

NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child
**Database of NGO Reports presented to the UN Committee on
the Rights of the Child.**

Document Title:

Children Abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda

Region:

Central Africa, Africa

Country:

Uganda

Issued by:

Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project and Human Rights Watch/Africa

Date of publication of NGO Report:

Date of presentation to presessional working group:

01/97

CRC Session

(at which related national state party report was submitted):

16th Session : Sept - Oct 97

Language:

English

Document Text

[Link to related state party report at UNHCHR in English](#)

[Link to related state party report at UNHCHR in French](#)

**A Report Prepared for the United Nations Committee On the Rights of the
Child**

I. SUMMARY

In northern Uganda, thousands of children are victims of a vicious cycle of violence, caught between a brutal rebel group and the army of the Ugandan government. The rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is ostensibly dedicated to overthrowing the government of Uganda, but in practice the rebels appear to devote much of their time to attacks on the civilian population. When the rebels move on, they take young children with them, targeting them to become rebel soldiers. The rebels prefer children of fourteen to sixteen, but at times they abduct children as young as eight or nine, boys and girls alike. Most estimates suggest that three to five thousand children have escaped from rebel captivity during the past two years. UNICEF estimates that an equal number of children

remain in captivity, and an unknown number are dead.

Abducted children are tied together and forced to carry heavy loads of looted goods as they are marched off into the bush. Children who resist, who cannot keep up, or who become tired or ill are killed. Children who attempt to escape are killed, often by other abducted children who are forced to participate in killings and atrocities as part of a gruesome initiation into rebel life.

The rebels generally bring captive children across the border to base camps in Sudan, where the Sudanese government supplies the Lord's Resistance Army with food and arms in exchange for assistance in fighting the rebel Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA). Children who reach Sudan are forced to serve the rebels. They are made to run errands, fetch water or cultivate the land; girls as young as twelve are given to rebel commanders as "wives." All of the children receive rudimentary military training and most are armed and forced to fight. In effect, children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army become slaves: their labor, their bodies and their lives are all at the disposal of their rebel captors.

Once they have been trained (and sometimes before being trained), the children are forced to fight in Uganda and in Sudan. In Sudan, the children are forced to help raid villages for food, and fight against the Sudan People's Liberation Army. In Uganda, the children are made to loot villages, fight against Ugandan government soldiers, and help abduct other children. When the rebels fight against the Ugandan government army, they force captive children to the front; children who hang back or refuse to fire are beaten or killed by the rebels, while those who run forward may be mown down by government bullets.

Those children who are lucky enough to escape or be captured by Sudan People's Liberation Army or Ugandan government soldiers face severe trauma and hardship upon their return. Often they have nowhere to go. Their villages may have been destroyed by the rebels; their parents may have been killed or may have fled the countryside for the comparative safety of the towns. Even those children with homes to return to may hesitate to do so, fearing rebel reprisals against them or their families, and ostracism by community members who blame the children for complicity in rebel atrocities. There are few safe havens for these children: only two nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) provide live-in trauma counseling centers for escaped abductees, but the centers cannot possibly take in all of the children. The Ugandan government does not appear to have a concrete program in place for the rehabilitation and reintegration into civilian life of former child soldiers. So far as Human Rights Watch is aware, the government is relying exclusively on the work of local and international NGOs to perform this function.

There is no end in sight to the conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan government; the conflict is deeply rooted in Uganda's troubled history of ethnic conflict, and the war has now dragged on for eleven years. The last two years have seen a great increase in the scale of the fighting, as a result of Sudanese government support for the Lord's Resistance Army, and prospects for a negotiated peace are bleak.

This report is based on research undertaken by Human Rights Watch in Uganda in late May and early June of 1997. In addition to holding background interviews with representatives of the government, the military and the NGO community, we interviewed about thirty children who had escaped from rebel captivity.⁽¹⁾ Most of the children interviewed were between the ages of ten and seventeen; some interviews were conducted in English, but the majority were conducted with the aid of interpreters. Section II of this report will document the children's experiences in captivity and immediately after, and will be largely in the children's own words. ⁽²⁾ Section III of the report will discuss the conflict's broader effects on the population of the north and on children. Section IV will present Human

Rights Watch's recommendations to the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

II. CHILDREN ABDUCTED BY THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY

Background to the Conflict

The origin of the current conflict lies in the deeply-rooted ethnic mistrust between the Acholi people of northern Uganda and the ethnic groups of southern Uganda—a mistrust that has often erupted into widespread violence.

During the period of British colonial administration, the British employed mostly southerners in the civil service; northerners, and especially the Acholi, were primarily recruited into the armed forces. This created a division between north and south that persisted through independence in 1962: the south was more developed and contained the bulk of Uganda's educated elite, while the north, including the districts of Gulu and Kitgum, the homeland of the Acholi, was much poorer, with the people relying largely on cattle and military service for subsistence.

The socio-economic division between north and south has been exacerbated by the serious human rights abuses and bouts of ethnic violence during the regimes of the post-independence period. According to most historians of post-independence Uganda, Acholi soldiers have been both victims and perpetrators of this violence. Under Milton Obote's first presidency, Acholi soldiers were implicated in many of the government's questionable activities. In the 1970s, during the administration of the notorious Idi Amin, many Acholi soldiers were slaughtered by Amin's henchmen. After the overthrow of Amin in 1979, Milton Obote returned to power; the Acholi soldiers in his army were implicated in human rights abuses and killings during the civil war against Yoweri Museveni's guerrilla National Resistance Army, which drew its support mostly from people in Uganda's southern and western regions.⁽³⁾

Following Museveni and his National Resistance Army's military victory and consolidation of power over Uganda in 1986, Acholi soldiers retreated north; some crossed the border and took refuge with the Acholi people of southern Sudan, but many retreated only as far as the districts of Gulu and Kitgum. Acholi ex-soldiers were asked to turn in their weapons, and many did so. Some, however, never relinquished their weapons.

