

**Testimony before the United States Senate  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
Subcommittee on African Affairs  
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**By Kevin Fitzcharles  
Country Director, CARE Uganda**

I would like to thank Chairman Feingold, Ranking Member Sununu and the other members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and subcommittee on African Affairs for holding a hearing to explore the U.S. role in addressing longstanding crises in this critical region of the world. It is an honor to be here on behalf of CARE and to share the perspective of an organization which has provided humanitarian assistance and development programming in the Great Lakes region for decades.

I currently serve as the Country Director for CARE in Uganda, and am pleased to provide my view point on the situation in the north of that country. However, I would like to note that I am also here today to represent all of my colleagues in CARE's Great Lakes country offices in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Burundi and hope to do justice in addressing our collective concerns about this vast and troubled region.

CARE has been operational in Northern Uganda since 1979—intensively in the Acholi region since 2003—and in the DRC most recently since 2002. Our programs in the Great Lakes region focus on food security, health, HIV/AIDS prevention, education, conflict resolution, microfinance, and community development and natural resource management. We do what we can—along with our colleagues in other humanitarian and development organizations—to address the enormous need of the people in these countries and the near total absence of basic services and livelihood opportunities that they face due to years of conflict and resulting underdevelopment.

The numbers of displaced are so large and the degree of suffering so intense that the figures almost become numbing; an estimated four million dead in the DRC due to the conflict, two million displaced in the north of Uganda due to the terror campaign of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and hundreds of thousands of refugees relegated to squalid camps across the region. However, we must stop and remind ourselves to put a face on these numbers, to remember the human scope of the ongoing political and security situation in these countries. The depravity and suffering are real for every child who does not have access to basic health care, for every woman who fears being raped as she travels long distances through insecure areas to collect water and for entire communities whose futures have been irrevocably altered by years of terror and abandonment.

Both the situations in the DRC and Northern Uganda require a level of humanitarian and development assistance that match the scope of the crises. However, only a fraction of the needs are addressed, reflecting the low global priority of ending the suffering in the region.

We thank the U.S. for what it has given to address these humanitarian situations and underdevelopment in the Great Lakes countries, but note that in order to have a meaningful impact in terms of lives and increased security, much more will be required.

Excluding P.L. 480 Title II food aid, the DRC received only \$50 million in humanitarian and development assistance in FY 2006, precious little to begin to address the enormous humanitarian and development challenges in one of the most underdeveloped and unstable countries in the world; a country the size of western Europe upon which the security of the entire Great Lakes region largely hinges. The proposed funding level in the Administration's request to Congress in FY 2008 is even lower, hardly reflecting the compelling nature and strategic rationale for assistance to the DRC.

U.S. foreign assistance in Uganda has largely been geared towards HIV/AIDS prevention and relief through the PEPFAR program, and has not been sufficiently focused in other critical areas including conflict resolution, peace building and the strengthening of governance and key institutions. Inadequate assistance levels are provided in northern Uganda to deal with one of the largest displacement situations in the world. Humanitarian assistance funding for the 900,000 people still in IDP camps remains inadequate and very little has been directed to assisting those trying to return home. Currently, 500,000 IDPs are residing in halfway resettlement areas, moving back and forth to the camps to access basic services like water, health care and education that are not available outside of them. Very little planning in terms of providing the right transitional assistance to returnees has been conducted, jeopardizing lives and the success of the peace process.

All that said, humanitarian assistance – as vital as it is – only addresses symptoms, symptoms that have been widespread and evident for far too long. The conflicts in northern Uganda and the eastern DRC are distinct from each other and require different solutions to the unique underlying challenges they pose. However, there are commonalities that I would like to highlight today, particularly regarding the role that the United States has to play in ending these longstanding conflicts. To make serious, lasting progress in the region, the U.S. and wider international community's attention span and depth of engagement must increase by an order of magnitude. Achieving peace agreements or national elections are vitally important signs of progress but not at all the end of the road. The following must be addressed both immediately and over a very long haul:

- Security and Lasting Peace – People need to be assured they can live, work and access services and markets in a secure environment;
- Protection – People need more capable and professional policing and access to justice, as well as much stronger medical care, psycho-social support, and child and women protection strategies; and
- Long-Term, Equitable Development – People in the long-neglected regions of the eastern DRC and northern Uganda need competent, transparent, and accountable governance and major investments over time in infrastructure, basic services, and economic opportunity.

