

Ghosts of Christmas Past. Protecting Civilians from the LRA

Oxfam International, Refugees International and 17 other NGOs

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Almost daily, a small band of rebels known as the Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, kills, abducts and attacks people across a vast area of central Africa. The LRA has become the most deadly militia in Democratic Republic of Congo, with Christmas time over the past two years marked by appalling massacres. Since 2008, more than 400,000 people have fled their homes after the LRA rampaged across remote villages in Sudan, Central African Republic and DR Congo. Attacks came in retaliation to an ill-planned military offensive against the militia by regional armies. The African Union and US government have recently announced initiatives to address the threat posed by the LRA. Renewed attention is welcome and vitally needed, but international and regional governments must learn the lessons of the past and ensure that future efforts provide effective security for local people. Women and men must be able to tend to their fields, children go to school and families sleep in their homes free from fear.

Summary

On Christmas Eve 2008 and over the following three weeks, 865 women, men and children were savagely beaten to death and hundreds more abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in a remote corner in the north-east of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and in southern Sudan. The attack was a murderous backlash in response to Operation "Lightning Thunder", a military offensive launched some 10 days before against the LRA by Uganda, DRC and southern Sudan. Less than a year later, between 14 and 17 December 2009, LRA commanders oversaw the killing of more than 300 people, again shattering communities in a remote corner of northern DRC. Today the LRA continues to attack marginalised communities in Sudan, Central African Republic (CAR), and DRC almost four times a week. The militia now operates across an area 20 times bigger than it did before the "Lightning Thunder" offensive. Since September 2008, the LRA has killed more than 2,300 people and abducted more than 3,000. It has raped women and forced abducted children to commit horrific crimes. Over 400,000 people have fled from their homes for fear of attack, 260,000 of them in DRC. New figures show that over the last two years the LRA has become the most deadly militia in DRC.¹ In southern Sudan, a further 42,400 people have fled from LRA violence this year alone – one fifth of all those displaced in 2010. In all, an estimated 87,800 southern Sudanese have fled their homes as a result of LRA attacks since late 2008.² In southeast CAR, the LRA displaced at least 20,000 people in the first three months of 2010. The acute suffering and mass population displacement the LRA has generated across international borders is undermining stability in an already fragile region, where southern Sudan is preparing to hold a landmark referendum on secession in early 2011 (...)

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