According to Paulinus Nyeko, chairman of Gulu Human Rights Focus, since Uganda's history for twenty-five years had been one of ethnic purges and reprisals, many Acholi feared that it was only a matter of time before Museveni's soldiers sought revenge on them for atrocities committed during past regimes. ⁽⁴⁾ The behavior of many of the National Resistance Army soldiers did little to quell these fears. Harassment, looting, rape and cattle-theft by National Resistance Army soldiers were not infrequent, and did little to increase Acholi faith in the new Museveni government. ⁽⁵⁾

By August 1987, many Acholi ex-soldiers in Sudan had joined up with other opponents of the Museveni administration, and formed a rebel alliance. One of the rebel units, the Holy Spirit Mobile Force, was led by self-styled Acholi prophetess Alice Lakwena, who claimed to be possessed by the Holy Spirit. She garnered much Acholi support with her promises to defeat Museveni's government and purge the Acholi people of witches and sinners. Following her defeat and flight into exile in 1987, the Acholi rebel movement disintegrated and many Acholi rebels surrendered. Some, however, remained in the bush, under the leadership of Joseph Kony, a young relative of Lakwena's. Kony claimed to be the inheritor of Lakwena's spiritual tradition, and his small group of rebels, based in Sudan,

eventually came to call itself the Lord's Resistance Army.

Despite years of government attempts to stamp it out, the Lord's Resistance Army persists, never strong enough to seriously destabilize the government, but never weak enough to die out completely. Sudanese government spokesmen have repeatedly accused the Ugandan government of providing military support to the rebel Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and several years ago, in apparent retaliation, the Sudanese government began to aid the Lord's Resistance Army.⁽⁶⁾ According to the children interviewed by Human Rights Watch, the Sudanese government also relies on the Lord's Resistance Army to help fight the SPLA. Sudanese aid has turned the Lord's Resistance Army into more of a threat than ever, providing the rebels with a constant supply of arms.

The recent activities of the Lord's Resistance Army have turned the northern districts of Uganda into permanent battle zones, filled with burnt schools, ransacked homes, abandoned fields, and a huge population of internally displaced people. One of the many tragic aspects of the conflict is that it is mostly Acholi civilians who are dying as a result of the activities of the rebels, the vast majority of whom are Acholi themselves. But it is the region's children who have perhaps suffered the most. ⁽⁷⁾

The Children's Stories

Capture and Early Days

Typically, the rebels appear to divide into small bands in order to lead raids into Uganda, maintaining radio contact with their fellows. In towns, the rebels loot trading posts and steal medicines from small health clinics. In the bush, they loot compounds, beating and often killing the adults, and abducting children. They burn huts when they leave, and steal everything edible or useful. The small rebel bands then reunite, and march together back across the Sudanese border with their child captives in tow.

Abducted children are generally tied up and forced to carry looted goods while marching. Unused to long marches through the bush, and given little or nothing to eat or drink, most children soon become ill and develop swollen and infected feet. Those who cannot keep up on the march are killed, and those children who try to escape face brutal repercussions: the rebels force other new captives to help beat or stab to death unsuccessful escapees.

Charles, fifteen:

It was morning, and I was practicing my music when I heard a shot. I started running into the bush, but there was a rebel hiding behind a tree. I thought he would shoot me. He said, "Stop, my friend, don't try to run away!" Then he beat me with the handle of the gun on my back. He ordered me to direct him, and told me that afterwards I would be released.

But afterwards it was quite different. That afternoon we met with a very huge group of rebels, together with so many new captives. We marched and marched. In the bush we came across three young boys who had escaped from the rebels earlier, and they removed the boys' shirts and tied ropes around their throats, so that when they killed them they would make no noise. Then they forced them down and started clubbing their heads, and other rebels came with bayonets and stabbed them.

Thomas, fourteen:

The rebels had already abducted about a hundred children, and they had looted a lot of foodstuff. But they would just give you only very little food to keep you going. I had to carry a bag of groundnuts, maybe twenty kilos. It was heavy but there was no alternative to carrying it. Some young children were given very heavy loads, but with any load you must struggle to carry it, or otherwise the rebels say, "You are becoming stubborn and rebellious!" And they kill you. If your feet swell they also kill you.

I saw quite a number of children killed. Most of them were killed with clubs. They would take five or six of the newly abducted children and make them kill those who had fallen or tried to escape. It was so painful to watch. Twice I had to help. And to do it, it was so bad, it was very bad to have to do.

On paper, the children's stories have a terrible sameness: "The rebels took me, they made me march, I was afraid, my feet swelled, I had to help kill another child" But for all their similarities, the stories are each unique: one child recalled a visit from the spirit of his dead brother; another remembered the chicken the rebels forced him to pluck more quickly than he was able; a third remembered the blood that dripped from the mouth of a child she saw clubbed to death.

James, fourteen:

My eldest brother escaped but the rebels caught him and they killed him. They beat him on the back of the head with a club. I watched him being killed. His *tipu* (spirit) came to me and covered me and told me, "Today, I am dead. " I was in shock My other two brothers and I were allowed to stay together but we were told that if any of us escaped, one of us would be killed.

George, fourteen:

It was around ten a.m. and my two brothers and I were doing handicrafts. The rebels appeared all of a sudden. They had guns. They took all three of us, and they ordered us to remove our shirts and run with their group. We ran for about five miles, and came to a larger group, and they gave us chickens and ordered us to remove their feathers very fast. I was not good enough and they beat me with their guns to make me hurry. As we prepared their meal we were attacked by government forces. I was shot in the arm but I still had to march. They killed you if you could not march.

Stella, fifteen:

On the second day of marching our legs were swollen. They said, "Eh, now, what should we do about your legs? You must walk, or do you want us to kill you? It's your choice." So we kept going.

On the third day a little girl tried to escape, and they made us kill her. They went to collect some big pieces of firewood. Then they kicked her and jumped on her, and they made us each beat her at least once with the big pieces of wood. They said, "You must beat and beat and beat her. " She was bleeding from the mouth. Then she died. Then they made us lie down and they beat us with fifteen strokes each, because they said we had known she would try to escape.

Many of the children spoke of being so frightened and bewildered that nothing seemed real anymore. The pain, fear, and shock combine to create a numbness, a dizziness—a sense, at times, that madness is not far off.

Sharon, thirteen:

They made us walk for a week . . . Some of the smaller children could not keep up, as we were walking so far without resting, and they were killed . . . Some of the children died of hunger. I felt lifeless seeing so many children dying and being killed. I thought I would be killed.

Samuel, seventeen:

Many people were killed because they could not walk further. They were stabbed with bayonets in their chests and heads. It was so horrible, I felt that I was going crazy. I felt dizzy a lot, my head spinning most of the time.