Let me address each of these in turn, underscoring the importance of regional approaches throughout. Resources, violent conflict, and insecurity all travel across borders in the Great Lakes region and integrated, regional planning and interventions by all stakeholders are essential.

## **Peace and Security**

Security is critical in protecting human lives and preventing more displacements. There is no hope that the humanitarian situation can be significantly improved or that economic development take hold in the region as long as conflict and resultant insecurity reign. Furthermore, improved security is a prerequisite for organizations like CARE in providing humanitarian assistance in hard-to-reach areas. This issue is highlighted by the recent spike in insecurity in the North Kivu region of the DRC due to the activities of General Laurent Nkunda, which has caused NGOs and some UN agencies to evacuate many areas.

For these reasons, a drawdown in the UN Peacekeeping force in the DRC—MONUC—would be catastrophic. Though stretched thinly across a vast region, MONUC provides a critical security presence that benefits the people in the DRC, humanitarian actors and the broader Great Lakes community. We would encourage the U.S. to actively support the extension of a robust MONUC force with adequate resources, capacities and accountabilities to implement its mandate to protect civilians.

The U.S. should also continue and scale up its work in security sector reform of the DRC's military (FARDC) – ensuring that they are adequately trained and paid, so that they are capable of providing security in the violence-racked East and do not commit atrocities against the local population themselves.

In northern Uganda, a growing conflict between the Ugandan military and Karamoja cattle rustlers is causing further deterioration to regional security and is one of the reasons that nearly 900,000 million people remain in IDP camps. Addressing the Karamoja situation must be viewed as an urgent security priority and must be done at the same time as steps are taken to negotiate and finalize a peace agreement with the LRA.

The U.S. could have an immediate impact in both crises by employing its high profile and diplomatic clout. To date, U.S. attention to both of these conflicts has been inconsistent at best, without adequate attention to the regional dimension of these crises or a focus on addressing the underlying causes that drive them. Infrequent visits by U.S. policy makers, resulting in brief talks and weak public statements, have done little to convince actors in the region that the U.S. considers these crises priorities or will take any meaningful actions to address them.

A consistent demonstration of interest and commitment to the Juba peace process would have a tremendous impact on the likelihood of the talks resulting in an agreement. The U.S.' influence over all actors involved, including the Government of South Sudan and the

Government of Uganda, is a resource that should not be discounted and one that should be utilized to the maximum extent. Recent developments suggesting that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the Government of South Sudan and the Sudanese Government is in jeopardy—possibly resulting in the collapse of the Juba Peace Talks—highlight the fragile nature of the peace process and underscore the need for third parties to maintain consistent engagement to ensure that the entire process does not unravel.

The U.S. also has a critical role to play in ensuring that the newly elected government of the DRC and its neighboring countries find and abide by a resolution to the ongoing conflict in the eastern part of the country, including how to deal with the armed groups that continue to undermine stability in the region. The U.S. has engaged in the Tripartite Plus process, and these regularized discussions must continue well into the future to move toward a durable solution to longstanding tensions between the Great Lakes countries, including competition over natural resources.

We applaud the decision by the State Department to appoint a Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary on Conflict Resolution, tasked with following the situation in the Great Lakes. We encourage that this position be accompanied with increased resources to support ongoing peace talks in the region as well as attention at the highest levels of in the Department of State. Furthermore, we encourage the State Department to ensure that its approach be regional in nature given the connections between Sudan, the LRA, Uganda, Rwanda, and the DRC and its armed factions. Failing to focus on the whole picture, or only parts of it, will seriously compromise the U.S. and the international community's efforts to address any one of these situations. This high degree of interconnectedness means that if there are weak links in the diplomatic chain, it will surely break.

