

**The conflict in Uganda raged for more than twenty years across northern Uganda killing tens of thousands and displacing millions of people.**

Background to the conflict:

In January 1986, Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army overthrew the Acholi-led government in Uganda. Museveni's government faced opposition from various groups, including the Holy Spirit Movement led by Alice Auma (also known as Alice Lakwena). Alice Lakwena claimed to be a spiritual medium and initially fought against the Ugandan government but was soon defeated. Following her defeat, a new rebel group emerged under the leadership of Joseph Kony, who had served as a mid-level commander in the Holy Spirit Movement. This new group, known as the Lord's Resistance Army, drew on Lakwena's religious and spiritual ideologies. Like Alice Lakwena, Joseph Kony also claimed to communicate with spirits to fight the Ugandan army and his goals were to overthrow Museveni's government and then rule Uganda with a theocracy based on his interpretation of the Ten Commandments. In this quest, the LRA became the rebel group that operated in Northern Uganda and neighboring countries, primarily during the late 1980s and early 2000s.

Between 1987 and 1994, the LRA, under Kony's command, conducted brutal attacks on civilians in villages and towns and their signature tactics included mutilation, rape, and the abduction of children. Thousands of children were abducted during the war and forcibly recruited as soldiers, porters, or sex slaves within the LRA. These abducted children, known as "The Invisible Children," were subjected to intense indoctrination and often forced to commit acts of violence against their own communities as a way to prevent them from coming back home to their loved ones.

Between 1994 and 2006 the LRA insurgency increased in Northern Uganda. One of the first major attacks was in St. Mary's College in the northern Ugandan town of Aboke where they abducted 139 girls between the ages of 13 and 16. Like many other abducted girls, the Aboke girls were given as wives to LRA commanders. The increased attacks in the region forced millions of people in Northern Uganda into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps to try and shield them from the LRA. The abduction of the "Aboke girls" was one of the incidents that brought what was happening in northern Uganda and LRA abductions to the attention of the international community.

The conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan government lasted for over two decades, causing immense suffering and displacement for the people of Northern Uganda. The Ugandan military, with support from regional and international partners, launched multiple offensives to combat the LRA. Efforts were made to rescue and rehabilitate abducted children and encourage LRA fighters to surrender. The UN estimates that over 380,000 people have also been displaced across Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan as a result of LRA activity in the region.

By December 2003, Uganda referred the situation in the north to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In July 2004, the ICC opened an investigation in Uganda. In 2005, the first arrest warrants issued by the ICC were for Joseph Kony and a handful of his top commanders, 10 years later in 2015, one of the top commanders wanted by the ICC, Dominic Ongwen surrendered in the Central African Republic. To this day, only Dominic Ongwen, himself a former abducted child soldier, has been presented for trial before the ICC. No one else has faced justice for crimes allegedly committed by the LRA in Northern Uganda. Other perpetrators, including Joseph Kony, remain at large and victims have been left without any sense of justice.

The trial of Dominic Ongwen opened in The Hague in 2016. On February 4, 2021 judges at the ICC found Dominic Ongwen guilty of 61 out of 70 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. He was later sentenced to 25 years of imprisonment.

In recent years, the LRA's activities have significantly diminished. Most of its leaders have been killed or captured, and the group's presence has largely been reduced to sporadic attacks in neighbouring countries like the DRC, South Sudan, and CAR. However, the scars left by the LRA's reign of terror continue to haunt communities in Northern Uganda to this day, requiring ongoing efforts for justice, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and development.