Christine, seventeen:

Whenever they killed anyone, they called us to watch. I saw eleven people killed this way. One of them was a boy who had escaped. They found him in his home, and called him outside. They made him lie down on the ground, and they pierced him with a bayonet. They chopped him with the bayonet until he was dead. Seeing this, at times, I felt like I was a dead person—not feeling anything. And then sometimes I would feel like it was happening to me, and I would feel the pain.

Phillip, fourteen:

I saw my older brother go mad . . . He would be given food and would just throw it on the ground, and mix it with dirt and eat it. I was allowed to talk with him, and he would tell me about how our mother was here and our sister. He thought that we were at home. I don't know what happened to him. We saw so many people killed, bodies sticking out of trenches, and gun shots all around. It was so frightening. Maybe that made him mad.

On the March in Uganda and Sudan

After abduction, some children remain in the bush in Uganda for several months, used by the rebels as porters and servants. At some point, however, most children who have not escaped or been killed are brought across the border into Sudan, where the rebels have their main base. In southern Sudan as in Uganda, the rebels loot homes and trading centers, spreading carnage and destruction wherever they go. For many children, the clearest memories from this period are of the exhaustion and the apparently aimless marching. And, of course, of the atrocities they witnessed and were forced to take part in.

Charles, fifteen:

After my abduction, we marched and marched. Once we passed close to my homestead, but I was carefully guarded and I could do nothing. We came across a car which we ambushed, and later we came to a homestead and found a family with a father who was drunk. The rebels said, "This one is drunk, we cannot spare him!" So they clubbed him to death, then dragged him to a hut and burned it. As we went we burned many houses. I also recall that after we attacked a

Kitgum trading center, we came across two hunters, and they were killed with clubs and bayonets.

This looting and killing continued as we marched. So many people were killed. You had to adapt yourself quickly to that kind of life.

Teddy, thirteen:

We walked for a very long distance, day and night, and we slept with no food given to us. As we moved we crossed the river between Gulu and Kitgum. The water almost killed us, because we could not swim. We crossed a main road and came across five people riding bicycles, and the rebels killed them because bicycles are against their rules: the rebels fear fast delivery of information about their presence. They would send young children to climb trees for observation, but still we were often attacked by government soldiers, and many were killed. I was shot in the leg, but it missed the bone and afterwards I recovered.

After one battle where many rebels were killed we spent a long time deep in the bush, far from villages. After a time we came to a camp for rebels who had been wounded or were sick. This was still in Uganda. My duty was to go look for food. Often we stole it. Another of my assignments was to wash the clothes of the wounded and sick. They were dirty clothes, covered with blood and stains, and I also had to clean out gumboots that had filled with blood.

Patricia, fifteen:

They made us walk for a week. Some of the children were young and not used to walking, but if you sit down to rest, they beat you, and sometimes they just shoot you I saw so many children dying. About fifty children in my group died. I was so scared. I didn't know where we were going.

They would make us cut people's legs off. If you don't help they beat you. My back still hurt from the beatings. But I would not help. They said, "We will kill you some day, you are misbehaving!" I said, "If you kill me, I will become a saint."

When we reached the Sudan border and I saw the Arab people I knew I was in Sudan. In Sudan, so many children died of diarrhea and hunger.

During long marches through the bush, water is often scarce or non-existent. Food, too, is limited, and when it cannot be looted from villages, the children are reduced to foraging for wild leaves. Many children die of hunger, thirst, or dysentery before ever reaching the Sudanese camp.

Charles, fifteen:

After a time we received a radio message to go to Sudan to meet Joseph Kony's group. We started marching and it became very dry. We could not find water or food, and we ate the leaves of trees. Many became sick and died, and you would see children everywhere, lying down like they were sleeping. But they were dead.

Susan, sixteen:

We were always hungry. There was never enough food. Most people in the villages we passed through had run away. On the way to Sudan we passed so many dead bodies of people who had died along the way-people who died of hunger, or sickness, or were killed.

Samuel, seventeen:

It was so hot. It was the dry season and I had blisters on my feet from walking so much. They never told us where we were going or why we had been taken. We were given raw food, simsim and boiled sorghum to eat, but no water. The water ran out after two days, and many people died of thirst. We walked for three days straight, without sleeping, until we reached Sudan. In Sudan, the main problems were diseases: dysentery and malaria-and food shortages and not enough water.

Life in the Rebel Camps in Sudan

The rebels have at least one major camp in southern Sudan. Kony, the Lord's Resistance Army leader, lives in the camp along with his top commanders. In the camp in Sudan, the children (both boys and girls) are trained to use weapons and fight. The weapons are supplied by the Sudanese government; children report the frequent arrival of heavy lorries containing weapons and supplies, driven by soldiers in Sudanese army uniforms.

We heard repeated allegations that in Sudan, some Ugandan children were sold as slaves to the Sudanese, in exchange for guns and food. We were unable to obtain any direct confirmation of these rumors. (8)

Thomas, fourteen:

In Sudan, they brought us to a large camp. There were maybe 5,000 people there. My duties were mostly to farm. I would dig fields and plant maize beans. I spent most of my time digging. They also trained us in how to be soldiers. I was trained to use mortars, RPG [rocket propelled grenade], and SMG [sub-machine gun] weapons. The guns came from the Arabs and the Sudanese government. Kony had lorries that were given him by the Sudan government. They would leave the camp and come back, loaded with guns.

Timothy, fourteen:

After we crossed into Sudan, we went to a place called Kit where they trained us. Kony told us we would go back to Uganda and overthrow the government-we were trained how to attack vehicles, and how to shoot

After my training, I was given a gun: an AK47. I had to carry it on my right shoulder at all times. It was so heavy. The loaded magazine made it so heavy. For a while, my right arm was paralyzed from the weight, and the skin on my shoulder burned from carrying it. I had chest pains. I was also given things to carry like cans of water.

Sarah, sixteen:

In Sudan they gave us training for three weeks. Kony sent a message to send the young ones to him in Palataka. Kony wanted those who had been in schools to be trained as nurses, to give first aid to the rebels. I was one of those. But I was also trained to shoot, and how to put together guns and handle the weapons-antipersonnel mines, antitank mines, SMG, LMF, PKM, mortars. The weapons were brought by Arabs in uniforms.

