



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**EMERGENCY RELIEF COORDINATOR BRIEFS PRESS IN NAIROBI AT
END OF EIGHT-DAY, THREE-NATION MISSION TO AFRICA**

(Nairobi, Kenya: 12 September 2006): Thank you all for coming to this press conference where I'd like to sum up my very strong impressions from eight days where I visited numerous communities of war-affected populations in the Great Lakes region, eastern Congo, northern Uganda, South Sudan. I'm more optimistic than I've been on any of my visits before to this region that some of the worst wars of our generation are coming to an end. I think that both the Congo and northern Uganda may see in the next months a dramatic return to normalcy and a dramatic opportunity for the international community to help peace and stability.

This in many ways has been the epicentre of the worst humanitarian tragedies of our generation. So this is then also then Ground Zero for humanity in the sense that are we living up to this the greatest challenge of our time, namely to help the peoples of this region to get finally a better future. And I say that because the facts are the following: no where else in the world have more lives been lost because of war and neglect than in the Great Lakes region. In the Congo, our estimate is that four million lives were lost in eight years. That's six Rwandan genocides in eastern Congo alone. It's a staggering number. No other part of the world is even close to having had this haemorrhage of human life as in the Central African Great Lakes region, and therefore we have now to run the marathon to the end. I really hope we are going to do that as an international community. And I really hope that the African elites -- political, military and cultural elites -- will not make the catastrophic mistakes that they did in the past, which led to these incredible tragedies; that they will behave as they should now that we can end it and go to a better future.

The UN system is willing to do its part. In all of our appeals for Congo, Uganda, the Sudan, southern Sudan in particular, Burundi, Rwanda, we are emphasizing recovery, refugee return, return of displaced, livelihoods, recovery. And our appeal is, let's have money to do the job. And I'm nervous that we may not get the money to do this job after we've had generous donor response to much of the emergency relief effort. We're deeply underfunded in terms of receiving IDPs, receiving refugees. We're even seeing shortfalls for some basic humanitarian actions as we try to complete the marathon. In the Congo, we do not even have enough money for food at the end of the year. We need \$7 million per month in the next few months to keep the pipeline alive in this period where militia soldiers are disarming, where refugees and displaced are willing and able to return home.

I met with President Kabila in Kinshasa as I started. My main issue of discussion with the Congolese leadership, President Kabila, the Governors in the Republic, the Generals of the new army, was the following: there has to be an end to impunity for violations against the civilian population. Sexual abuse of women has become a cancer really in the whole culture, in the whole civilization of the Great Lakes Region. It cannot be denied that it is happening, not in the

hundreds but in the tens of thousands of women being abused, and it is destroying the whole moral and social fabric of society. It has to end. And then some say you know we don't have a justice system like you have. I know, and we need to help in building that, but it takes five minutes to demote a colonel who is responsible for soldiers who have abused civilians; it takes five minutes to demote or fire a public employee who tolerated corruption or tolerated abuse. There has to be more accountability, really, and that would also help to get more investment in good governance in the future.

I was deeply encouraged by meeting in the Congo militia soldiers, who were giving in their arms. This has been really the brewing pot of militias in eastern Congo. We met Mayi-Mayi militias who have been responsible for infinite suffering to the surrounding populations. They had given in their arms and were greeting us with a song and a dance and not with bullets. But they also told me that they hadn't received any assistance or any reintegration packages in the 20 days since they had disarmed. That really is a time bomb. Militia soldiers who are not integrated are a time bomb and we can relapse into a future conflict.

I then proceeded to northern Uganda, where I have visited regularly since 2003; where I coined it the world's worst neglected emergency. It is not anymore the world's worst neglected emergency. It is a place we have built up systematically humanitarian operations and still people live in sub-human conditions in crowded camps all over northern Uganda. But for the first time there is realistic hope to return home and that is because there is for the first time a peace process that can bring it all to an end.

The UN is supporting this peace process. I went to Juba and I met not only with the Government delegation and gave my strong support to President Salva Kiir and Deputy President Riek Machar of the south Sudan government. I also met with the LRA delegation and it is probably the first time ever a UN official like me has met with Lord's Resistance Army representatives. I also had, I think, four telephone calls in these last 48 hours with Vincent Otti, who is the number two in the Lord's Resistance Army.