On a more local level, vulnerable groups, especially women, must be provided opportunities to engage in peace and reconciliation initiatives. Women are often most adversely affected by conflict, due to the fact that conflict tends to empower male-dominated armed groups, leads to abuses of authority and increases the labor burdens placed on women, who are often responsible for a majority of the activities that families need to survive.

For this reason, CARE integrates a gender focus in its programs. In northern Uganda, for example, CARE is working to harness the potential of women in doing everything from reintegrating formerly abducted women and child mothers into communities to calling for peace negotiations. However, despite their role as one of the most vulnerable and conflict-affected groups, women have not had a significant role in the peace negotiations. Losing the perspective of the most impacted groups means that many of their most deeply felt concerns may not be addressed in the peace process. The U.S. and others in the international community should work with all parties to negotiations to ensure that local women are represented in peace talks and that resources are provided for local level peace and reconciliation initiatives.

### Summary of Peace and Security Recommendations

- *Support the extension of MONUC with adequate resources, capacities and accountabilities to implement its protection mandate while scaling up security sector reform efforts with the DRC military*
- *Support and engage with, consistently and at a high level, the Juba Peace Process and the Tripartite Plus Process, as well as efforts to deal with Uganda's ongoing Karamoja conflict*
- *Provide adequate resources and weight to the new Senior Advisor on Conflict Resolution in the Great Lakes ensuring that U.S. diplomacy in the region responds effectively – and in integrated fashion – to the cross-border issues fueling conflict*
- *Provide resources for local level peace and reconciliation initiatives in which women and other marginalized groups are adequately represented*

### Protection

Security must be understood in broader and more holistic terms than merely protection from violence perpetrated by armed groups. Security depends not only on military and policy prescriptions, but on people's ability to make free choices and exercise control over their lives.

Unfortunately, protection is a long called-for priority in the Great Lakes region but, to date, not more than a dream for vast numbers of conflict-affected people in the region. The range of rights abuses against the population in the eastern DRC and northern Uganda is extensive. In addition to the millions who have died as a direct or indirect consequence of violence and the hundreds of thousands who continue to be displaced, the abduction and recruitment of children into armed groups has been another tragic characteristic of both conflicts. In Northern Uganda the number of abductions since the onset of conflict is estimated at 25,000<sup>1</sup>, while UNICEF has recently noted that increased fighting in the eastern DRC has been accompanied by forced recruitment of children by all groups.<sup>2</sup>

For purposes of this hearing, CARE has been asked specifically to address the scourge of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), a major focus of our work on the ground. We welcome the recent surge in attention to this long ignored issue, including the cover story on SGBV in the DRC that appeared in the New York Times earlier this month<sup>3</sup> and hope that this renewed focus on the issue and the resultant public outrage will translate into meaningful and sustained action on the part of donor governments and the international community at large.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict 13 August 2007, (A/62/228)

<sup>2</sup> DRC, North Kivu Crisis – Humanitarian Situation and UNICEF Response , *December 2006 – October 2007*, UNICEF , 18 October 2007

<sup>3</sup> “Rape Epidemic Raises Trauma of Congo War” New York Times ,Oct 7, 2007  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/world/africa/07congo.html?\\_r=1&hp&oref=slogin](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/07/world/africa/07congo.html?_r=1&hp&oref=slogin)  
(last accessed October 20, 2007)

October marks seven years since the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, declaring its intention to effectively address violations of women's human rights in conflict situations. Yet in many parts of the Great Lakes region today, sexual and gender based violence remains one of the gravest manifestations of the insecurity facing ordinary people. In the case of eastern DRC, the rates of these violations have risen to catastrophic levels and their increasing regularity and brutality over time is well documented.<sup>4</sup> Armed groups in eastern Congo are effectively using sexual violence as a weapon of war and destruction, inflicting grievous physical, psychological and social harm on women, children and entire communities.

