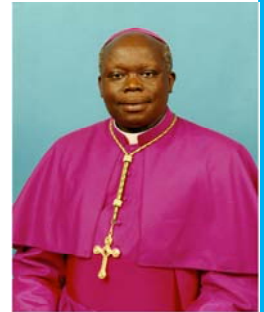
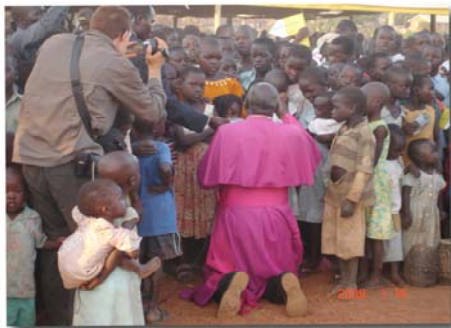


THE JUSTICE AND RECONCILIATION PROJECT CONGRATULATES ARCHBISHOP JOHN BAPTIST ODAMA, 2012 WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL PEACE PRIZE WINNER

Archbishop John Baptist Odama is the metropolitan Archbishop of Gulu Archdiocese in northern Uganda, a region which is emerging from over two decades of conflict waged between the Government of Uganda and the rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The civil war, which started in 1986, has had disastrous impacts upon the population. Among other impacts of the conflict, between 28,000 and 38,000 children were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) to serve as child soldiers, sex slaves and porters, and over 1.8 million people were displaced and forced to live in squalid conditions of the IDP camps. It is amidst this setting that Archbishop Odama has worked for several years to restore peace in northern Uganda. When he was first posted to northern Uganda in the early 1990s, he readily accepted to go and work in the region despite the threat of insecurity posed by the LRA. The suffering of the people in northern Uganda, and in particular the children immediately influenced his determination to work for the return of peace in the region. He has been an outspoken advocate for peaceful means, having witnessed first-hand the impacts of war against civilians. He is known to have continuously remarked that *"As long as there is an opportunity for peace talks, I shall pursue it"*. He is soft-spoken and a good listener. When addressing people he is fond of referring to them as 'gentle people' instead of the traditional 'ladies and gentlemen'. He also has a high sense of humor and patience with each and everyone who approaches him.



HIS GRACE JOHN BAPTIST ODAMA
THE METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP OF GULU



Archbishop John Baptist Odama kneeling before children rescued from the LRA to apologize for not protecting them from being abducted.

From the moment of his ordination as Archbishop on 10th April 1999, Archbishop Odama dedicated his efforts to advocating and working for the return of peace in northern Uganda to create a safe environment for children and other civilians. During the inaugural speech at his ordination ceremony as Archbishop of Gulu, he called one of the children to him, lifted up the child, and asked the child if he wanted to grow into an adult amidst settings of violence and insecurity. The child shook his head. The Archbishop then declared that his main priority would be to advocate for the restoration of peace in northern Uganda for the sake of the children.

On many occasions, he has knelt down in public before children who were rescued from the LRA, and asked them to forgive him for not protecting them with the words, *"Forgive me for not having protected you from being abducted by the LRA"*.

He fondly refers to children as *'ngini-ngini'*, the Acholi word for small black harmless insects that are very hard working and often co-exist in large numbers. He has demonstrated his love and concern for the welfare of children in various ways. For example on several occasions when he was leading mass and the church was packed to capacity he would call the children to sit around him on the altar. At the height of the conflict, the LRA used to abduct children they came across and carry them off to serve in their army as soldiers and rebel wives. To avoid abduction, many children in northern Uganda used to seek refuge at night in town centres such as Gulu town, where they would sleep on verandas of shops and any other public spaces. It was during this period that Archbishop Odama showed solidarity with the night commuting children, an incident which many people in northern Uganda still recall. On one of the evenings Archbishop Odama, together with other religious leaders, left the comfort of his residence in Gulu Cathedral and walked with these children for almost four kilometers to Gulu town, where he spent a cold night with them on the veranda of a shop. He opted not to carry a blanket with him, but instead wrapped his legs in a nylon sack just like most of the children would do in order to keep warm for the night.



Archbishop John Baptist Odama in Garamba forest during the Juba Peace Talks. To his right is Rwot David Onen Achana II, the Paramount Chief of Acholi.



Archbishop John Baptist Odama, Bishop MacLeod Baker Ochola, and one other religious leader stands with a group of LRA soldiers in Garamba forest during the Juba Peace Talks.

He is a strong advocate of peaceful and non-violent methods including amnesty and dialogue. In 2002 he was instrumental in organizing a series of meetings between the government and LRA. For his first meeting with the rebels, on 14th July 2002, at a great risk to his own life, he went to meet a group of LRA rebels at a place called Otici in Kilak Hills in northern Uganda. This location was deep in the bush, and to find it they had to cut through thick bushes until they reached the rendezvous. From then on, he attended a series of meetings with the rebels and presented their demands to the government until his initiative collapsed as a result of resumption of hostilities between the government and the LRA. During the Juba Peace talks, Archbishop Odama played a key role. He was among the people who were used to build confidence among the LRA. He was always willing to leave his residence in Gulu at short notice and head off to Juba or Garamba forest in the Democratic Republic of Congo to attend the peace negotiations. The input of religious and cultural leaders during the Juba

Peace Talks did a lot in influencing the talks beyond the signing of the final peace agreement. Religious leaders were a constant pillar of strength, encouragement and confidence. There were occasions when the LRA leaders insisted that religious leaders be present as a condition for meeting with the government peace delegation. On several occasions when the peace talks were showing signs of breaking down the religious leaders would intervene to encourage the delegates to go back to the negotiating table. Although the final peace agreement was not signed in 2008, the six agenda items, particularly agenda item number three on accountability and reconciliation have been critical in paving the way for the implementation of post-conflict reconstruction programs.

One of the most remarkable impacts arising from the work of Archbishop Odama was the passing of the Amnesty Act of 2000. Through the Acholi Religious Leader's Peace Initiative (ARLPI) he advocated for the passing of a blanket amnesty in order to promote forgiveness of ex-combatants and to encourage many of them to abandon rebellion. Through advocacy from Archbishop Odama and other religious leaders, coupled with pressure from prominent Acholi leaders in northern Uganda, the Amnesty Act of 2000 was passed, and has been influential in facilitating the return of over 10,000 ex-combatants. Archbishop Odama advocated for a blanket Amnesty, as opposed to conditional amnesty that would exclude some members of the LRA leadership from receiving pardon.



Archbishop John Baptist Odama greeting an LRA soldier in Garamba forest during the Juba Peace Talks.

In addition, he has also been instrumental in setting up organizations and associations that have contributed tremendously in working for peace in northern Uganda. One of the most famous organizations that the Archbishop contributed to setting up is the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). ARLPI is an interfaith peace building and conflict transformation organization formed in 1997 as a proactive response to the conflict in Northern Uganda. ARLPI brings together leaders of six different religious sects/denominations (Anglican, Catholic, Muslim, Orthodox, Pentecostal, & Seventh Day Adventist) and their respective constituencies to participate effectively in transforming conflicts in Northern Uganda and the surrounding region. With northern Uganda currently experiencing relative peace, ARLPI continues to work for the reconstruction and recovery of northern Uganda in various areas including interfaith relations, research & documentation women empowerment, peace building & reconciliation and advocacy & lobbying. In 2004, ARLPI became the first African institution to receive the Niwano Peace Award for her contributions towards promoting unity and her commitment to finding peaceful ways to end the northern Uganda conflict. Upon receiving the prize, ARLPI used this award to create an 'Interfaith Centre for Peace' in Gulu.