

# *Ugandans to the rescue*



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## **Where are the missing Acholi Children?**

Two lorries full of Acholi Children were taken to an unknown location by the UPDF. This was revealed by one of those children to political leaders and elders of Soroti and Gulu districts on 25th September 2003 in Acholi Inn in Gulu.

The team from Soroti was led by vice Chairman LC5 Alok Darlington who brought some of children who were able to narrate their stories while in the hands of the UPDF. They told the leaders that in August 2003 at night two lorry trucks belonging to the UPDF came and collected unspecified number of children from Acholi sub region and took them to an unknown location. It is unclear for what purpose these children were abducted by the UPDF.

Observers believe, just like it was the case with the Major Kakooza Mutale school, the UPDF is after Acholi children to help it fight its wars in Acholi, Lango and Teso districts. Morale within the UPDF itself, with mounting daily casualties, is believed to be at an all time low. Others detect a more sinister motive. They believe these Acholi children, like the thousands of Acholi children believed to have been forcibly recruited (abducted) by the UPDF are required to form part of a pseudo LRA force. It is this pseudo LRA force has been behind the numerous atrocities committed in Acholiland, Lango and Teso areas. For now what can be said for certain is that, thousands of Acholi children remain unaccounted for, believed to be in UPDF custody or other ungazetted detention areas.

## **UPDF Sergeant walks free**

The High court of Uganda, which sat in Gulu, has released the UPDF Sgt Jimmy Opio who was in remand for murder. The court heard that two principal witnesses in the case were deceased. The sources said that the two were killed in unclear circumstances that were related to the case. A letter from the director of public prosecutions dated 8 September 2003 was read in court withdrawing the charge on the accused person.

Consequently the presiding Judge Augustine Kania set the accused free. Observers believe Sgt Opio was in all certainty a member of the KAP death squad. It is this group (KAP) which are in charge of the local offshoot known as Boo-Ketch (BK). The two organizations are responsible for the reign of terror gripping Gulu/Kitgum municipal areas for the last 6 years.

KAP/BK killings are political and the same group are also under license to create an atmosphere of terror such that political assassinations may look like common criminality. The trial of Sgt Opio would have brought to light sensitive details of the nature and operation of this group. That is why key witnesses had to be eliminated and thus bringing the trial to a halt.

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## **And the UPDF Killings continue...**

Okello Leo, 23 years, and a former student of Sir Samuel Baker School was killed by the UPDF in Unyama camp Paicho sub-county about 8 kms North East of Gulu town. This happened in August 2003 when the UPDF under the command of Major Jackson Kayanja ordered the killing of the student.

The UPDF on Saturday 10th October 2003 shot dead David Onek 25 years of age, from Awach sub-county in Gulu District. Sources from Awach said, Onek had a runny stomach, which made him frequent visits to the latrine in the night. The UPDF who happened to be in the vicinity shot him several times and he died instantly.

A similar incident happened in early September and October when the army killed four people from Pabbo Camp. The deceased were identified as Okot Justin 25, Too Bina 17, Aciro 6 and Okello within the camp. The UPDF shot dead a child and mother who was in labour pain on 25th September 2003. According to an eyewitness, Komaketch 19 and mother Abalo 39 were killed two kilometres from Gulu town on their way to Gulu hospital.

UPDF on 18th December 1993 killed nine civilians in the market in Atiak sub-county Gulu District. People had come from various parts of Gulu for an auction in Atiak trading centre. The army wanted to use the occasion to make various statements and speeches but there was a lot of noise. Lt Bbosa who was the commanding officer of the 7th Battalion gave an order to shoot if the people would not listen. Nine people died instantly with sixteen others sustaining bullet wounds.

On 23rd September 2003 the UPDF killed a suspected LRA sympathiser called Kinyera. The UPDF had arrested Kinyera on suspicion that he was a senior member of the LRA. Sources report that Kinyera was held captive for months in the hope that the UPDF would use him for intelligence purposes. Kinyera was tortured and killed in Awoo Lakwana sub-county, about 35 kms east of Gulu town. His relatives were informed he died in a friendly fire incident.

## **But the killing isn't one way...**

In October 2003, the LRA came to Pabbo camp and killed 4 members of the UPDF and injured more than a dozen. Such events made the army stop any movement in the camp during nighttime. Anybody found outside of their makeshift dwellings was shot on sight. Despite these measures, the LRA still comes to the camp regularly and makes away with supplies and people to carry the loot.

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In Anyatido, Pader district, the army had a small force of 80 to protect the camp. They would usually leave the camp and spend the night in the bushes fearing attack from the LRA and returning to camp in the mornings. One night on 22nd November 2002, they found the LRA had taken over their hideouts. In the ensuing firefight, the LRA killed 27 soldiers and injured at least 30 others.

Six UPDF soldiers in August 2003 were beheaded by the LRA in Laguti sub-county, Pader District. The soldiers were on foot patrol when they came across the LRA. The soldiers were captured and later beheaded. Their army uniform were taken.

Two UPDF soldiers were killed when they picked up a quarrel over a woman in Awere sub-county, Pader District in March 2003. Witnesses say, when the shooting started, soldiers from a neighbouring detach thought it was an LRA attack. Those soldiers opened fire indiscriminately killing their 2 colleagues, 5 civilians and injuring many others.

In another development, 4 UPDF soldiers were killed in October 2003 by a group of LRA fighters believed to be under Vincent Otti in Pacilo parish Atiak sub-county in Gulu district. The soldiers were on foot patrol when they landed into an ambush, which killed 4, and several went with bullet wounds. It is believed 3 UPDF soldiers were also taken alive by the LRA.

### **The life of a child is sooo cheap...**

Thanks to testimonies of people who were with Lt. Gen. Museveni in the bush, a favored method for recruitment into the NRA was for Lt. Gen. Museveni's rebels to kill senior members of a family, whilst purporting to be government soldiers. The children of the deceased family were taken into the bush by the rebel NRA (now called the UPDF).

In the bush, the children were indoctrinated into thinking the gun was their "mother and father". As part of the initiation process the children were made to take part in the brutal killings of captured government soldiers or UPC party activists. This practice of the NRA/UPDF in treating a child's life so cheaply in theatres of war has followed it wherever it has been. Be it in Luwero, Rwanda, DRC, Sudan and most certainly in Northern Uganda.

In August 2003 twenty five children were killed by the UPDF in Omot, Pader district. The children were a group set free by the LRA. Their parents having been retained by the LRA to carry looted foodstuff to a nearby LRA base. The UPDF angry at its lack of success against the LRA, ordered armored vehicles to turn fire on the Children. The children were completely unarmed and posed no threat whatsoever to the UPDF. The Ugandan press were later told that the 25 children died in crossfire with the LRA. Witnesses however tell of a cold blooded massacre.

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