

**Testimony of U.S. Agency for International Development
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Subcommittee on African Affairs
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“Countering the Lord’s Resistance Army”

Good morning Chairman Coons, Ranking Member Isakson, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today.

For over two decades, the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) terrorized communities across huge swaths of northern Uganda, abducting civilians and forcing children to become soldiers. The LRA was finally driven out of Uganda in 2006, and since then, northern Uganda has undergone a transformation that is tangible. People can move freely, banks and stores are open, and fields are being cultivated. Poverty declined from 60.7 percent in 2005 to 46.2 percent in 2010, and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that 95 percent of the 1.8 million Ugandans displaced by the conflict have returned to their homes.

Today the LRA’s numbers are significantly reduced, but it continues to commit atrocities throughout large parts of central Africa—the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Republic of South Sudan. It is an area the size of California, and it is harsh, remote, and underdeveloped. Reported LRA attacks and abductions have increased in the first quarter of 2012—particularly in the DRC—and the LRA’s violence has now displaced more than 445,000 people.

As the threat of the LRA shifted from northern Uganda to CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan, USAID accordingly adjusted its response to address humanitarian needs and supplement ongoing efforts by regional governments and the United Nations to increase the protection of civilians in these areas. In LRA-affected populations in CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan, the United States’ life-saving humanitarian assistance, health services, food aid, civilian protection, and economic recovery totaled more than \$18 million in FY 2011.

USAID remains committed to promoting stability and economic development in northern Uganda while also addressing the immediate needs of communities in LRA-affected parts of CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan—though insecurity presents a significant challenge to providing humanitarian assistance and promoting development in these areas.

USAID aims to provide at least 240,000 people with humanitarian assistance in LRA-affected parts of CAR, the DRC and South Sudan, and these programs are having a significant impact on women and children. USAID is addressing the psychosocial needs of children who have either been abducted or displaced by the LRA by supporting the participation of nearly 1,000 children in play therapy and life skills training. In CAR, DRC, and South Sudan, USAID supports protection for LRA-affected children through reunification and reintegration of separated and

formerly abducted children into their families and communities. In CAR, one of our grantees supports protection activities for LRA-affected individuals, including gender-based violence sensitization and psychosocial support for displaced and formerly abducted children. In the Haut Uélé District of the DRC, USAID is providing assistance to the Kpezu Women's Tailors Association to purchase sewing machines, fabric, and basic accessories. Made up primarily of women who are the sole providers for themselves and their children, the women of the association can now earn a living through tailoring and producing clothing for clients in and around the community. Kpezu's activities also include training young women who have not had the opportunity to attend school in sewing and basic literacy.

The protection of civilians continues to be central to the overall U.S. Government strategy to help counter the LRA. Because the LRA preys on vulnerable communities, we are supporting the efforts of regional governments and nongovernmental organizations to reduce the vulnerability of those communities.

In LRA-affected areas of the DRC, the United States is incorporating high-frequency radios into community-based protection programs to provide early warnings to conflict and violence. Although implementation of this work has been delayed by severe logistical challenges, including undependable air service, negligible road and communication infrastructure, and acute insecurity, the project is progressing. USAID has engaged 24 communities based on their level of insecurity, willingness to take part in the project, and gaps in coverage with other similar programs. All 24 communities have formed local protection committees that are identifying security threats and assessing what actions they can take to mitigate the threats. Each committee consists of around 15 members, including an average of four to six women and representation from displaced populations and youth. USAID is assisting them in developing protection plans tailored to specific needs of their communities and will provide some funding to support priority activities within the plans. For example, a committee in Yassa formed in February 2012 reported that the police had been abusive toward the population, stealing from and harassing them. Since the committee began to work to improve relations between community members, the police, and the DRC Armed Forces, the police have significantly improved their behavior and are now working closely with the community to address their concerns. Once these community protection plans are in place, the use of high-frequency radios will reinforce and extend the existing network of radios managed by the Catholic Church as an early warning network.

Additionally, USAID is piloting an innovative cell phone tower project that aims to diversify the communications options available for use in early warning systems and humanitarian efforts. USAID funding partially supports the construction of four low-cost base transmission stations in strategic towns in Haut and Bas Uélé. Each of the four towers will provide at least 20 square kilometers of cell phone connectivity to 1,200 mobile phone users living in areas previously lacking coverage. Although the DRC's main mobile network operators have the potential to expand their operations, their unfamiliarity with the technology has precluded any investment. Despite these challenges, Vodacom accepted the challenge and expects the towers to be operational by fall 2012.

The benefits will be well worth the investment. Vodacom recently sent a team to Ango to begin to educate the community about the project; the residents were excited and believe it will

significantly reduce their isolation. Additionally, this project will be a model for how to introduce low-cost cell phone coverage to remote areas located outside of cellular networks. Mobile companies do not typically invest in remote areas because of the difficulty in earning a profit. In this project the low-cost, light-weight AltoPod “stations” replace large, costly towers and are easier to transport into areas which are logistically difficult to access. In terms of long-term development impact and innovation, this pilot project could catalyze additional private-sector investment in rural areas by demonstrating the technical and economic viability to mobile network operators.

