abduct civilians and kill them like goats. They only started becoming serious when Kony started killing the Government forces. UPDF as a government force should be held responsible for the atrocities committed in Northern Uganda.

**Elder (3):** The problem that resulted into the suffering of the people of Northern Uganda is as a result of discrimination that was started during the Obote II regime against the Acholi people. Museveni was in that Government by then and he was biased by Obote’s regime that the Acholi are not good people. When he eventually came to power, he maintained the discrimination that had already existed against the Acholi people. Talking of who should be held responsible for the suffering in Northern Uganda, Museveni as the President of Uganda should shoulder the blame since his government has been so negative about the Acholi people. To me I feel that the reason why we suffered this much is because his attitude towards the Acholi and the Northern conflict was ‘let them kill each other’.

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**Elder (4):** I feel Alice Lakwena and her father Lukoya Severino should be held responsible for the atrocities committed in the North. Why did they 'squeeze the tail of the lion' and leave the burden for another person to shoulder? They were the ones who started a reckless rebellion when they claimed to be fighting with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

**Man (5):** Personally, I hold Acholi elders responsible for atrocities committed in the North because Kony said that he received blessings from Acholi elders before starting his rebellion. Why did the elders give him blessings instead of advising him not to wage war that would destroy his own people? Let those elders who gave blessings to Kony stand responsible for the suffering of people in Northern Uganda.

**Woman (6):** I blame the late Tito Okello Lutwa the former president of Uganda for having taken over power from Obote II government. Tito was not a strong leader or someone capable of leading Uganda. He was not educated. He should have let someone from another tribe to overthrow Obote's Government. The fact that he did otherwise is the reason why the Acholi people are now hated by the Banyankole.

**Woman (7):** I hold the UPDF responsible for the atrocities committed in Northern Uganda because they are provided with guns and salaries by the government to protect civilians' lives and properties. Where were they when the LRA were killing and abducting people in Northern Uganda? UPDF should carry all the blame for the suffering of the Acholi people.

**Youth (8):** I hold Kony responsible for the atrocities committed in Northern Uganda because none of us requested him to fight on our behalf. If he wanted to fight in an army, why didn't he join the UPDF (NRA) at that time other than going into the bush? Secondly, Kony relies on spiritual powers to guide him. Can somebody who is possessed by *cen* really lead Uganda? I will end by telling you that all leaders are ordained by God but Kony was ordained by Satan.

**Man (9):** When Kony started his rebellion, he barely had enough guns to sustain him in the bush but due to Sudan's backing he obtained enough guns. That raises the question of who should be held responsible for the suffering in Northern Uganda. If any of you comes to me to borrow a gun and states that his motive is to kill his neighbor and I go ahead and lend him that gun, who is to be held accountable for the death of this neighbor in question? In my opinion, the Sudan Government contributed greatly to the atrocities committed in Northern Uganda because they supplied Kony with the guns and also gave him a base from where to operate.

**Woman (10):** Our children were forcefully abducted, our property looted and our huts burnt. Our hands, lips and ears were chopped using knives and machetes. Who did all these terrible things? The answer is Kony. Kony should carry all the blame for the atrocities committed in Northern Uganda because he behaved as though he is not a son of the very soil upon which he is unleashing mayhem and terror. How can you kill your own people yet the main reason why you went to the bush was to resist the government?

**Youth (11):** What everyone here should know is that this northern war was not started by Kony. When Kony joined the rebellion, there were people already fighting the government in power. To me therefore, whoever started the rebellion stands accountable for the suffering of the Acholi

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people. Alice Lakwena and her father should be held accountable. These people recruited so many youth into their rebel group and yet they knew that they did not have strength enough to overthrow the government. Furthermore, they are also related to Kony so I can boldly say that they were the very people who persuaded Kony into joining the rebellion.

**Youth (12):** I want to pose this question to everyone present. What will happen if the LRA refuse to sign the peace agreement with the Government of Uganda? I need no answer to this question from any of you. Allow me to tell you that Kony had a genuine interest in the aborted talks of 1994 but what happened instead? The President of the Republic of Uganda ordered his army to open fire on Kony and his fighters and this made Kony very doubtful of Museveni. He became very skeptical about pursuing peace talks because of the mistrust he now has in Museveni. The problem therefore is not Kony but our President Museveni, who is a war monger. If Uganda is really a good and peaceful country to live in, why is it that it is only one tribe that is suffering while the others are enjoying peace? We all know that when insurgency broke out in Kasese district it never lasted long. The Government of Uganda sent the UPDF to crush the Allied Democratic Forces and they succeeded. If you can answer those few questions that I posed then you will be in position to know who is to blame as far as atrocities committed in the North are concerned. It is the government of Uganda who is not interested in ending this conflict that is to blame for.