We invest now in peace. We invest in the reconciliation process. We invest in the return process. And we advocate for, we demand the release and return of women and children and non-fighters. And we have progress in this. As we speak, militia soldiers from rebel groups, from the Lord's Resistance Army, are moving north from northern Uganda into the eastern part of Equatoria in Sudan to assemble. Already at the western assembly point in western Equatoria, Otti and others have assembled and then he called me from there. The UN will help women and children who come with these groups and provide them support. We estimate that there will be many of them. We hope some of them will be released so that we can take them home and reintegrate them.

We will also help the general population around these camps. These are people who are not thrilled by getting new neighbours in the form of the LRA soldiers, who will not be disarmed. So they need humanitarian assistance because these are very poor societies.

On top of that, I promised financial support to the mediation team effort, logistical support, advisers, and we will also observe the talks more systematically. We will do anything to help

this to succeed. But it is an African-led process. It should remain an African-led process. Perhaps that's why it has been so successful so far. We are there to help it succeed.

In the next few months, we are confident that hundreds of thousands may either return or start to return in northern Uganda. It will be a dramatic change really in an area which had more, I mean a greater degree of displacement than perhaps any where else in the world, 80 per cent of Acholiland where people had been displaced. It was like a desert outside of these over crowded camps. It will change.

The night we spent in the huts in the camp, we did indeed have a "Wan Oo", which is a traditional bonfire, with 70 internally displaced women, children, men, and we exchanged stories in the Acholi tradition. We discussed the future. Now the people there told me that they did not want the indictments of the ICC to stop this peace process. I told them that the indictments or the International Criminal Court, which is not us in the UN -- it is an independent court as you know, but I know that these indictments will not stop the peace process. Actually the peace process started after the indictments were made. I think they have been a positive factor in having the peace process.

What we agreed with the victims is that justice has to be served. And justice has to be served in a way that it is not blocking peace nor blocking reconciliation. And I'm confident that that will happen. So this notion that it will stop with indictment is wrong. We will be able, I think, to see justice served. To not have impunity for war crimes, for crimes against humanity and so on, and still have a peace agreement. Some of you may ask me how and let me already say, I don't know how. This will be something that they will be negotiating on and agreeing on and then we will see how justice will be served and the indictments stance from the ICC will be factored in this demobilization.

I think that's it and I'm more than willing to take questions.

Question and Answer

Q: We would like to know what pressure you've put on the LRA to release the children and when that might happen.

A: It was certainly the main issue in my talks with Vincent Otti on the phone. I had hoped really that they would come with a gesture even when I was there and we did discuss it as such and I'm sorry it didn't happen. One of the reasons was that, to the assembly points, very few had actually reached at that time. I told him that we know that there are hundreds of women and children even in the groups that are on the way to the assembly points and some of them are sick, some of them are wounded, and some of them had been recently abducted, and these are the kind of people we would hope will be released. Anyhow it's an agreement that we will be able to give special care for women and children as they come to the assembly points and they should be de-linked from the armed combatants. When it will happen, I don't know. It's really too long overdue. It should have happened a long time ago, but I don't know when. I hope it will happen very soon.

Q: Were you able to convince the IDPs that the indictments will not stop the peace process?

A: Well, first of all, I mean, I think it is an example for the world in terms of the ability here to forgive, to reconcile, and to look to the future. Europeans -- you and I -- we have a lot to learn from Africa in that, and the Middle East may have even more to learn from Africa in that respect, but there is perhaps a problem also in all of this. I mean, if you forgive and forget it may start again. So a big part of the discussion was what will be justice really. And it will not be the exchange of goats, which is part of the old tradition. These are war crimes, crimes against humanity. Justice has to be served in a manner which is commensurate. How and what it will mean, I don't know and certainly I'm not the expert on that. And to your question, they agreed that there has to be justice, but the most important thing for them is that the fighting stops and security will come and that the LRA demobilizes, and I assured that I think that will happen.

Q: So much of the world is grateful to you for speaking fearlessly up for the oppressed for the dispossessed. You have restored a certain amount of legitimacy in the UN.

On the question of the return of the Acholi in the north to their homes, I was in Uganda, in Gulu. Before that the Government was quite clear, the Government spokesman told me that those who will be returning will actually be going to other camps closer to their homelands before they are allowed to go their homes. So what is your position on that? Is it still the case?...political pressure to bear on the Government of Uganda? What is the UN approach in Uganda in comparing it with situation with Sudan? And question three is regarding the appointment of an envoy.