USAID has been heavily engaged in LRA-affected areas of Uganda since the late 1980s, and our intervention evolved over the years to reflect changing needs and priorities. With the LRA’s departure, we have had significant success in helping affected communities in Uganda make the transition from conflict to relief to recovery to development.

As the conflict in northern Uganda first began to exact severe economic losses, cause mass displacement, and weaken governance and social structures in Uganda, USAID focused on providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the conflict. Between 1997 and 2009, USAID provided more than \$436 million in humanitarian assistance to Uganda, including \$370 million in food aid. Food, health services, camp management, and other aid provided by the American people saved lives and helped communities survive the worst of the conflict.

In 2006, when the LRA was finally driven from northern Uganda, we shifted our programs from relief to recovery. We helped internally displaced persons return to their homes and re-establish their livelihoods. Investments in seed distribution programs improved food security, the rehabilitation of water points reduced health risk, and road repairs opened up access to markets, supporting local economies. As a result of these investments, in 2009, we were able to shift our programs in northern Uganda to focus on long-term development.

USAID’s Northern Uganda Transition Initiative was a critical step in this evolution. This 2008-11, \$23-million flagship program renovated public service buildings throughout war-affected regions, including government office buildings, schools and teacher houses, health clinics and health clinic housing, markets, boreholes, and police and justice facilities.

In Agago district, physical additions to congested court and police buildings strengthened the rule of law by allowing courts to process more cases. As a result of USAID’s infrastructure support, in 2011, the Kiryandongo court received 10-15 cases a day, as opposed to one or two cases before the court construction. Officials used to send cases to Masindi—over 70 kilometers away—and the complainant was forced to pay for the travel of the accused, police officers, and witnesses. The cost forced many people to opt to settle cases, but now that the facility has facilitated speedy trials, more cases are being reported, and witnesses even come willingly.

In addition, USAID worked with media, especially radio stations, to communicate correct and timely information on issues such as public services and land rights to returnees in northern Uganda and to support traditional and cultural reconciliation processes, which helped communities heal from the wounds of war. Radio messages on amnesty helped the return of

former combatants and the disarming of civilians; in fact, in Kitgum and Pader districts, guns were found surrendered after these messages had aired.

At a time of tremendous risk and uncertainty, the initiative quickly became a cornerstone of USAID's strategy in northern Uganda and was highly valued by Ugandan partners for its speed, flexibility, and impact. By partnering directly with government departments and offices, the initiative not only helped communities begin to rebuild, but also increased the visibility of, and confidence in, all levels of government. At the same time, local officials appreciated how the new infrastructure, especially markets, increased their revenue, making them less dependent on allocations from the district government and giving them more flexibility in development planning. This effort sent a clear message that peace had returned to the region and the Government of Uganda was now at the helm of the reconstruction process.

In northern Uganda, USAID's strategy is now woven into the Government of Uganda's Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan, which has ushered in the return of stability to the region. USAID has helped nurture this progress by providing medical care and counseling to abductees, promoting reconstruction, supporting transitional justice and reconciliation, increasing opportunities for ex-combatants, and addressing key issues such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, water, and sanitation. In addition, USAID is helping northern Uganda to redevelop its farms; in 2010, agricultural training and projects helped increase the region's crop sales by more than \$7 million. USAID's unique Northern Uganda Development of Enhanced Local Governance, Infrastructure, and Livelihoods program enables local governments to expand basic services to areas with ex-combatants, abductees, and returnees, while at the same time infusing capital into the recovering economy by using labor-intensive methods of construction. In FY 2011, this program supported the construction of 70 boreholes, six schools with latrines and teacher housing, and contracts for 19 farm-to-market roads in four districts.

Our efforts in northern Uganda demonstrate that development can flourish once security has been assured. However, the north remains the poorest region in the country. Underlying grievances over land rights, the discovery of oil, poor political processes, and ethnic divisions have the potential to slow development and raise tensions. Recognizing these challenges, USAID continues to take a conflict-sensitive approach. We continue to dedicate resources to address some of the remaining drivers of conflict and to build local government capacity to deliver services. USAID's new Supporting Access to Justice, Fostering Equity and Peace program will continue our efforts while also proactively addressing emerging development issues and sources of tension, such as land disputes. Our field office in Gulu, northern Uganda, not only remains open, but is expanding its staff numbers.

The United States is committed to continuing its long-term support to the people of central Africa in their efforts to respond to the threats of the LRA. Although we have made progress in addressing humanitarian assistance needs and increasing the protection of civilians in LRA-affected areas, critical gaps remain in CAR and parts of the DRC and South Sudan. USAID and the State Department are working together to determine how best to utilize the \$5 million in 2012 Economic Support Funds to address gaps in the region. We have determined that programming will focus on the LRA-affected areas of CAR, where the greatest gaps remain, although some funds may be programmed in the DRC and South Sudan. USAID's efforts in

LRA-affected areas in the region and northern Uganda are closely coordinated with the Departments of State and Defense, as well as other donors, such as the European Union and the United Kingdom, regional governments, and civil society on the ground, to make this a truly concerted push to help communities finally begin to rebuild and recover.

Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today on this critical issue, and I welcome any questions you might have.