



Refugee Law Project

Faculty of Law, Makerere University



International Day of Peace Press Release

In support of Co-ordinated Governance for National Reconciliation

As Professor Tarsis Kabwegyere, Minister of Relief, Disaster Preparedness and Refugees (Office of the Prime Minister) noted in yesterday's New Vision, 'Uganda today is faced with a series of potential conflicts which necessitate new measures to systematically integrate Conflict Resolution into Government institutional frameworks, budgets and programming in partnership with civil society organizations, private sector and individuals'. He went further, to state that 'The echoes of Uganda's past may resound even louder if the challenges of conflicts are not addressed in a more coordinated and comprehensive manner'.

The timeliness of the Minister's statements, as well as the OPMs initiative to develop a National Policy for Peace Building and Conflict Prevention, is indicated by the recent violence surrounding the NRM primaries. These events contained uncomfortable echoes of the violence which was prompted just one year ago when the Kabaka's authority was challenged in Kayunga. Do they also foreshadow similar yet more extensive – *national* – violence which may erupt around next year's presidential and parliamentary elections?

The aim of the National Policy for Peace Building and Conflict Prevention is to address the root causes of conflict in the country. The Refugee Law Project strongly urges, on this day of international peace, that the Government, as part of its national policy, and in recognition of the need to coordinate the various branches of Government, notably between the Office of the Prime Minister and the Justice Law & Order Sector's (JLOS) Transitional Justice Working Group, include an explicit commitment to a national reconciliation process.

As a first step, we endorse the current moves by JLOS to conduct national consultations on reconciliation needs, and we trust that this allows the further development and passing of what is currently a draft National Reconciliation Bill. The latter a mechanism for conducting a national reconciliation process, of which truth-telling about the more than 25 conflicts which have plagued

Uganda since independence will be an important element. As is by now well known, the legacies of these multiple conflicts can themselves easily become the root causes of future ones.

We also believe that, as part of integrating conflict resolution into government institutional frameworks, Uganda needs to seriously reconsider the impacts of its current practice of rampant decentralization. While this has in part been justified as providing the basis for resolving grievances and conflicts at local level, the over-zealous application of this internationally imposed framework has in reality become grounds for further conflicts. The mass violence during the primaries in the districts of Butaleja, Tororo, Sembabule, and Bulisa - to mention but a few – offers an example.

In the run-up to the 2011 elections – elections which promise to be the most historic yet in Uganda’s gradual transition from a monolithic movement system to a fully-fledged multi-party one - Ugandans need assurance that the armed forces will be neutral, and that they are able to maintain law and order, without themselves becoming perpetrators of abuse. In that regard, we note with concern that the ongoing forcible disarmament of pastoralist Karimojong in north eastern Uganda has been characterized by serious human rights abuses.

This in turn raises the question of just what does Objective 3(i) of the National objectives and directive principles of state policy of the Constitution mean? Can national stability and peace only be achieved if the population is entirely homogeneous in its behaviours and its aspirations, or, alternatively, must diversity be accommodated for these to be truly achieved? We do not believe that the fact of difference should be used to justify ever increasing militarization as a form of governance in the absence of any sense of unity. We do not believe, now that the guns are mercifully silent in the Acholi subregion, that Karamoja deserves to become ‘the new Acholi’. Nor do we believe that the only way to achieve law, order and development, is to sedentarise pastoralist peoples whose very livelihoods and sense of self are dependent on the constitutionally protected right to move freedom of movement.

In this light, and on this day of international peace, we invite all interested parties to the launch of a new Beyond Juba Project video documentary, **“We died long time ago.... Changing the Lens with which Karamoja is viewed”** , a film exploring the negative policies toward

Karamoja like the disarmament process and its effects. The launch will take place on Thursday 23 September at Kati Kati restaurant, Lugogo Bypass, from **2:00-5:00pm**. **Entrance is free.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Dolan', written in a cursive style.

Dr Chris Dolan
Director