



CEWARN Situation Brief: Uganda

Current Situation following Clashes between UPDF and Jie Warriors in Kotido District

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Introduction

This report provides a brief on the current situation in Kotido district of Uganda following the clashes between the Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) and the Jie warriors. It also gives a general picture about the on ongoing forceful disarmament. This report contributes to one of the aims of the CEWARN Briefs: to provide readers with an overview of developments in the areas of reporting.

Background

The Government of Uganda undertook a disarmament exercise during 2001 – 2002 which involved voluntary and forceful phases. The disarmament was not entirely successful because the abrupt withdrawal of the UPDF from Karamoja and because of the upsurge of the incursions by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels. The result was heightened internal raiding by sections of the Karamojong that had not been fully disarmed – leading to re-armament by those who had either surrendered their guns or who had them removed from them forcefully. Armed pastoral groups from neighboring Kenya, mainly the Pokot and Turkana warriors, and the Toposa and Didinga from Sudan also intensified their incursions into Karamoja. By the end of 2002, there was total mayhem in the entire region, as those who had disarmed quickly re-armed and engaged in raids and counter raids.

His Excellency the President of Uganda then re-launched the Karamoja disarmament exercise in Moroto on October 28, 2004. There was a renewed commitment by government to long term disarmament and development in the region. The Office of the Prime Minister in consultation with other stakeholders subsequently developed the Karamoja Integrated Disarmament and Development Programme (KIDDP), which was released in June 2005. Through community mobilization, some arms and ammunitions were voluntarily surrendered to designated reception centers as part of the implementation of the KIDDP that emphasizes voluntary disarmament. However, at the same time, the UPDF intensified military operations to forcefully disarm the Karimojong. Accusations of human rights abuses during the cordon and search operation used by the UPDF involving rounding up warriors and detaining them until their relatives hand in guns to regain their freedom led to suspension of the participation of some Development Partners. This has not deterred the UPDF and cordon and search operations continue.

Current Situation

On Sunday 11th February 2007, the UPDF conducted an operation at Kalojuka village in Lokitelaebu, parish, Kotido sub-county, Jie county, Kotido district. In the process, a clash occurred between the warriors and the UPDF and according to information from the Field Monitor, over forty (40) people, most of them children and the elderly, were killed. Lokwang Losiyapus was injured during the clashes and is reported to be receiving treatment at Matany hospital. Also over twenty (20) people were arrested by the army and were taken to the army barracks at Lokomebu for detention.

As a result of the operation, the kraals that had camped near the villages at *Cuc* grazing areas were shifted to a new location about five kilometers away toward Kaputh river south west of the villages adjacent to the UPDF barracks and next to the old Abim road. According to *The New Vision* newspaper of February 15, 2007, warriors staged ambushes on the Abim-Kotido road on Tuesday 13th February 2007 killing 5 travelers and injuring another 5. Most of the travelers are said to have been cattle traders. Both

the Field Monitor and the New Vision newspaper report that business was paralyzed in Kotido town for sometime as the army blocked all traffic from going to the area during the operations.

The UPDF pursued the warriors to their new site where more fighting ensued. The 3rd Division Spokesman is quoted in the same *The New Vision* newspaper as saying that fifty two (52) warriors and four (4) soldiers were killed in two days of running battles, and according to him, the operation that involved the use of air force, infantry vehicles, and infantry troops happened in a place where there were “no children, no women, and no old people but strictly warriors”. The army also admitted to have confiscated over some 2,000 head of cattle.

Reports received from the Field Monitor from the neighboring Kaabong district also indicate that on 21st February 2007, the Kaabong-Kotido road was also closed to travelers because of the general insecurity situation as the Jie warriors were reported to have been on rampage.

It should be recalled that it was in the same Kotido district that that 22 soldiers including their battalion commander, Major Kham Rwanshande, were killed on October 29, 2006 plus over 70 warriors during clashes between the UPDF and the warriors that followed.

Implications

If the disarmament continues to be military operations only, the likely scenario will be continued clashes between the army and the warriors leading to loss of life on both sides and the innocent women and children as the warriors continue to rearm as has been the case with all past disarmament attempts. The involvement of other stakeholders including the local politicians, other line Ministries and Government departments, and civil society organizations in mobilization and sensitization is critical to the success of the disarmament exercise. The removal of the gun should not be seen as an end in itself but should be accompanied with provision of livelihood alternatives and new ideas that will blunt the need for the gun.

Recommendations

- CEWERU should push for Government to provide adequate protection for humans and livestock so as to gain confidence of the warriors on the disarmament exercise;
- CEWERU to mobilize stakeholders to ensure that indiscriminate killing of civilians is avoided by both the army and the warriors;
- Civil society organizations should engage in mobilization and sensitization of the communities on disarmament;
- CEWERU to mobilize the participation of Development Partners in providing livelihood alternatives and social services to the Karimojong.