Samuel, seventeen:

In Sudan, we were informed that we were now soldiers. . . . I went through three

weeks of military training. We were given guns and were selected to fight in Sudan. There were confrontations between the Lord's Resistance Army and the UPDF in Sudan. The weapons we used [included] mortars and antipersonnel land mines. The BKs were the preferred weapon among us-it was the most reliable. It takes two people to operate it: one person to hold and feed the chain of bullets, and the other to shoot.

Kony abducts children for military purposes. The children are trained to make soldiers. Other children are taken to be wives-the girls. Others are taken to be porters, to carry things. There are also some who are brought to be killed in front of the new recruits, to build courage. In Sudan, some men were brought before us, and we were made to gather in a circle. We had to beat the man to death. The real killing was done by about ten people, and the rest were made to beat the person who was already dead. The new recruits are made to do this to build courage.

Although conditions in the camp are somewhat better than conditions on the march, many children still spoke of being hungry and thirsty all the time. The best food is reserved for the rebel commanders, and child captives often have to supplement their meager rations with wild leaves. Deaths from malnutrition and disease continue.

Jessica, fourteen:

There was no water in the camp. Every day we would have to go search for water. The Arabs brought food and guns from Juba, and the food was mostly beans, but it was not enough. We ate bitter leaves. People were dying, especially young boys. There were many boys of about seven years of age who had been abducted from Gulu, and they were many of them dying.

Patricia, fifteen:

In Sudan, so many children died of diarrhea and hunger . . . We were given food, but very little-maybe a little bread and beans. They would give us food maybe once a month-the food was brought by the Arabs. During the days, I would go out looking for food. Sometimes we would be beaten if we came back without finding any food. There was no water. You had to walk miles to collect water.

Stephen, seventeen:

In the Sudan, some people were dying of hunger, and diarrhea was also very serious. But should you make a mistake of stealing things, you will be tied to a tree and shot by a firing squad. These very young children especially, they very much miss the food they used to have at home. But if you take food they just shoot you, even the very young ones.

For girls, life in Sudan is particularly hard. In addition to military training, farming, and cooking, most girls who have reached puberty have an additional duty: they are given to rebel commanders as "wives." Although the Lord's Resistance Army has strict rules against voluntary sexual relationships between captives, girls given as wives to commanders are forced to provide sexual services; those who refuse are often beaten until they comply.

Theresa, eighteen:

I was made to be wife to three men. Three rebels were fighting over me and each

one wanted me to be his wife. One of them wanted to kill me. He took me as his wife, and I did not want to be his wife. He said if I refused he would kill me, and if I ran away he would kill me. He was sent away to fight, and then I was made to be wife to a second man. Then he also was sent away to fight, and I was given to a third man.

Susan, sixteen:

One week after I was abducted I was given to a man called Abonga. He was thirty years old. Two girls were given to him. He was trying to be nice to me, to make me feel happy and not want to run away, but all I wanted to do was go home. I was taken away from him when I got to Sudan because I had syphilis. They said they wanted to give me treatment, but I refused-I did not trust them and thought that they might try to hurt me, and I felt fine anyway. Because I had syphilis, I was not given to another man in Sudan. Instead I was kept separately and guarded because they thought I would give the sickness to others.

No one was allowed to have free relationships there. If they caught a boy and a girl together they would shoot you in public. The only relationships they allowed were the ones that they forced on you.

Sarah, seventeen:

After the military training, I was given to a man called Otim. There were five women given to one man. The man I was given to was very rude to me: he thought I wanted to leave him and escape. He beat me many times with sticks. He thought I wanted to escape. Now I'm going to be a mother soon. I don't want to be a mother at this age. But it happened and I must accept this.

Religion and Ideology

The children we interviewed had only the haziest idea why the rebels were fighting: "They want to overthrow the government" was a refrain we heard repeatedly, but few children, regardless of how long they had been with the rebels, were able to articulate anything specific about the rebels' program.

Thomas, fourteen:

Joseph Kony came out to address us several times. He said the present president of Uganda is biased and is only developing the west and south, and is neglecting development in the north, but that he, Kony, would develop the north. He always would warn the abductees not to escape. He would tell us to be patient, and we would overthrow the government, so be patient and wait.

Stephen, seventeen:

The rebels say that they don't want this man Museveni who is ruling Uganda, because he has killed a lot of Acholi, he has killed a lot of their brothers, mothers, fathers, aunts and sisters. So they don't want this man who is ruling, and they want to take the government from him. Museveni caused a lot of Acholi life to be lost, and therefore he can never rule Acholiland, and the rebels say they will fight until the government falls down and the Acholi are rich in Uganda.

Western news reports tend to depict Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army as a group of violent Christian fundamentalists, committed to establishing a government based upon the Ten Commandments. This is a misleading oversimplification, however. Kony was brought up partially in the Catholic tradition, and claims to be doing the bidding of the Holy Spirit, but in practice the

rebels perform an eclectic mix of rituals, some drawn from Christianity, some from the indigenous Acholi tribal religion, and, increasingly, some from Islam.

Molly, seventeen

They prayed a lot, but they didn't pray like normal Christians. Sometimes they would use rosaries, but sometimes they would bow down like Muslims. They said they had a *malaika* (spirit, angel). They said the malaika said there would be a terrible fight, and that the government would be overthrown. After that, they said, we would be released. Sometimes they would gather us together and try to convince us to believe them.

They believed in their local gods, and they didn't want us to learn about their malaika. They discouraged us from asking questions about them or their beliefs. If you asked too many questions they would become cruel.

Christine, seventeen:

The rebels call Joseph Kony their father, and say that the Holy Spirit speaks to him, and tells him what to do. But I don't see anything to their religion. At times they pray like they're Christians, and at times like they're Muslims. They made us kneel and face in one direction to pray, like Muslims. Their customs are strange. If they've just abducted you, they smear you with oil in the sign of the cross, on your forehead and on your chest. They did that to us on the third day after we were abducted. They said it was their custom. Another one of their customs is they don't eat with strangers. . . .

They said they were preparing to overthrow the government, and that the day for the fight would take place if a child between ten and fifteen years old would have a certain dream about them, or if someone would rise at dawn and see a hand in the clouds-that would mean that there were five days before the fight. But this would happen, and then time would pass, and nothing happened. They didn't overthrow the government.