According to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), over 2,000 cases of rape have been reported in North Kivu between January and September of this year alone<sup>5</sup>. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) further reports 18,000 cases of rape reported in 2006 in three Congolese provinces, including North Kivu.<sup>6</sup> The estimate is that children represent at least 31 percent of the victims.<sup>7</sup> These figures, as outrageous as they are, mask the true scope of the problem as they do not take into account the many violations that go unreported for a variety of reasons, including stigmatization of victims by communities, a lack of redress for survivors, and an environment of impunity. As one CARE health worker in Maniema province put it to a colleague there, "Women who experience rape or sexual violence are punished three times: once by the violence itself, once by their communities if they dare complain, and a third time when they see the culprits walking the street."

Our own research in the Great Lakes region has revealed the widespread prevalence of this crime against humanity. For example, a recent survey that CARE conducted in the eastern Congolese province of Maniema revealed that 70% of victims of sexual violence surveyed reported that they knew other women who had undergone similar experiences and that 80% of these victims said that they had been gang-raped.<sup>8</sup> While much of the sexual violence in this area is perpetrated by armed men associated with the Mai Mai, the Congolese army, the FDLR and militias loyal to Laurent Nkunda, CARE research also indicates that sexual violence committed by civilians is now on the rise, demonstrating a disturbing trend towards the inculcation of sexual violence as a phenomenon into the wider culture. This is particularly alarming, as the end of insecurity itself will not bring about a cessation to this heinous crime. The idea that "being raped is normal" has taken hold in an environment where outright war has transitioned to banditry, and lawlessness and impunity reign.

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<sup>4</sup> Information on the atrocities can be found in the UNICEF-V-day initiative "Stop Raping our Greatest Resource: Power to Women in the DRC" <http://www.vday.org/contents/drcongo> (last accessed October 20, 2007)

<sup>5</sup> "DRC: Rape cases up by 60% in North Kivu" –Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) News and Analysis online Oct 11, 2007 <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74767> (last accessed October 20, 2007)

<sup>6</sup> "DRC: Sexual violence the scourge of the east" (OCHA) News and Analysis online Oct 16, 2007, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=74801>

<sup>7</sup> Briefing by John Holmes, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, to the UN Security Council September 11, 2007. <http://ochaonline.un.org/AboutOCHA/Organigramme/TheUnderSecretaryGeneral/SpeechesandStatements2007/tabid/1156/Default.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> CARE Survey undertaken Nov. 8-15, 2006 in southern Maniema province.

Rampant sexual and gender based violence against women and girls is also alarmingly prevalent in northern Uganda. Even at this moment of relative peace, less than 20% of defilement cases are taken to the police because of a lack of a functioning judicial system in the region.<sup>9</sup> A recent survey of local perceptions of the peace process in northern Uganda indicates that many women fear that the high levels of gender based violence that characterized life in displacement will continue after resettlement.<sup>10</sup>

All this calls for an increased emphasis on programs focused both on prevention and response to sexual and gender based violence. CARE's experience with gender based violence programming in the region underscores the need for strong awareness-raising and educational efforts to tackle social norms around gender roles, identity and violence, as well as for initiatives that involve both men and women in networks of activism against gender violence. Also essential is the expansion and improvement of locally-accessible medical, psycho-social and legal services and better coordination among the entities offering these services.

Finally, there is an urgent need to support stronger implementation by national governments of national, regional and international legal commitments, including through inclusive action planning and ongoing learning and monitoring of progress, in order to improve and expand prevention efforts, basic service provision, and access to justice and accountability for such crimes. We note the adoption in November 2006 of the Great Lakes Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children in particular, and encourage its urgent implementation. At an international level, we note the need for the UN Security Council to show leadership on this issue by developing a mechanism, such as a working group, to monitor grave violations of women's human rights such as SGBV in conflict.

We are pleased that distinguished members of this Committee will shortly introduce the International Violence against Women Act (I-VAWA), which seeks to establish mechanisms to aggressively address GBV in developing countries in both conflict and peace time settings. CARE supports this legislation as a critical first step on the U.S. Government's part. We would also note that addressing GBV in the Great Lakes will require tackling the larger challenges in the region that the other panelists here today and I have outlined, including: rampant insecurity; a near total absence of legitimate, accountable government institutions; a culture of impunity; the marginalization of women and the resulting abject poverty that so many people in these countries face.

