

February 2, 2011

President Barack H. Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

On November 24, 2010 you released to Congress your “Strategy to Support the Disarmament of the Lord’s Resistance Army,” in fulfillment of the *LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009*. We applaud your historic leadership and attention to this issue, and the efforts made by your Administration to develop this strategy. It provides a comprehensive framework to guide policy responses moving forward, and, if implemented robustly in concert with regional and international actors, it can play a critical role in ending one of Africa’s longest-running and most violent crises.

However, we are concerned that the current vision and will for implementation may fall dramatically short of what is required to realize the full potential of the strategy and permanently end LRA atrocities. To help ensure that this strategy results in concrete progress towards a more secure and prosperous future for communities affected by the LRA, four groups have collaborated to develop a “report card” to evaluate your Administration’s implementation efforts moving forward. Please find enclosed Issue #1 of this report card, which grades the content and initial rollout of the strategy. Report cards will be released three times per year and will focus on the concrete measures your Administration takes to achieve the goals outlined in the strategy.

As this first report card outlines, we applaud the comprehensive scope of the four strategic objectives outlined in your strategy to address current LRA violence, as well as the annex concerning comprehensive reconstruction and transitional justice in northern Uganda. In this letter we would like to highlight four steps we believe are especially crucial to the overall success of the strategy but are deeply concerned were not given adequate attention in the strategy: taking immediate steps to improve regional efforts to protect civilians; finding viable alternatives to the Ugandan military in apprehending or removing from the battlefield senior LRA commanders; expanding efforts to demobilize Ugandan LRA commanders; and dedicating significant new staff, senior leadership, and funding to implement the strategy.

**Take immediate steps to improve regional efforts to protect civilians**

Mr. President, we applaud the emphasis placed on Strategic Objective #1, “Increase Protection of Civilians,” in your LRA strategy. However, as the “C” grade for this category of the report card indicates, we are concerned that your strategy does not place adequate emphasis on achieving rapid progress in protecting civilians vulnerable to LRA attacks. Immediate action by the U.S., in concert with regional and international actors, is needed to give credibility to the broad commitments outlined in the strategy. The hallmark brutality of LRA attacks and their targeting of women and children place additional urgency on the need for action. Since September 2008, LRA units have killed more than 2,300 civilians, displaced 400,000, and abducted more than 3,000

others, including hundreds of children, in central Africa. In 2010 alone, LRA rebels conducted more than four deadly attacks on civilians every week.

A first priority should be ensuring that MONUSCO and UNMIS deploy additional peacekeepers and air mobility assets in LRA-affected areas and take more proactive measures to protect communities at risk of LRA attack. MONUSCO should expand on recent deployments in Bas Uele district, and ensure that its troops are more active in doing patrols along roads and in remote areas most vulnerable to LRA raids. U.S. and international diplomats must also pressure the governments of Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic (CAR), and Southern Sudan to invest more resources and political will in protecting people under attack from the LRA, which targets people living in remote and politically marginalized regions. This must include ensuring national military forces have the capacity and will to protect civilians from LRA attacks and are held accountable for abuses against local populations. Your Administration should also work with the UN and African Union to improve coordination between national military and peacekeeping forces, including by supporting the joint coordination cell in Dungu, and ensuring that the security vacuum in southeastern CAR is filled.

We also urge you to accelerate current efforts to expand access to telecommunications and road networks in LRA-affected areas of northern Congo and eastern CAR, highlighted in your strategy as a “priority action.” The U.S. and other international donors should fund the construction of telecommunications and road infrastructures and partner with local communities and national governments to improve community early warning mechanisms and the response time of civilian protection forces to threats of LRA attack.

#### **Find viable alternatives to the Ugandan military**

Apprehending or removing Joseph Kony and other senior LRA commanders remains a critical component of any strategy to permanently end LRA violence and could enhance broader civilian protection efforts. Doing so would deliver a decisive and possibly fatal blow to the rebel movement’s cohesion and would also help achieve justice for the countless victims and survivors of LRA violence. Your LRA strategy released in November 2010 commits to continue and increase support to the Ugandan military to accomplish this task, and our deep concerns about the effectiveness of this strategy explains the “C” grade we give to your strategy on stopping senior LRA commanders. Though support to the Ugandan military may represent the best opportunity to apprehend senior commanders in the short term, a growing body of evidence indicates that the Ugandan military is unable to do so. U.S. leadership is urgently needed to find viable alternatives to the current strategy and level of support if efforts to apprehend senior LRA commanders or remove them from the battlefield are to succeed.

Mr. President, we are greatly concerned about the effectiveness, human rights implications, and sustainability of a strategy that relies exclusively on the Ugandan military to implement a strategy to apprehend senior LRA commanders. Since the launch of U.S.-supported, Ugandan-led military operations against the LRA in December 2008, LRA commanders and units have dispersed across northern Congo, eastern Central African Republic, Southern Sudan, and southern Darfur. Ugandan military efforts in these regions have succeeded in capturing or killing several senior LRA commanders and protecting some towns from LRA attacks. But 25 months after the launch of Operation Lightning Thunder, the LRA’s command structure remains largely intact and Ugandan and

other regional forces have failed to protect a vast majority of civilians in LRA-affected areas from frequent and brutal rebel attacks.

Despite their mostly professional conduct in recent operations against the LRA, continued human rights abuses by Ugandan military and security forces within Uganda raise concerns about continued U.S. support to these operations. These abuses highlight the need to condition this support on the Ugandan military improving its human rights record and holding perpetrators of human rights abuses accountable. Furthermore, statements by civil society leaders in areas currently affected by the LRA indicate that some are growing increasingly uncomfortable with the prolonged deployment of the Ugandan military in their communities. Ugandan military commitments at home and to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) also bring the sustainability of its operations against the LRA into serious question.