Many Ugandan government officials insist that Kony and his top commanders are motivated by greed and a thirst for personal power, rather than by any political or religious program. Indeed, it's impossible to assess the degree to which rebel actions are "truly" motivated by religion: the children we interviewed were all escapees from the rebels, non-believers more or less by definition. But it would be a mistake to dismiss out of hand the force of the rebels' beliefs: Kony's Lord's Resistance Army grew directly out of Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement, in which thousands of Acholi rebels met their deaths by walking into government bullets, armed with nothing more than stones, accepting Lakwena's assurance that shea butter oil smeared on their chests would protect them from bullets.

George, fourteen:

. . . we Acholi are a very bad people, and we must all become better before we can rule in our land. This is what the Holy Spirit has ordered. This also is why some people must be killed: we must become pure, and many Acholi do not follow the orders of the Holy Spirit anymore. Many of them are working with *jok* (spirits). So they must be killed. This is what the rebels told me.

James, fourteen:

The leader, Kony, would speak in tongues. Jok would speak through him—they would say that tomorrow such and such would happen. I only half-believed what he said. There were contradictions in what he said, so I didn't believe it all. But some of it was true. Like when Kony would order no eating—if you eat during the day you'll die in battle. I believed that, because I saw a boy who ate that day, and he later died in battle.

Going into Battle

At some point, nearly all of the children end up in the midst of fighting. The rebels seem to rely mostly on teenage boys as fighters, but this is by no means a rule; all children are expected to fight if necessary during raids on villages and when ambushed. Those who retreat in battle are beaten.

The rebel commanders use the children as shields: when battle approaches, the children are sent to the front lines, while the commanders remain safely in the rear. At times, the children are told not to take cover, and they are beaten if they attempt to duck down or crouch behind trees or buildings. At other times, taking cover is permitted. There does not appear to be a pattern; it all depends on what orders the Holy Spirit gives Kony. The children are told that those who obey the Holy Spirit will not be killed in battle: those who obey will be protected, while only those who have offended the Holy Spirit will die. Unknown numbers of captive children do die in the fighting, often killed by the bullets of government soldiers.

Charles, fifteen:

After training in Sudan, the rebels sent me back to Uganda. I was to be part of a group that would attack trading centers in Kitgum and abduct new children. I was well-armed, a soldier already. As we were returning, we were attacked by government soldiers. The frontline was somewhere ahead of where I was, and the commander said, "Run, run to the front-line!" It didn't matter whether you had a gun or not. If you did not run they would beat you with sticks. Many children without guns had to run to the front.

You are not allowed to appear to be thinking too much. If you had a gun, you had to be firing all the time or you would be killed. And you were not allowed to take cover. The order from the Holy Spirit was not to take cover. You must have no fear, and stand up as you run into fire. This was because they said you would be protected by the Holy Spirit if you stood tall and had no fear. But if you took cover, the Holy Spirit would be angry and you would be shot dead by all the bullets.

So many, so many were killed.

Samuel, seventeen:

When the commanders sensed that there was an ambush ahead, they made us walk in a single line in front of them. The commanders were behind us directing us where to go. At the beginning you could hear gunshot sounds, and then, when you were right in the middle of the firing, you couldn't hear anything, but only feel the bullets rushing by you, and pieces of them falling on you, and burning your skin.

Thomas, fourteen:

Going to the battle you must clap your hands and sing. There are many songs: some are prayer songs, some soldier songs. Some are both. For an example: "God, God, God, you come and help us, we have prepared to come to you. " If you fail to clap your hands while you sing, a bullet will hit your hand. If you fail to sing, a bullet will hit your mouth. If you fail to walk always forward, a bullet will hit your leg.

We were told not to take cover. When you started fighting, as soon as you would fall down to take cover, the bullets would cut you up. If you stood strong you would be protected and there would be no need to retreat.

Escape

It is impossible to know the percentage of abducted children who die while in rebel captivity. Children who try unsuccessfully to escape from the camp or while on the march are killed, apparently without exception. But during battles, the rebels appear to relax their normally draconian rules: children who become separated from the group, but are later found, are treated as strays and receive only mild punishment. As a result, many children wait until fighting breaks out to steal away in the confusion. Some simply drop their guns at an appropriate moment and surrender to government soldiers (UPDF) or to the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA); the SPLA sends the children to UPDF bases. Other children run away into the bush, and eventually approach a civilian to request assistance. Civilians usually bring escaped children to the UPDF, although it is possible that some escaping children are killed by civilians who, viewing the children as rebels, shoot first and ask questions later. Several children spoke of near-escapes from civilians who wanted to kill them.

We heard scattered reports of captured children being charged with treason, although government spokespersons denied that this ever occurs. By all accounts, the Uganda People's Defense Force and Sudan People's Liberation Army treat child rebels who surrender or escape with sympathy, and release them to trauma counseling centers or their families after interrogation.

The Future and the Ugandan Government's Response

Under Articles 38 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Ugandan government is obligated "to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflict," and to "take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of: any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflict."

In its 1996 report to the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Ugandan government affirmed its general commitment "to improve the lives of . . . child soldiers" and its "special concern" for children abducted by rebels. (9) **Nonetheless, the** Uganda Child Rights NGO Network (UCRNN) has been critical of the government's response to the crisis in the north, noting that while the Museveni government provided "special services" for children who were caught up in civil wars of the early 1980s (when Museveni's guerrilla army fought the Obote and Okello regimes), "children caught up in the armed rebellion in northern Uganda since 1987 have not received adequate support from the government." According to UCRNN, "no government programmes or resources have been

identified" for children abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army. UCRNN has called upon the government to "take concrete measures to address the needs of children caught up in armed conflict" and to "establish adequate responses for the long-term support of these children."(10)

Counselors and children's advocates criticize the Uganda People's Defense Force for not providing escaped children with adequate medical care while the children are in UPDF control. "They don't always give them treatment right away," says Richard Oneka, a counselor. "Sometimes by the time they reach us, they've been with the UPDF for weeks without seeing a doctor."(11)

The Uganda People's Defense Force also sometimes brings recently escaped children to appear at public rallies, to drum up popular support for the fight against the rebels. This practice, too, is sharply criticized by children's advocates: "They display the children, and read out their names, which only increases the likelihood of rebel reprisals against the child or his family," explains Paulinus Nyeko of Gulu Human Rights Focus. "Also, they give details on how the child escaped. The rebels come to hear of it, and that makes it hard for other children to escape. The army is just using the children." (12)

