

**For Immediate Release**

**December 7, 2011**

**REMARKS**  
**Ambassador Johnnie Carson**  
**Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs**  
**at the U.S. Institute of Peace**  
**on “U.S. Efforts to Counter the Lord’s Resistance Army”**

**December 7, 2011**  
**Washington, DC**

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY CARSON:** Let me first thank the U.S. Institute of Peace for having me back, and for organizing this important event. The United States is engaged in a number of efforts to help address violent armed groups and to promote security in the Great Lakes Region of Africa. Among those efforts, countering the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) has been a priority for us. Over the last several years, hundreds of thousands of Americans, especially young Americans, have mobilized and expressed concern for the communities in central Africa placed under siege by the Lord’s Resistance Army. We greatly appreciate your efforts, and we are committed to working with you in pursuit of an end to the LRA’s atrocities.

For several years, the people and governments of Uganda, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and South Sudan have worked to bring an end to the scourge of the LRA. They have endured difficult circumstances and many sacrifices in search of peace. The United States has sought to support them in their struggle. We believe the LRA’s actions are an affront to human dignity and a threat to regional stability. We believe that those abducted should be freed and that the leadership of the LRA should be brought to justice. In collaboration with our partners in the region, we have sought to put in place a strategy that draws on the lessons of history, improves our support to the governments of the region, and increases the chances of successfully ending the LRA threat once and for all.

Let me begin with the history. The LRA has now been active for 25 years, a quarter of a century, making it one of Africa’s oldest, most violent and persistent armed groups. For two decades, the people of northern Uganda were caught in the midst of the fighting between the brutal LRA insurgency and the government. Some two million people were forced into internal-displacement camps, where they languished in squalid conditions. Tens of thousands of children were abducted by the LRA, maimed, and forced to become child soldiers or sex slaves and ordered to commit unspeakable acts. Since it began its insurgency, the LRA has abducted 66,000 youth. To repeat: 66,000.

At the conflict’s height in northern Uganda, thousands of children would walk long distances every evening from villages into town centers to avoid being abducted by the LRA. They became known as “night commuters.”

When I served as ambassador in Uganda from 1991 to 1993, the United States recognized the enormous suffering caused by the LRA and tried to support the Government of Uganda's efforts

to end this scourge. Over the years, we have provided security assistance and training to the Uganda People's Defense Force, supplied humanitarian assistance, supported peace talks and reconciliation initiatives, and worked with partners to enhance the protection of civilians and the reintegration of former combatants.

Under increasing pressure, in 2005 and 2006, the LRA's leader Joseph Kony ordered the LRA to withdraw completely from Uganda and move west into the border region of the DRC, the CAR, and what would become South Sudan. Kony believed, rightfully, that it would be more difficult to track and pursue his forces in this remote region. In 2006, the LRA accepted an offer to engage in peace talks with the Government of Uganda.

From 2006 to 2008, the United States supported the peace talks in Juba. We believed the talks offered a real opportunity to bring an end to the conflict, and our diplomats worked with the mediators and civil society for two years to move the process forward. However, it became increasingly clear that Joseph Kony was not committed to the process. In 2007, he reportedly killed his second-in-command Vincent Otti who was engaged in the peace process. When a peace agreement was finalized, Kony refused to come out of the bush and sign. He was given the opportunity to sign on multiple occasions over several months, and each time he failed to do so. Meanwhile, throughout 2008, the LRA began to carry out new attacks and abductions in Congolese and Central African communities.

By late 2008, it was very clear that Joseph Kony had no interest in peace and was resuming hostilities and working to replenish his ranks. It was also clear that Kony had no regard for the lives of the people of the CAR, the DRC and Sudan, and would continue to kill and pillage. Regional leaders agreed to launch new military operations against the LRA. Unfortunately, the LRA managed to escape the initial assaults on their camps in Garamba National Park in the DRC. Over the following months, at Kony's direction, the LRA committed a series of new large-scale massacres, including the brutal "Christmas Massacres" in northern DRC, in which hundreds of Congolese were hacked to death and burned alive.