We strongly urge you to work with international and regional partners to explore viable alternatives to apprehending or removing senior LRA commanders from the battlefield and bringing them to justice, especially commanders indicted by the International Criminal Court. Your Administration should engage with the African Union, UN Security Council, France and other regional and international partners to seek a multilateral consensus and more effective forces, supported by greater intelligence and rapid response capacity, to improve on current efforts to pursue LRA commanders. These initiatives should be integrated with robust strategies to protect civilians from reprisal attacks that result from military operations. Greater US engagement requires direct leadership by senior officials at the White House, State Department, and U.S. Mission to the UN.

U.S. diplomats must also continue to make clear to the Government of Sudan (GoS) that it neither resupply the LRA nor give it safe haven, especially given reports that LRA commanders have traveled to southern Darfur and made contact with Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) representatives there. In particular, the GoS should not be removed from the State Sponsors of Terrorism List unless the U.S. can certify it has not supplied or given safe haven to the LRA in recent months.

#### **Expand efforts to demobilize Ugandan LRA commanders**

We also urge you to invest new funding and diplomatic efforts to reinvigorate regional efforts to encourage mid-level and senior Ugandan LRA commanders to defect from the rebel group. We recognize your strategy's commitment to improve broader efforts to encourage defections from the LRA and help escapees reintegrate, for which we gave a "B" grade, and encourage rapid progress on implementing this objective. The U.S. should increase funding for expanding radio networks and programming to encourage defections, as well as reintegration initiatives for escapees.

In addition, more attention is needed on securing the defection of LRA commanders in the coming months. Evidence suggests that the LRA has not promoted recent abductees to a high rank, meaning the core group of Ugandan commanders in the LRA is critical to its survival. Each one of these commanders who surrenders reduces the rebel group's fighting capacity and ability to abduct more children. The U.S. should fund and support efforts to establish contact with Ugandan LRA commanders, including by expanding DDR radio programming, to encourage them to defect. The defection of Ugandan LRA commanders, particularly those isolated from LRA leaders indicted by the ICC, can play a critical role in weakening the LRA's internal cohesion and capacity to attack civilians. The U.S. should also increase the strength of "pull" factors encouraging commanders to defect by

pressuring the Ugandan government to ensure rapid progress on reconstructing war-affected communities in northern Uganda and establish clear legal guidelines and a precedent for granting amnesty and rehabilitating LRA commanders who defect.

**Dedicate significant new staff, senior leadership and funding to implement the strategy**

Responding to the LRA crisis in central Africa represents a daunting challenge for U.S. officials. The LRA's fragmentation across several countries in central Africa means that responsibility for addressing it is diffused throughout the U.S. government's Africa foreign policy architecture. Historically, getting sufficient high-level diplomatic engagement and allocation of resources to address the crisis has been hampered by other foreign policy priorities, including broader civil conflicts in each affected country and U.S. national security interests in the region.

We appreciate the broad commitment outlined in the strategy for "collaborative, integrated, and cross-cutting" interagency efforts to address the crisis. Effectively implementing your LRA strategy will require your Administration to designate a senior official and staff clearly responsible for putting the strategy into action, as well as the dedication of significant new financial and material resources to the issue. We were greatly disappointed that your LRA strategy contained neither a commitment to designate such an official and staff to the crisis, nor a dedication of significant new resources to the crisis, resulting in our report card's grade of "D" on this subject. We are concerned that unless you act to do so in the coming months this strategy will fail to achieve concrete progress on its objectives.

We urge you to ensure your Administration dedicates significantly more financial resources to implementing the LRA strategy than has been allocated to this issue in the past, which includes \$23 million in support to Ugandan military operations since December 2008 and \$35 million in emergency assistance in fiscal year 2010. Doing so will no doubt require your Administration to find additional funds within existing spending accounts. You should also request significant new funds in specific line items of the fiscal year 2013 budget proposal and other future budget proposals to Congress to send a clear message that implementing your LRA strategy is a priority for your Administration.

Mr. President, we also specifically urge you to oversee the designation of a Great Lakes envoy that reports to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and is tasked with ensuring interagency coordination in implementing the strategy. Such a diplomat should have a mandate to address LRA violence as well as insecurity in the broader Great Lakes region and travel frequently to the region. This diplomat should also have several full-time staff, including staff dedicated specifically to the LRA crisis. The work of this diplomat should be strengthened by regular engagement between foreign policy officials across different U.S. government agencies at both the working staff level and the more senior Deputies Committee or Principals Committee level, including the establishment of a point person at the Deputies Committee or Principals Committee level. Greater leadership by such senior officials is needed to move U.S. policy responses beyond previous efforts that have failed to effectively stop senior LRA commanders and protect innocent civilians from violence.

Mr. President, we share the vision for the future you outlined in your strategy: "People in central Africa [are] free from threat of LRA violence and have the freedom to pursue their livelihoods." Historic engagement by Congress and the American public has created an unprecedented mandate

for your Administration to invest the political will and resources necessary to realize this vision. We urge you to fully take advantage of this opportunity to do so, and thank you and your Administration for your efforts to date.

Sincerely,

**RESOLVE**



**INVISIBLE  
CHILDREN**

Cc:

Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State

Dr. Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense

Thomas Donilon, National Security Advisor

Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator, USAID

Denis McDonough, Deputy National Security Adviser

Samantha Power, Senior Director and Special Assistant for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights

Maria Otero, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs

Ambassador Johnnie Carson, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

Michelle Gavin, Senior Director for Africa, National Security Staff

Karl Wycoff, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs

Vicki Huddleston, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa, Office of the Secretary of Defense