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Uganda

REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

Head of state and government	Yoweri Kaguta Museveni
Death penalty	retentionist
Population	30.9 million
Life expectancy	49.7 years
Under-5 mortality (m/f)	135/121 per 1,000
Adult literacy	66.8 per cent

Peace talks continued between the government and the armed group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), aimed at ending the 20-year conflict in northern Uganda. The talks reportedly focused on withdrawal of the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants for four senior LRA leaders. A ceasefire agreed in 2006 was extended. The independence of the judiciary was threatened and attacks on freedom of expression and press freedom continued. Violence against women and girls remained widespread. Reports of torture by state security agents persisted.

Trial of Kizza Besigye

The trial of opposition leader Dr Kizza Besigye and six others accused of treason remained pending in the High Court in Kampala. On 1 March, the six co-accused still detained were released on bail by order of a court, but government security personnel invaded the court premises and rearrested them. The defendants, one defence lawyer and a journalist were reported to have been ill-treated by the security personnel. The defence lawyer subsequently required medical treatment. The armed raid on the court provoked national and international outcry. Following the raid, the judiciary suspended its work and lawyers went on strike. The President issued a public apology to the judiciary and promised an investigation into the incident. By the end of the year, the process and results of this investigation had not been made public.

After their re-arrest the six defendants were charged in two upcountry courts with new charges of murder. All six were later granted bail on the murder charges. By the end of 2007, three of the defendants remained in detention after failing to meet the bail conditions and three others had been released.

Armed conflict

Peace talks between the government and the LRA continued in southern Sudan. Both parties agreed to extend the cessation of hostilities in April, and in May both signed a document entitled Comprehensive Solutions to the Northern Uganda Conflict. On 29 June, the parties signed an agreement on "reconciliation and accountability", an agreement purportedly establishing a framework to address crimes committed during the conflict in northern Uganda. Negotiations reportedly focused on bringing about the withdrawal of the International Criminal Court's (ICC) arrest warrants for four senior LRA leaders – Joseph Kony, Vincent Otti, Okot Odhiambo and Dominic Ongwen – by setting up alternative national processes. In 2005, the ICC charged the men with crimes against humanity and war crimes. Rumours persisted that Vincent Otti, one of the LRA leaders charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes, had been killed by the LRA in October following an alleged disagreement with Joseph Kony.

By the end of 2007, both parties had reportedly engaged in consultations with victims of the conflict, as stipulated in the agreement. The outcome of this consultation exercise had not yet been made public. Speculation over the future of the peace process continued but the government stated that the peace process was still on course.

Freedom of expression

Attacks on freedom of expression and press freedom continued. Some journalists faced criminal charges because of their work.

- In October, a private radio station, Life FM, in south-west Uganda went off air for several days following

an attack by unknown armed assailants who poured acid on the station's transmitters. The attack was thought to be linked to the airing of a radio programme critical of the delivery of public services by the local government. No one was apparently prosecuted for this crime.

- In October, three journalists working for The Monitor newspaper were charged with sedition in relation to a story alleging that soldiers were secretly trained as policemen in order to try and bring the police force under military control.
- In November, two journalists from The Monitor newspaper were charged with criminal libel over a story alleging that the Inspector General of Government had been taken back onto the government payroll after retirement, in breach of the public service regulations.

Accountability

The government started investigations into corruption allegations regarding the mismanagement of the Global Fund against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in Uganda. Following these investigations, a former Health Minister and his two former deputies were referred to the police for further investigations. In May, the former minister, his two former deputies and one government official were charged with embezzlement and abuse of office.

Refugees and asylum-seekers

In July, the government of Uganda signed a Tripartite Agreement with the government of Rwanda and UNHCR, in preparation for the repatriation of Rwandese asylum-seekers and refugees living in Uganda. On 3 October, about 3,000 refugees and asylum-seekers were returned to Rwanda from Uganda. Ugandan government officials stated that this process was voluntary and that UNHCR was informed of the process. The Rwandan Minister for Local Government reportedly stated that the 3,000 people did not have refugee status and were not seeking asylum in Uganda. However, many individuals complained that they were forcibly returned and were not given the opportunity to seek asylum in a fair and effective process. They claimed that they feared for their lives and security in their country of origin. At the end of the year there were also fears that Burundian refugees and asylum-seekers would be forcibly returned.