Since that time, the UPDF and national militaries in the region have continued to pursue the LRA and to expand protection to the local populations. Despite tremendous challenges, the UPDF's sustained efforts have yielded some success in reducing the LRA's numbers and in keeping them from regrouping. Dozens of LRA officers have been killed or captured or have simply surrendered. The LRA's core fighters have been reduced to an estimated 150 to 200, in addition to accompanying women and children.

However, there are significant challenges in pursuing small groups of LRA across this densely forested and difficult jungle terrain. This is one of the least developed regions in all of Africa, and lacks basic road and telecommunications infrastructure. Local authorities are far removed from their capitals and often lack resources to govern effectively. As a result, Kony himself and the other top LRA commanders have managed to evade capture.

The LRA retains the capacity to cast a wide shadow across the region because of its brutality and the fear it arouses in local populations. As of August 2011, the UN estimated 440,000 people were displaced or living as refugees across CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan due to LRA activity. The remaining LRA elements have continued to commit attacks across the three

countries. According to the UN, this year alone, there have been over 250 attacks in the CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan attributed to the LRA.

The LRA's continued attacks have been cause for universal concern and condemnation – by the people and governments of the region, the United Nations, and the African Union. Just last month, African leaders from across the continent came together to declare the LRA as a terrorist group, the AU's first such designation. Here in the United States too, people have come together to condemn the LRA's atrocities. In the Congress, Senator Russ Feingold teamed up with Sam Brownback and James Inhofe, and Congressmen Ed Royce and Jim McGovern in 2009 to write legislation calling for more comprehensive U.S. efforts to help end the LRA threat. With the support of youth activists and human rights organizations, this legislation won historic bipartisan support and was signed into law by President Obama.

After coming into office, the Obama Administration reviewed ongoing and past U.S. support to governments in the region for countering the LRA. We worked to identify what had worked and what had not, and how we could best support our partners in the region to accomplish their mission. In line with the Congressional legislation, we worked last year to develop a comprehensive, multi-year strategy to guide U.S. support to help our partners in the region better mitigate and ultimately eliminate the threat posed by the LRA. In our strategy, we sought to incorporate a number of lessons learned from history.

The first lesson we identified is that LRA will use any reduction in military or diplomatic pressure, or the provision of safe haven by any actor, to regroup and rebuild its forces. As he did during the Juba peace talks in 2008, Joseph Kony will use any chance he gets to kill, abduct, and loot in order to regenerate his ranks and capabilities. Therefore, we made a strategic decision to continue assisting the UPDF as they carry out forward operations against the LRA. We have continued to provide logistical support for their operations on the condition that they remain focused on the mission, cooperate with the other regional governments, and do not commit abuses. They have lived up to those commitments.

We also realized the need to encourage stronger regional partnerships to effectively address the LRA. As a result, we have increased our engagement with the militaries of CAR, DRC, and South Sudan regarding the LRA, and supported their increased efforts to address this threat. With our encouragement, earlier this year, the government of DRC deployed a U.S.-trained and -equipped battalion to participate in counter-LRA efforts in the LRA's areas of operations in the DRC. We have also provided some equipment to CAR forces deployed in the LRA-affected area, and we plan to provide targeted training to SPLA forces that will deploy to the LRA-affected area of South Sudan.

The second lesson we identified in developing our strategy is that additional critical capabilities were needed to increase the chances of militaries in the region apprehending or removing LRA top commanders from the battlefield. As part of developing the President's strategy, we asked U.S. Africa Command to review how we could improve our support to national militaries in the region to increase the likelihood of success. AFRICOM planners traveled throughout the region and met with the governments there. Their conclusion was that sending a small number of U.S. military advisors to work with these national forces, both at headquarters and the field-level,

could enhance their capacity to coordinate and fuse intelligence with effective operational planning.

On October 14, President Obama reported to Congress that he had authorized a small number of U.S. forces to deploy to the LRA-affected region, in consultation with the national governments, to act as advisors to the militaries that are pursuing the LRA.