Children who escape from rebel captivity are in poor shape: they are usually in lice-ridden rags, covered with sores, scarred from beatings and bullet wounds. According to Robby Muhumuza of World Vision, one of the NGOs that provides trauma counseling for returned children, the children are "sick, malnourished, with low appetite. They have guilt feelings, are depressed and with low self-esteem . . . They have swollen feet, rough skin, chest infections . . . they tend to be aloof . . . with little confidence in themselves or others. They tend to lapse into absentmindedness as well as swift mood changes. (13)"

Many of the children-especially the girls, who are routinely given to rebel leaders as "wives"-also have sexually transmitted diseases: "They arrive with gonorrhea, syphilis or sores, skin rash and complaints of abdominal pain and backache." (14) At World Vision in Gulu, 70 to 80 percent of the children newly arriving at the center test positive for at least one sexually transmitted disease. (15) Some of the girls are pregnant and some have stopped having their menstrual periods because of malnutrition and stress. (16) The trauma counseling centers do not test the children for HIV, reasoning that after their experiences in the bush, the children are not yet psychologically ready to be told that they may have contracted a fatal illness. But with HIV infection rates of 25 percent in parts of Gulu and Kitgum, it is overwhelmingly likely that many of the children-especially the girls-have become infected.

Some of the children go immediately home to their villages and families, and some return to their boarding schools, but many end up staying, for a time at trauma centers operated by World Vision or the Gulu Save the Children Organization (GUSCO). Conditions in the centers are poor: too many children in small huts and tents, too few trained counselors, and not enough for the children to do. At one center, children are taught basic skills like carpentry, tailoring and bicycle repair, but at the others, the children spend much of their time just sitting around, playing card games or staring into space.

But at least the centers feel safe to the children: they are surrounded by other children who have gone through similar experiences, and are cared for by supportive non-judgmental adults. This is not always the case outside the centers: according to Robby Muhumuza of World Vision, children who return home sometimes find that other families with young relatives still in captivity are "jealous of those who have returned." Some people also blame the children for rebel atrocities and label the children as "rebels."(17)

For girls, in a culture which regards non-marital sex as "defilement," the difficulties are even greater: reviled for being "rebels," the girls may also find themselves ostracized for having been "wives." They fear "shame, humiliation and rejection by their relatives and possible future husbands." They may suffer "continual taunts from boys and men [who say they are] used products that have lost their taste." (18)

For many children, however, lack of community acceptance is the least of their troubles. "Many of these children have parents who were killed during their abductions," explains World Vision's Charles Wotman. "Others have families, but they have been displaced, and no one knows where they are." (19) These children simply have nowhere to go, no family or community to which they can return. They worry about how they will survive and support themselves. And even those children with supportive homes and communities feel unable to return because of the danger of being re-abducted and killed.

William, ten:

I am afraid to go back home to my village, because the rebels are still there in plenty. I fear they will kill me if they come to know of me here. I was in primary three when I was abducted, and I would like to go back to school, if there is somewhere that is safe. I don't know. I am sad now. The other thing I would like to say is that I experienced the deaths of many children. I wish there could be a solution.

Timothy, fourteen

I don't know what I will do in the future. Since I've been here [at the trauma counseling center], I haven't seen my family, and am sad that they haven't come. I don't know anything about them-I have no news. I can't go home. I'll be re-abducted and killed straightaway. At least here, I feel safer than at home. I dream at night of being re-abducted, or that I am still a captive, walking somewhere.

In the short term, the children face many direct threats to their survival upon return. But the long-term psychological effects of their experiences can only be guessed at. For many children, fears about the future are accompanied by memories of the past, memories of their own pain and feelings of guilt from the atrocities they witnessed and took part in.

Stephen, seventeen:

I went to the elders and I was cleansed: I had to be cleansed because I killed. It does not matter that you did not wish to kill. You still have killed and must become clean again. For me, I am older, and I think I will be all right. But I am thinking that it is the young boys and young girls who will not be all right.

I am very much interested to go back to school. So for now I am just here, and I am feeling okay. But I don't feel yet free, because of some dreams that can come at night, because of the bad things that happened to me in the bush. Killing people, dead bodies, the sound of gunshots-sometimes you wake up and it is as though that is what is still taking place.

Susan, sixteen:

I feel so bad about the things that I did. It disturbs me so much, that I inflicted death on other people. When I go home I must do some traditional rites because I have killed. I must perform these rites and cleanse myself. I still dream about

the boy from my village who I [was forced to kill]. I see him in my dreams and he is talking to me and saying I killed him for nothing, and I am crying.

Relevant International Humanitarian Standards

The LRA's abuses of children's rights are both too numerous and too self-evident to make an exhaustive list of relevant international human rights standards necessary. Most pertinently, however, the LRA's actions violate the provisions of Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which lays out the minimum humanitarian rules applicable to internal armed conflicts:

In the case of armed conflict not of an international character occurring in the territory of one of the High Contracting Parties, each Party to the conflict shall be bound to apply, as a minimum, the following provisions:

(1) Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed *hors de combat* by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

To this end the following acts are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

- (a) violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, or mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- (b) taking of hostages;
- (c) outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment;
- (d) the passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognized as indispensable by civilized peoples.

(2) The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for (20).

Since Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions is binding on "each Party to the conflict" - that is, it is binding on both governmental and non-governmental forces-the Lord's Resistance Army currently stands in flagrant violation of international humanitarian law.

Currently, the Geneva Conventions and the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child establish fifteen as the minimum age at which states that have ratified these treaties may recruit children into their armed forces. Since the Lord's Resistance Army is a nongovernmental force, it is not a party to these treaties (although it remains bound by Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, cited above). Nonetheless, these treaties establish clear principles of customary international law with regard to the use of children as combatants. Serious violations of the rules and customs of war, including the forced recruitment of children into armed groups, should be punished by law.

The 1996 U.N. Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children documented the tragedy of child soldiers throughout the world; as Graca Machel, who headed the study, says, "War violates every right of the child-the right to life, the right to grow up in a family environment, the right to health, the right to survival and full development and the right to be nurtured and protected, among others. (21) In the study, Graca Machel also recommended that the minimum age for recruitment and participation in armed forces be raised from fifteen to eighteen.