A: It is still our intention to have a regional envoy, and have the announcement of that, but to have it all ready, I don't know exactly when. It is really a regional issue, which has affected Congo, northern Uganda and southern Sudan. And more southern Sudan than we have realised. The fighting with the LRA has created havoc in many communities in southern Sudan.

On the issue of the return of the IDPs, many of them have sort of gone to halfway houses. The importance, the halfway house is a decongestion camp or a spontaneous creation of huts before they go to their traditional land that they may consider insecure still. The important thing for us is to really safeguard the voluntary return, and that people are allowed to go home and encouraged when they want to go home. At the same time, we do not want to have pull factors to keep them, because they have school and health in camps and they have nothing to come to. So, a big leap for us to try to provide services where they go, where it is safe. I met a family -- we stopped on the road in a place where there was a man with two sons, and they made bricks out of mud and they told me that this was a house that they would build within days. In October, they would move into it; they would live here. In January, they would go a further three kilometres in and now start to till and this is a very representative story of what will happen.

The Ugandan authorities have made many mistakes in northern Uganda in my view, and the Acholis and other people have felt alienated. It's being abused, committed in Government forces. I had a good meeting with the Prime Minister, and I told the Ugandan delegation to Juba how they are willing to provide services in northern Uganda and how they behave, as they have

soldiers and police in northern Uganda and it cannot be tolerated, any abuse, corruption, misuse of power.

There will be political pressure. I met with the donor community in Kampala. There will be a joint effort. There is a joint Monitoring Mechanism, where the UN, the donors and NGOs are represented, where we discuss and agree on future actions and hold each other accountable. I also said we will be willing to provide experts on the internet data base on the financial tracking system so that you can check real time where the money goes, how it is spent just like you can check us now, the UN money we have and how we spend it.

I will make a report to the Secretary-General and I will brief the Security Council on Friday and tell it as it is. I always speak what I consider the truth and I will talk about all the worries for the indictments among the people of northern Uganda, and also the strong message from the Prosecutor himself of what he wants to see, which is justice, and then we can discuss how justice can be served and how impunity can be avoided.

Q: How can we see the Government of Uganda be held accountable? And on Darfur, can the UN call Darfur a genocide?

A: If you speak to the people in the camps on what they fled from, it was the LRA. But there are also many stories of rape and abuse being committed by Government forces and I speak very frankly on that. I said that publicly many times and I now say it, that they have to have much better accountability with their forces and their public servants and their use of funds and their democracy in northern Uganda than in the past. And they hear me on that.

On Darfur, yes, we are in a free-fall. The Secretary-General was very clear in the Security Council yesterday. I have myself appealed publicly to those nations, countries that include the Government of China and the Arab States, to convince Khartoum that we need a UN force that to avoid the collapse. And the collapse would be that those who are now debating on whether to leave Darfur is that, pulling the plug and we won't have services on the ground, we would have absolutely no assistance. There are possibilities to avoid that, but we have very little time in my view to avoid a collapse in Darfur.

Q: Can you call it genocide?

A: I am not a lawyer. Lawyers gave a long report and it is a legal term. Crimes, ethnic cleansing, that is very visible on the ground. Whether you call it genocide or not is more of a legalistic term. You don't have to call it genocide to act to stop mass murder. And the world has not done enough to act to stop the mass murder.

Q: How did you react to Vincent Otti on lifting the ICC indictments?

A: This was not a big thing in my conversation with Otti. It was with the delegation team in Juba, with civil society in Juba, with the Government in Juba, and with the IDPs in the camps and so on. I think Uganda is more educated on the legal intricacies of the ICC than the population in the city of Hague in the Netherlands. It's quite interesting how people have read

their statutes. I am not so worried. I think actually the indictments have been an incentive for this process and I think that can continue to be an incentive for this process.

What I'm more nervous about is, are we ready to receive potentially LRA soldiers with their dependents in these camps? Are we able to provide them -- we as the international community and the Southern Sudan mediation -- able to provide them with the food, the services and so on that they require to stay in these places and not to return to old habits? I have appealed for money for this from donors; we have already gotten from Norway \$250,000 to start to assist this effort and we will get from other Europeans and other donors to assist the process so that it doesn't fail because of logistical problems. That will perhaps be a bigger stumbling block than many of these legal issues.

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