

ANNEX F

Public

Statement of Bishop MacLeord Baker Ochola

**THIS IS BISHOP OCHOLA II'S POSITION ON THE FORMERLY
ABDUCTED CHILDREN OF NORTHERN UGANDA TO BE PRESENTED TO
THE ICC IN THE HAGUE, NETHERLANDS.**

Kitgum, March, 31, 2025.

I am MacLeod Baker Ochola II, a retired Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Kitgum, The Province of the Church of Uganda. I am one of the co-founders of Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). The ARLPI is an Interfaith Peace-building and Conflict transformation organisation that was formed in 1997 and inaugurated in February 1998 to provide a proactive response to the conflict in northern Uganda. I am also one of the peace activist who advocated for peace and stability in the world. I am also the founder and Chair of the Acholi Education Initiative.

ARLPI, brings together all the religious leaders of the major denominations in Acholi sub-region namely ; Anglican, Catholic, Muslim, Orthodox, Seventh Day Adventist, and the Born Again Faith Federation to participate effectively in transforming conflicts in Acholi sub-region. We were therefore, inspired by our faith, to come together for a common cause to advocate for and lead our followers out of the violent conflict in the region. Our work for peace has been recognised internationally, our organization and several members of our board received Peace Awards, including the Niwano Peace Award, the Paul Carus Award, and the Peace Award of IRU African.

Like all members of the community, I have experienced first-hand the violence from both parties to the conflict and have personally suffered from it. Nevertheless, I personally chose the way of God to bring about peace, forgiveness and reconciliation into our own situations. For many years, with the ARLPI, I have advocated for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in northern Uganda. We consistently opposed a military solution as we knew it has been proven to be inefficient. Rather, we led mediation initiatives, playing a pivotal role in promoting dialogue between the Lord's Resistance Army and the government of Uganda. Shortly after our organization was

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founded, we promoted an Amnesty Bill that granted blanket amnesty to LRA members, which was adopted into the Amnesty Law in 2000. As a result, thousands of people have been granted amnesty and were reintegrated into our community. We also met more than 20 times with some of the LRA highest commanders to pave the way for peace negotiations. We then played an advisory and observational role in the Juba Peace Talks.

It is true that nobody in northern Uganda who is in his or her right mind can dispute all these facts about the abducted children in northern Uganda who have been subjected and conditioned to become a killing machine in the hands of the LRA as an organisation. The truth of the matter is, all these worse crimes committed against humanity have been committed by the formerly abducted children of Northern Ugandan who had been forced to do so by the LRA as an organisation. No doubt, these were the circumstances they were subjected and conditioned to do for years.

Where is the distinction between the formerly abducted children of Northern Uganda and the LRA as an organisation? Can they be as guilty as their captors? All the formerly abducted children of northern Uganda, were victims of circumstances because they were all abducted against their will and conscience.

I recognize the legitimacy of the International Criminal Court and do not reject the ICC's charges, nor do I encourage impunity. However, I believe that the ICC's involvement has been, and still is, an obstacle to meaningful peace in northern Uganda. I fear the ICC risks destroying efforts for a lasting peace, because people want this war to stop, and if we follow the ICC in branding the LRA as criminals, it will not stop. Retributive justice is not the appropriate means to achieve peace in northern Uganda. The ICC system insists on punishment, promotes polarization and alienates both sides. The ICC proceedings risk driving away from the community the highest-ranked LRA commanders. I witnessed how the issuance of arrest warrants against five LRA commanders worked against efforts to end the war peacefully and worry that the current proceedings against Joseph Kony will again act as an

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obstacle to reconciliation efforts. In my opinion we should instead focus on truth-telling, acceptance of responsibility, forgiveness, and traditional reconciliation processes. If there is no process of reconciliation, there is no healing, and if there is no healing there is no restoration and justice. Only this approach will bring us peace as I understand it, that is not just as the silence of the gun, but also as a feeling of freedom in our heart. I am convinced the *Mato Oput* process is more holistic and will bring restoration to broken human relationships, transform lives and heal the hearts of those involved. That is what we need in northern Uganda.

~~† MB. Bai~~, March 31, 2025.