**Elder (13):** I get offended when I hear the youth saying that the elders are to blame for the atrocities committed in Northern Uganda. It has never been in our interest as elders that people should suffer. It was the elders who went to Kony and told him to come back home. The problem with Kony is that he is under the influence of *cen* and he follows its directions. I strongly feel Acholi elders have done all they can to advise Kony to come back home. I do put my blame on Kony and Museveni because all of them are poor listeners.

**Woman (14):** There are people who are advising Kony to continue with the war and these very people are sending in support for Kony from the Diaspora. These are our own children who have turned into collaborators. They are the ones causing us problems and are to be blamed for having caused suffering in the North.

**Man (15):** UPDF should be held responsible for what happened. It is their duty to protect the people. Where were they when the rebels were killing civilians? Are they not paid for the very duty they failed to perform? Are they trying to tell us that they are too weak to fight Kony? If that is the case, let them stop going to other countries in disguise of carrying out peace keeping operations and yet they have left their own unfinished task back home. I would like to advise the UPDF that they should take their national function very seriously other than claiming to be giving assistance to our neighbors while there are numerous problems at home.

**Man (16):** There are people benefiting from the bloodshed which is occurring here in the North. They are enjoying life while others suffer. They advise Kony to carry on with the war and in return they avail him with current information. The collaborators are the ones causing us big problems and they are to blame for the suffering in Northern Uganda. If they could be prosecuted then that would be good.

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**Youth (17):** The fact that I never saw the UPDF abducting, killing and burning huts in broad day light makes me blame Kony. Whoever caused suffering to the people of Northern Uganda should be held responsible. Kony made us to be displaced and we are now living in the camp with so many endless problems.

**Youth (18):** UPDF failed to protect the civilians and their property and yet they receive salaries for that duty. They have never been able to defeat Kony. So they should be held accountable.

**Elder (19):** Lack of forgiveness between these two parties fighting is what has made the suffering of the people of Northern Uganda to continue. If Museveni had accepted long ago and forgiven Kony and Kony had done likewise, our problems by now would have been history. If indeed there are grievances, why can't they solve it peacefully through peace talks? What will happen to us if the current Juba peace talks fail? For over 21 years armed conflict has not provided any solution. Why can't we now try peaceful measures to solve our problem?

**Youth (20):** I am holding three categories of people responsible for the atrocities committed in northern Uganda. First is the UPDF who failed to protect the people. Second is the LRA for their poor fighting policies; instead of fighting the UPDF, they came to kill us the civilians. The third are the collaborators for giving assistance to the LRA. God should punish them all.

**Woman (21):** The Sudanese Government should be blamed. It equipped Kony. Had that support not been given to Kony, he would have been defeated by now because it would have been very easy for the UPDF to fight and defeat the LRA. With support from Sudan, the LRA's strength now measures up to that of the UPDF which makes it very hard for them to be defeated.

**Man (22):** I disagree with the people who are saying the UPDF has not done enough. The UPDF has been doing its best to protect the civilians but Kony kept sneaking in and wrecking havoc upon the civilians. This makes tracking the LRA very hard for the UPDF and yet the UPDF cannot be in every location. Kony is to blame.

**Youth (23):** As people focus on Kony as the man behind all the suffering in the North, they should first ask themselves whether or not the Government has fulfilled its national function of protecting the people. I would like to make it very clear that the UPDF have failed to perform their national duty. Despite the fact that the LRA have committed atrocities, all the blame should go to the UPDF.

**Woman (24):** Kony should be held responsible for all that happened. He is the one who gave orders for us to be abducted, for our lips to be chopped and for us to be killed.

**Man (25):** If we are interested in Forgiveness and reconciliation then no one should be held accountable for the atrocities committed in Northern Uganda. Focusing on who has committed atrocities will instill the spirit of revenge in you. Let us forgive all those who caused us suffering and leave revenge to God.

**Elder (26):** Killers, defilers and rapists are the ones to be held responsible for the suffering of the people in Northern Uganda. I am not here to mention names but they know themselves.

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**Youth (27):** Joseph Kony ordered for all these atrocities to be committed. He should therefore, be held responsible. In his rebellion, he has no strategy for overthrowing the Government but rather to destroy the Civilians.

**Woman (28):** Kony should be held responsible because he abducted our children forcefully and forced them to kill their own people. He abducted our young girls and distributed them as wives to his soldiers to be defiled and raped. If he had a grudge to settle with the Government he should have killed the UPDF and not the civilians.

**Man (29):** It is the UPDF who were supposed to offer us protection. We were instead forced into this crowded camp.