It is Human Rights Watch's position that no one under the age of eighteen should be recruited (either voluntarily or involuntarily) into any armed forces, whether governmental or nongovernmental in nature. (22)

III. OTHER EFFECTS OF THE CONFLICT

Due to the conflict, northern Uganda today faces an acute humanitarian crisis. The districts of Gulu and Kitgum have been hardest hit: relief agencies estimate that over 240,000 people are currently displaced from their homes and villages, (23) while some local officials estimate that the figure is as high as two million displaced people. (24). In Kitgum, nearly half of the displaced people are children, and more than a third of those children have been orphaned by the war. (25) Education has come to a stand still in many parts. The rebels target schools and teachers, and in the last year, in Gulu alone, more than seventy-five schools have been burnt down by the rebels, and 215 teachers have been killed. An estimated 60,000 school-aged children have been displaced, and during 1996, the number of functioning schools in Gulu fell from 199 to sixty-four. (26)

The health care system in the north, always rudimentary, has almost collapsed. Rebel raids on clinics and dispensaries have diminished the store of medicines available, and the instability has caused many health workers to flee. This has disrupted most basic non-emergency services, including immunization campaigns. Officially, there are thirty rural health units in Gulu, but as of May 1997, only fourteen remained in operation. The results are predictable: by almost any health care indicator, Gulu and Kitgum lag far behind other parts of Uganda. At the end of 1995, for instance, the infant mortality rate in Gulu was 172 per thousand live births, compared to eighty per thousand live births in Kampala. Most estimates suggest that the HIV infection rate in the region hovers at around 25 percent of the population. (27). And AIDS deaths compound all of the region's other problems, further straining health care resources, rendering immune-compromised people more vulnerable to other diseases, and leaving still more children orphaned.

The health crisis has been greatly exacerbated by the Ugandan government's policy of encouraging civilians to leave rural areas and move to "protected camps" near Uganda People's Defense Force military installations. The rationale behind the protected camps is straightforward: by concentrating the civilian population in a few well-defined areas, the army hopes both to simplify the task of protecting people from rebel attacks and make it harder for the rebels to find food by raiding villages. But in practice, the protected camps have been, at best, a mixed blessing for the internally displaced people of Gulu and Kitgum: tens of thousands of them thronged to the camps, only to find that virtually no provision had been made for sanitation or sustenance.

Unsurprisingly, limited water, poor sanitary facilities and minimal provision of medical care in the protected camps has led to thousands of deaths each month. (28) Ten of the twenty-four camps in Gulu district are situated in areas with no health care facilities at all, and a recent survey in three of the camps found that 41.9 percent of the children were malnourished. Epidemics of measles, malaria and dysentery kill off many of the weakest in the camps. In Pabbo alone, there were more than four thousand deaths during the month of February 1997 (more recent figures were not available to Human Rights Watch). (29)

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Although children are far from the only ones who are suffering as a result of the Lord's Resistance Army, it is unquestionably the very young who are suffering the most. As this report went to press, the abductions were still going on unabated. Even if the crisis ended tomorrow, the effects of the Lord's Resistance Army's atrocities will haunt Uganda for generations to come.

The Lord's Resistance Army should comply with its obligations under international humanitarian law, and the government of Uganda should take all possible steps to protect the rights of Ugandan children, as required by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. But the international community, too, has

a tremendous responsibility to end the violation of children's rights in Uganda.

Recommendations

Human Rights Watch urges the Committee on the Rights of the Child to:

conduct an on-site investigation into the situation of children held in captivity by the Lord's Resistance Army, and into the situation of children who have escaped from the LRA and returned to Uganda

press the Ugandan government to:

take all possible steps to protect children from abduction;

when fighting the Lord's Resistance Army, take all possible steps to minimize child casualties;

ensure that all children who escape or are captured from the rebels receive prompt and adequate access to medical attention and counselling while in government custody;

release children as promptly as possible to their families or to appropriate child welfare organizations, rather than holding the children for questioning in military barracks;

ensure that an adequate number of trained counselors exists to work with the children, with special attention paid to the needs of girls who have been sexually abused;

promptly reunite children with family members;

initiate a widespread information and education campaign to inform communities of the special needs of children who were abducted;

facilitate the children's full and speedy reintegration into their communities;

develop a concrete plan for meeting the long-term needs of former abducted children;

ensure that people living in government-established "protected camps" have adequate food, water, sanitation, and health care, and are protected from rebel attacks.

Human Rights Watch urges the Committee on the Rights of the Child to press

the Lord's Resistance Army to:

immediately stop abducting children;

immediately stop killing children;

immediately stop torturing children;

immediately stop sexually abusing children;

immediately release all children remaining in captivity;

ensure that Lord's Resistance Army combatants respect the human rights of civilians in the areas of conflict.

Human Rights Watch urges the Committee on the Rights of the Child to press the Government of Sudan to:

cease all military aid and other support to the Lord's Resistance Army, until it complies with the recommendations outlined above;

use Sudanese influence over the Lord's Resistance Army to stop the LRA's abduction, killing, torture and sexual abuse of children, to ensure that all LRA captives are treated humanely, and to bring about the immediate release of children held by the LRA.

Footnotes

1./It should be noted that the children we interviewed are somewhat atypical, in that they succeeded in escaping from the rebels, something most abducted children never do. In our investigation, we had to rely solely on the testimony of those children who had escaped from the rebels, since it was not possible for Human Rights Watch to gain access to the rebel camps and interview children still in captivity

2.The following excerpts from the children's stories have been lightly edited for clarity, but are otherwise unchanged. Ages given are ages of the children at the time of our interviews in May 1997. Most of the children we met had been held by the rebels for months and sometimes several years before managing to escape. To protect the children, we have changed all names and altered other identifying characteristics.

3. See Thomas P. Ofcansky, *Uganda: Tarnished Pearl of Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), Chapter 3, *passim*; A.B.K. Kasozi, *The Social Origins of Violence in Uganda, 1964-1985* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), pp. 11, 54; Amii Omara-Otunnu, *Politics and the Military in Uganda, 1980-1985* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 104, 125-126, 158-159.

4. Human Rights Watch interview, Gulu, May 30, 1997

5. Museveni and other senior officials have acknowledged human rights violations

by NRA forces during this period, and tried and punished some of the soldiers involved. The Parliament of Uganda, "Report of the Committee on Defense and Internal Affairs on the War in Northern Uganda," January 1997, pp. 11-12.

6. For a brief discussion of Sudan's charges against Uganda and the Ugandan government response, see, for instance, Nhial Bol, "Sudan-Uganda: Khartoum Denies Air Attack on Ugandan Town," Interpress Service, February 16, 1997.

