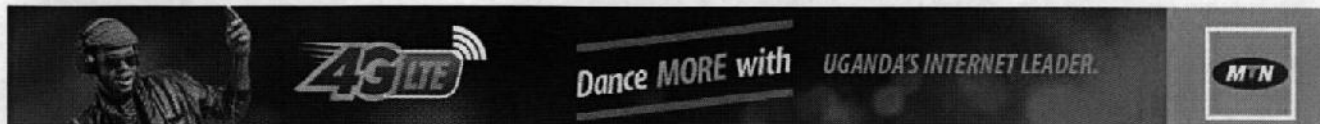


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Govt grants amnesty to LRA defectors

By Vision Reporter

Added 5th December 2007



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THE LRA fighters who defected from the rebels' hideout in Garamba have been granted amnesty. Sunday Otto, Vincent Okema, George Okello and Richard Odongo-Kau arrived in Uganda on December 1, after they parted ways with LRA leader Joseph Kony who they said killed his deputy Vincent Otti.

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By Henry Mukasa

THE LRA fighters who defected from the rebels' hideout in Garamba have been granted amnesty. Sunday Otto, Vincent Okema, George Okello and Richard Odongo-Kau arrived in Uganda on December 1, after they parted ways with LRA leader Joseph Kony who they said killed his deputy Vincent Otti.

The four, together with three young girls, whose identity was concealed, were flown in by MONUC from the DR Congo. They escaped from the rebel base in DR Congo on November 7 and moved through the dense Garamba forest before making contact with MONUC.

“We have given them amnesty,” Justice Peter Onega who heads the Amnesty Commission said yesterday at Hotel Africana in Kampala.

Onega, who was attending a consultative meeting of the LRA on accountability and reconciliation, said the former rebels would receive their certificates today at the commission offices.

During the meeting, Onega called for the speeding up of the talks so that peace was permanently restored in the North.

“We cannot keep this peace process going on for years. The people who have been suffering are tired. Let us not wait when they have broken down completely and we sign. What I have said applies to the LRA and to the Government.”

He cautioned the LRA against tackling their ICC the indictments in a confrontational manner. The judge said the ICC would not push to try anybody after the conflicting sides had signed an agreement.

Participants told the LRA team to pursue solutions to the original causes of the rebellion and not adopt other issues they have found along the way during the talks.

“Overtime, you have taken on causes like federalism that were not associated with the rebellion. You will become politicians instead,” said Arthur Bainomugisha of ACCORD.

Max Omeda, a former rebel who signed an agreement to end the Teso insurgency, advised the LRA to trust the Government, saying it could not

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renegade on the deal.

â€œDonâ€™t create more complications and drag the talks. As a former rebel I urge you to think about the suffering people.â€

Mwambutsya Ndebesa of Makerere University said the AU and the UN should be guarantors of the peace agreement to be signed, while Apac MP Betty there was a general view among some MPs that the war be solved using traditional justice.

Erute North MP Gutumoi Angiro asked the parties to conclude the agreement in January and attend the commemoration of the Barlonyo massacre on February 21.

David Pulkol, a former spy chief, predicted that dragging Kony to Juba to sign the agreement would be a huge call with the indictments hovering over his head.

â€œThe arrest warrant must be suspended. If Kony gets in a helicopter to go to Juba, how sure will he be that it will not end up in The Hague?â€

LRA delegation chairman Martin Ojul pleaded that he should not be distracted from his mandate of talking peace with questions on Ottiâ€™s death.

â€œMy mandate doesnâ€™t include military and administrative matters of the LRA. Therefore, when Kony says his deputy is under house arrest, it would be unfair to ask me to confirm or deny the statement.â€

â€œHe (Kony) confirmed to me that any military or disciplinary measures in their command have nothing to do with the peace process.â€

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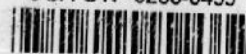
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