Internally displaced people

As of May 2007, an estimated 1.6 million people remained displaced in camps throughout northern Uganda. In the Acholi sub-region, the area most affected by the conflict in northern Uganda, UNHCR estimated in September that nearly 63 per cent of the 1.1 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in 2005 were still living in their original IDP camps. As of May, the UNHCR estimated that just over 7,000 people had returned permanently to their places of origin in the Acholi sub-region.

Torture and other ill-treatment

Reports of torture and other ill-treatment committed by the police force and state security services persisted. In particular, the Rapid Response Unit (RRU), formerly the Violent Crimes Crack Unit (VCCU), was criticized by organizations including the Uganda Human Rights Commission for numerous incidents of torture and other ill-treatment, and for prolonged and arbitrary detention of suspects. By the end of the year, there was no government response to calls for investigations into these allegations of torture and other ill-treatment.

- In August, members of the RRU arrested 41 individuals, including Ugandans and foreign nationals, in an operation ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Kampala in November. During the arrest, police officers beat some of the detainees with batons and rifles butts, breaking one person's arm. The 41 were held in incommunicado detention for five days, with 23 individuals held together in a 3m x 3m cell.
- On 29 October, police in Apac district arrested and detained about 30 people and allegedly tortured at least 22 of them while questioning them over an alleged theft of cattle. Up to 20 police officers took turns to beat the detainees using sticks while questioning them. Four of the men suffered serious injury during the beating, one of whom was beaten until his trousers were torn and soaked with blood.
- In November, Hassan Nkalubo, a resident of Mbale district, was allegedly detained and tortured by the RRU based in Mbale. He was accused of illegal possession of an AK 47 rifle, and was critically ill as a result of his treatment.

Violence against women

An official government study published in August confirmed a high prevalence of violence against women, including rape and domestic violence, throughout the country. In northern Uganda, despite the cessation of hostilities in 2006, women and girls continued to face violence by government soldiers, LRA rebels who

returned to their communities, law enforcement officials and members of their families and communities. The weak and ineffective justice system left female victims of sexual and gender-based violence traumatized and without any recourse to justice, legal, medical and psychological support.

Discrimination – lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people

Abuses against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people continued. Homosexuality remained a criminal offence. Following a high-profile media campaign by local LGBT organizations in August, government officials, the media, church groups and other groups, including teachers, condemned LGBT people and called for them to be arrested.

- In September, The Red Pepper newspaper published a list of people it asserted were gay and lesbian and published their workplaces and home addresses. Some of the individuals on the list subsequently complained of harassment and discrimination.

Death penalty

Civilian courts continued to impose the death penalty for capital offences. No executions following convictions by a civilian court have been carried out since 1999. In September the Prisons Services reported that at least 520 inmates were on death row in Uganda. Military courts continued to hand down death sentences and order executions of soldiers in the Uganda Peoples' Defence Forces (UPDF). The exact number of soldiers put to death under military law remained unclear.

- On 20 September, a UPDF soldier, Corporal Geoffrey Apamuko, was sentenced to death by hanging for murder.

In October, the government's Internal Affairs Minister, Dr Ruhukana Rugunda, ruled out the imposition of the death penalty for LRA leaders if they were tried in Ugandan courts for crimes committed during the conflict in northern Uganda.

Amnesty International visits/reports



Amnesty International delegates visited northern Uganda and Kampala in May and August.



Uganda: Doubly Traumatized – The lack of access to justice by female victims of sexual and gender-based violence in northern Uganda (AFR 59/005/2007)



Uganda: Justice system fails victims of sexual violence (AFR 59/011/2007)



Uganda: Detainees tortured during incommunicado detention (AFR 59/006/2007)



Uganda: Proposed national framework to address impunity does not remove government's obligation to arrest and surrender LRA leaders to the International Criminal Court (AFR 59/002/2007)