7. In this report, the word "children" refers to anyone under the age of eighteen. The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as "every human being under the age of eighteen unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is obtained earlier." Article 1. Convention on the Rights of the Child, G.A. res. 44/25, annex 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No 49), at 167, U.N. Doc. A/4/49 (1989). The full text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child is set forth in the Appendix.

8. The existence of slavery in Sudan (particularly involving children from southern Sudan) has been well-documented. See, for instance, Human Rights Watch/Africa & Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project, *Children of Sudan: Slaves, Street Children and Child Soldiers* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995).

9. Government of Uganda, report on the implementation of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1 February 1996. The Ugandan Constitution lays out certain basic rights of children "Every child has a right to know and be cared for by his parents a child has a right to a basic education No child shall be deprived of medical care, education or any other social and economic benefit." Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, enacted September 22, 1995, promulgated October 8, 1995. Chapter Four, Paragraph 17. The Government's duties with regard to children are elaborated in the Children Statute of 1996, which entered into force in August 1997. The statute defines a child as "a person below the age of eighteen years," (Part II, paragraph 3), and states that "whenever the state, a court, a local authority or any person determines any question with respect [to] the upbringing of a child . . . the child's welfare shall be the paramount consideration." (First Schedule, paragraph 1). Specifically, "A child shall have the right to a just call on any social amenities or other resources available in any situation of armed conflict or natural or man-made disasters." (First Schedule, Paragraph 4b). The constitution also declares that Ugandan children have "all the rights set out in the U.N. Convention on the rights of the child and the OAU Charter on the rights and welfare of the child. . . ." (First Schedule, paragraph 4c). The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, in Article 22, obligates states parties "to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts and [to] take all feasible measures to ensure the protection and care of children who are affected by armed conflicts. Such rules shall also apply to children in situations of internal armed conflicts, tension and strife."

10. Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, "Response to the Government of Uganda Country Report on the Implementation of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child," pp. iii, 12.

11. Human Rights Watch interview, Richard Oneko, Counselor, Gulu Save the Children Organization, Gulu, May 30, 1997.

12. Human Rights Watch interview, Gulu, May 30, 1997.

13. Robby Muhumuza, *The Gun Children of Gulu* (Uganda: World Vision, December 1995), pp. 9-10.

14. Ibid.

15. Human Rights Watch interview, World Vision's Gulu Traumatized Children of War Project, Gulu, May 30, 1997.

16. Human Rights Watch interview, Concerned Parents of Aboke, Lira, May 27, 1997.

17. Muhumuza, "Gun Children," p. 11.

18. Robby Muhumuza, *Girls Under Guns* (Uganda: World Vision, December, 1995), pp. 12-13.

19. Human Rights Watch interview, Kiryandongo, May 26, 1997.

20 The protections established by Common Article 3 are developed and supplemented by Protocol II to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, which applies to internal armed conflicts "which take place in the territory of a High Contracting Party between its armed forces and dissident armed forces or other organized armed groups which, under responsible command, exercise such control over a part of its territory as to enable them to carry out sustained and concerted military operations and to implement this Protocol." (Article 1, 1). Protocol II reiterates the fundamental guarantees laid out in Common Article 3, and adds a range of additional requirements for armed groups to whom the protocol applies. In circumstances in which Protocol II does not directly apply, it is generally seen as providing interpretive guidance on the implementation of Common Article 3, which establishes only minimum humanitarian standards. Of particular relevance here are several of the Protocol II provisions which relate specifically to children: for instance, Article 4(3)(c) states that "children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall neither be recruited in the armed forces or groups nor allowed to take part in hostilities." Article 4(3)(d) states that "the special protection provided in this Article to children who have not attained the age of fifteen years shall remain applicable to them if they take a direct part in hostilities despite the provisions of subparagraph (c) and are captured." Protocol II was ratified by Uganda in 1991.

21. Graca Machel, Statement to the Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly, November 8, 1996.

22. Human Rights Watch supports current efforts to raise to eighteen the age at which people can take part in armed conflicts. This effort is being spearheaded by the United Nations Working Group on a Draft Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. (The Draft Optional Protocol is included in the appendix to this report). For other Human Rights Watch reports dealing with child soldiers in various parts of the world, see, for instance, Human Rights Watch/Asia, "Burma: Children's Rights and the Rule of Law," *A Human Rights Watch Short Report*, vol.9, no.1(c), January 1997; Human Rights Watch/Africa & Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project, *Children of Sudan: Slaves, Street Children and Child Soldiers* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1995), and Human Rights Watch/ Africa & Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Project, *Easy Prey: Child Soldiers in Liberia* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1994).

23. UNICEF Background Situation Report, June 1997.

24. Gulu District Emergency Plan, May-June 1997. Since the total population of Gulu and Kitgum combined is roughly 700,000, UNICEF's figure seems more plausible. (*Uganda Districts Information Handbook*, 1995/96 Edition (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, Inc., 1995)

25. UNICEF Background Situation Report, June 1997.

26. Gulu District Emergency Plan.

27. This estimate was given to us by a number of different journalists, lawyers and doctors

28. 11 Years on, War Wracked Acholi only getting Worse," *The Monitor* (Kampala), May 25, 1997. Despite the extremely dangerous conditions in the protected camps, a number of people interviewed by Human Rights Watch charged that government soldiers often force unwilling civilians into the camps, warning them that if they remain in rural areas, the Uganda People's Defense Force will consider them to be rebel collaborators and may kill them. A number of our interviewees also complained that government soldiers do not provide the camps with adequate military protection, and do not respond quickly enough to reports of rebel activity. Since Human Rights Watch's mission to Uganda was primarily concerned with the abduction of children, we were unable to investigate these allegations or assess their validity.

29. There were 1457 deaths from malaria, 14 from measles, 1558 from diarrhea, 490 from "diarrhea with blood," sixteen from malnutrition and 480 from upper respiratory tract disorder like pneumonia. Gulu District Office Morbidity Data for Protected Camps, February 1997.

[Home](#)

The NGO Reports Database on Children's Rights includes all existing and public reports submitted to the Committee on the Convention of the Rights of the Child by NGOs and NGO Coalitions. The copyright of the reports are retained by the authors and use thereof must be duly acknowledged.

The database is the property of the Liaison Unit of the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and is managed by that unit. For further information or other enquiries please contact the Liaison Unit at dcj-ngo.group@pingnet.ch.