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<sup>9</sup> CARE Baseline Survey for Women's Empowerment Project, September 2007.

<sup>10</sup> "Report of consultations on Reconciliation and Accountability held with communities in Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile Sub-regions" August 2007, Civil Society Organizations for Peace In Northern Uganda (CSOPNU)

### Summary of Protection Recommendations

- *Support national government capacity and accountability for implementing national laws and regional and international instruments addressing women's human rights and, particularly, national action plans and initiatives aimed at addressing SGBV*
- *Increase funding to meet survivors' immediate needs, including the full range of essential medical care, legal aid, and psycho-social support, while investing in national and decentralized institutions charged with providing access to justice and key social services*
- *Increase support to community-based awareness raising and dialogue on social norms that contribute to SGBV and to interventions that reduce women's vulnerability to over time – e.g., through greater access to education, inheritance rights, economic livelihoods and political empowerment*

### Long-Term, Equitable Development

Ending the instability and meeting immediate and short-term humanitarian assistance and protection needs in the region can only be the first part of a long-term strategy to ensure a durable peace. Implementing peace agreements and preventing countries in the region from sliding back into war will require consistent and robust engagement in years and even decades to come to address the underlying drivers of insecurity, build legitimate, accountable and effective governance down to provincial and local levels, and strengthen systems and capacities for basic service delivery for all.

Of course, a balanced approach is required. In the DRC, the U.S. should provide substantial, long-term funding and technical assistance to strengthen governance, including service delivery, at national and decentralized levels, but should couple those efforts with ongoing humanitarian and development funding to assist local populations as the government of the DRC develops its own capacity to do so. Focusing on governance and institutions without simultaneously addressing immediate needs would not be a sound strategy, nor would focusing only on current needs to the exclusion of meaningful efforts to set up the right institutions and strengthen capacities for the DRC to govern itself.

Similarly, a “peace dividend” will have to accompany any agreement that is reached to end the longstanding conflict in northern Uganda. A peace process will only be as good as the improvements that it brings to people's lives; therefore ensuring that people have something to go home to is of paramount importance. Major efforts to rehabilitate infrastructure and provide basic services to IDPs as they return home must be the central focus for both donors and the Government of Uganda, and plans for these activities must be prepared now *in anticipation* of a peace agreement, not after one is struck. Many IDPs have already begun to return home, encouraged by progress in the peace talks, so it is critical that this assistance begin to be phased in.

Furthermore, the U.S. must play a role in ensuring that the Government of Uganda makes efforts to even out the levels of economic development and service provision between the



north and the more prosperous south of the country. This inequality in wealth and opportunity was one of the underlying causes of the conflict and must be addressed head on to prevent the resurgence of fighting.

#### Summary of Development Recommendations

- *Provide comprehensive, well-phased assistance for humanitarian and development needs in both countries, while simultaneously supporting governance and institution-building*
- *Support rehabilitation of amenities and services for returning displaced persons in anticipation of peace agreements*
- *Urge the Government of Uganda to move beyond rhetorical promises in addressing the long-standing neglect and economic disparities between northern Uganda and the rest of the country by dedicating significant resources to do so*
- *Ensure that state building in the DRC includes a major focus and major investments in strengthening governance and service delivery in the East*

#### Conclusion

There is hope in the Great Lakes region for movement forward in ending the complex and horrific conflicts that have racked the region for decades. Both the situations in northern Uganda and the eastern DRC stand at a critical juncture in which effort on the part of the international community—and in particular the U.S. government—could turn the tide towards peace. This window of opportunity should be seized by employing both diplomatic and foreign assistance resources in full force, and doing so with a regional mindset that ensures integration across country-level strategies, plans, and interventions.

In closing, I would note that peace in the Great Lakes will not come in a single moment—the conflicts in these countries will not be concluded by successful elections or the signing of a peace agreement. Securing peace is a process, not an event, and the U.S. government and its partners in the international community should view it as such and orient their actions toward a long-term, consistent and robust engagement across the Great Lakes in order to realize a durable solution to the trouble the has plagued this critical region.