

## **Human Rights, Humanitarian, and Faith-Based Groups Back Landmark U.S. Legislation to Help Protect Civilians from the Lord's Resistance Army**

*(Washington, D.C. 21 May 2009)* – The introduction of legislation in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives earlier this week to commit the United States to comprehensive efforts to help civilians threatened by one of the world's longest-running and brutal insurgencies is a crucial step forward for U.S. policy in the region, a coalition of twenty-two human rights, humanitarian, and faith-based groups said today.

If passed, the Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act would require the Obama Administration to develop a regional strategy to protect civilians in central Africa from attacks by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and enforce the rule of law and ensure full humanitarian access in LRA-affected areas. The Act additionally commits the United States to increase support to economic recovery and transitional justice efforts in Uganda. The coalition of supporting organizations includes groups in Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and Uganda, where communities are currently threatened by the LRA.

"We continue to live in fear of LRA attacks and of our children being abducted," said Father Benoît Kinalegu of the Dungu/Doruma Justice and Peace Commission in DR Congo. "We are praying for help and protection and hope U.S. lawmakers will hear our cries."

Senators Russ Feingold (D-WI) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Representatives Jim McGovern (D-MA), Brad Miller (D-NC), and Ed Royce (R-CA) introduced the bill. It affirms the need for U.S. leadership to help bring an end to atrocities by the Lord's Resistance Army and to advance long-term recovery in the region.

"The LRA has long posed a terrible threat to civilians," said Georgette Gagnon, Africa Director at Human Rights Watch. "This bill will help the US government support for comprehensive multilateral efforts to protect civilians in LRA-affected areas and to apprehend or otherwise remove the group's leader, Joseph Kony, and his top commanders from the battlefield."

For more than twenty years, northern Ugandans were caught in a war between the Ugandan military and the rebel group. The violence killed thousands of civilians and displaced nearly two million people. Kony and his top commanders sustain their ranks by abducting civilians, including children, to use as soldiers and sexual slaves. Though the rebel group ended attacks in northern Uganda in 2006, it moved its bases to the northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo and has committed acts of violence against civilians in Congo, Sudan, and the Central African Republic. In December 2008, Sudan, Uganda and Congo began a joint military offensive, "Operation Lightning Thunder," against the rebel group, with backing from the United States. As a result, the Lord's Resistance Army has dispersed into multiple smaller groups and has brutally murdered more than 1,000 civilians and abducted over 400 people, mostly children.

"Given the catalytic involvement of the U.S. military in Operation Lightning Thunder—and the horrific aftermath of this operation—the U.S. government now has a responsibility to help end the threat posed by Joseph Kony once and for all," said John Prendergast, Co-Founder of the Enough Project. "One man should not be allowed to terrorize millions of people in four Central African countries. The bill is a crucial first step in galvanizing immediate and effective U.S. action."

The legislation also aims to help secure a lasting peace in Uganda by supporting measures to assist war-affected communities in northern Uganda and to help resolve longstanding divisions between communities in Uganda's north and south. It authorizes increased funding for recovery efforts in northern Uganda, with a particular focus on supporting transitional justice and reconciliation. It also calls on the Ugandan government to reinvestigate its commitment to a transparent and accountable reconstruction process in war-affected areas.

"Smart investment in long-term recovery is essential if the people of northern Uganda are to live with peace and dignity," said Annalise Romoser, Lutheran World Relief Associate Director for Advocacy. "Transitional justice initiatives and the development of basic infrastructure such as food and water systems are crucial elements to lasting peace and reconciliation in Uganda. Such investment from the United States will support the inspiring efforts of northern Ugandans to return home and rebuild after decades of war and displacement."

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**Supporting organizations include:**

*Human Rights Watch*  
*Enough Project*  
*Resolve Uganda*  
*International Rescue Committee*  
*Invisible Children*  
*Refugees International*  
*AVSI*  
*Global Action for Children*  
*Lutheran World Relief*  
*United States Fund for UNICEF*  
*Women's Refugee Commission*  
*Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*  
*Genocide Intervention Network*  
*Refugee Law Project, Uganda*  
*Dungu/Doruma Justice and Peace Commission, Democratic Republic of Congo*  
*Azande Community World-wide Organisation, UK-South Sudan*  
*Mbomu Charitable Organization, Sudan*  
*Ibba Charitable Organization, South Sudan*  
*Azande Women Organization, South Sudan*  
*Hope Sudan Organization, South Sudan*  
*Eso Development Organization, South Sudan*  
*Nabanga Development Agency, South Sudan*  
*Dungu/Doruma Justice and Peace Commission, Democratic Republic of Congo*  
*Azande Community World-wide Organisation, UK-South Sudan*  
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