

August 14, 2010

Statement by the Mucwini Massacre Memorial Committee

In Conjunction with the 8th Annual Mucwini Massacre Memorial Service

In the early morning hours of 24 July 2002, our villages awoke to the bloodied corpses of 56 innocent men, women and children. The massacre was a deliberate and ruthless act of retaliation by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) after they claimed that one of our own members who had been abducted escaped with their gun. In cold blood, the rebels rounded up our community and randomly selected some of our friends and family members to be murdered by axes, hand hoes, machetes and logs. Some women among us were painfully forced to participate in clubbing to death their own children.

As we came out of our hiding places, shaken and frightened, we were greeted by chaos, shock and terrible trauma due to the gruesome scene that the LRA had left behind. In the days, weeks and months after the massacre, we lived in fear of further retaliation, and many of us abandoned our villages and fled to the trading centre in fear that the LRA would return. The parishes of Pajong, Yepa, Pubec, Pudo, Ogwapoke, Agwoko, Akara and Bura in Mucwini were directly affected by the massacre.

Eight years later, the person or persons responsible for the Mucwini massacre remains controversial, unresolved and unacknowledged. The massacre divided us and further fuelled longstanding conflict between the Pubec and Pajong over a piece of land where both parties claim ownership. As a result, the relatives of the alleged perpetrator still live in the camp, as they have been denied access to the said land. While the mediation team headed by the Rtd. Bishop McLeod Baker Ochola has tried to forge some kind of reconciliation among the alleged parties to this tension, most of us feel left out in the process as few families are being included. The families of the 56 people who died still live with immense trauma; psychosocial and physical difficulties; biting poverty; the burden of meeting the educational and basic needs of numerous orphans; and a generation of elderly who have no one to care for them, yet some have the responsibility to take care of orphans.

In light of all the said challenges, we now live in desperation and would like to use this day of commemoration to bring to the attention of Government, civil society organisations, religious leaders, cultural leaders, and other stakeholders the following recommendations:

1. To the Government of Uganda (including The President, Members of Parliament, Kitgum District Officials, Mucwini Sub-County Leaders), we ask you to ensure that a technical institution, a community hall and a monument with the names of the deceased in memory of the massacre is erected in Mucwini. While the technical institution will be of service to youth/students within and out of Mucwini to enhance their skills, the community hall will generate income that can help the victims' group in various ways.

In addition, we ask Government to:

- Offer free education (both formal and skills training) in the form of scholarships to all persons orphaned by the massacre.

- Join hands with the cultural institutions to compensate the families of the 56 men, women and children who died, to foster reconciliation and healing. We appreciate the efforts put forth by Government and Parliament in compensating victims (both deceased and injured) of the 11 July 2010 Kampala bombings and the 1989 Mukura massacre and would like to call upon you to consider us in the same manner.
- Ensure that government programmes in the District (e.g. NUSAF II) directly target the victims' families to improve their livelihoods.
- Allocate annual district budgetary funds through the sub-county to support our efforts in organising this annual memorial service.

2. To Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), we ask you to support and work together with the Government and the cultural institutions in providing funds to ensure that the families of the 56 men, women and children who died are compensated.

We also ask NGOs to:

- Ensure that interventions, especially in the areas of economic empowerment and education, directly target victims' families and orphans.
- Offer psychosocial support to promote healing in victims who are going through traumatic challenges.
- Build capacity of the victims' group, through the committee, in areas of proposal development, advocacy, peace building and reconciliation.

3. To the cultural institution of the Acholi people, Ker Kwaro Acholi, we ask His Highness Rwot David Onen Acana II to follow up his promise for compensation to the victims made when he visited this community and to lobby the government and the NGOs to work together with the cultural institution to ensure that compensation for the 56 men, women and children who died during the massacre is paid as required by the Acholi tradition to promote reconciliation and healing.

In addition, we call upon all the cultural leaders under the leadership of His Highness Rwot David Onen Acana II to implore traditional justice principles that involve compensation, truth-telling and symbolic ceremonies for the dead.

4. To our mediation team headed by Rtd. Bishop McLeod Baker Ochola, we ask you to involve all the parishes affected by the massacre, the victims' families and the committee in the mediation processes to promote reconciliation.

5. And finally, to those who lost loved ones during the massacre, we request that the Lord God may be with you and inspire in you a spirit of community reconciliation so that the souls of our children, brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers who were slaughtered finally rest in peace!