There has been some confusion in the media about this announcement, so let me clarify a few things. First, contrary to some conspiracy theories in the press, this deployment is focused on the LRA and the LRA only. Second, although they are equipped for combat in case that they need to defend themselves, the U.S. forces in this operation are there to play a supportive role to the UPDF and national militaries pursuing the LRA. Third, although the total number of U.S. military personnel participating in this operation will be approximately 100, only a portion of those total personnel will travel to field locations in LRA-affected areas to serve as advisors to regional forces pursuing the LRA; the personnel who remain in Uganda will perform logistical and other functions to support our advisors. Fourth, this is not an open-ended commitment; we will regularly review and assess whether the advisory effect is sufficiently enhancing our objectives to justify continued deployment.

In his report to the UN Security Council last month, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that regional military operations against the LRA must continue, but acknowledged that national militaries in the region “lack the full range of resources and capabilities in areas such as logistics, intelligence gathering, and air power, to effectively deal with the problem.” In a Presidential Statement following its meeting, the UN Security Council welcomed international efforts to enhance the capacity of these militaries, and noted the efforts of the United States.

Over the last month, the U.S. military personnel have, in coordination with the UPDF, been planning and laying the groundwork for forward deployments to field locations in the LRA-affected areas. Starting this month, teams of the advisors are beginning to deploy to LRA-affected areas. It is critical that they get out to field so they can directly interact with all of the forces pursuing the LRA and assess the operating environment. Our embassies have been in close touch with all of the governments in the region in developing this operation, and we are not sending any personnel into their countries without their consent. We have also made clear that this operation is contingent on their sustained commitment and cooperation toward ending the LRA threat.

The third lesson we identified in developing our strategy is the importance of civilian protection. The LRA has often responded to new military campaigns by committing reprisal attacks against vulnerable communities, taking advantage of soft targets that lack protection and early warning capabilities. National militaries bear responsibility for civilian protection, but we realize that they face significant challenges in this regard. We have ensured that our military advisors are sensitive to the challenges of civilian protection and are incorporating protection considerations into all training and operational planning. Our advisors are also seeking to strengthen information-sharing among militaries in the region to allow better communication with local populations, and other civilian actors with the aim of enhancing protection. In partnership with the State Department’s new Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations, we have deployed a civilian officer to the region to assist our advisors in this regard.

We have also encouraged the UN peacekeeping missions in the DRC and South Sudan to augment their protection efforts in the LRA-affected areas to the extent possible. MONUSCO's leadership has told us that they will take additional steps over the coming month in an effort to prevent a repeat of the Christmas Massacres that took place in 2008 and 2009. At MONUSCO's request, the United States has embedded two U.S. military personnel into MONUSCO's Joint Intelligence and Operations Center in Dungen. These personnel are working with MONUSCO, FARDC, and UPDF representatives there to enhance information-sharing, analysis, and planning. In addition, our Embassy in CAR has encouraged the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office for CAR to put greater focus on the LRA-affected area.

Still, we have to acknowledge the enormous challenges for regional governments and their security forces given their limited resources, lack of mobility, and the poor transportation and communications infrastructure in this region. We have worked with partners to empower communities to make decisions related to their own safety. The State Department and USAID are now funding projects in the DRC to expand existing early warning networks to remote communities. USAID is also implementing a pilot project to install low-cost cell phone towers in LRA-affected areas of the DRC. We're talking to partners about trying to initiate similar projects in the CAR and South Sudan.

The fourth and final lesson we identified in developing our strategy is that there is no purely military solution to the LRA threat. We believe a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach is required. Military support must be embedded within a broader strategy and complemented by civilian efforts. Uganda's Amnesty Act has been a hugely effective tool for reducing the LRA's overall numbers. As regional actors increase military pressure on the LRA, it is critical to complement that effort with an increased push for LRA fighters and abductees to defect and escape.

In the last two months, we have seen the release and defection of dozens of women and children from the LRA's ranks in the DRC. I was especially struck by the story of two young women, one Congolese and the other Ugandan, both pregnant, who courageously escaped from the LRA's ranks in the middle of the night. They walked for four days, crossing three rivers, until they found a Congolese soldier on the road. These women were tired of living in dire conditions in the bush, and they wanted a different, brighter future for their babies. We know there are many more in the LRA's ranks who want the same thing, but who are afraid of what will happen to them when they come home.

All of those individuals who have left the LRA recently in the DRC and been handled by MONUSCO have received food, medical attention, and transportation assistance to return home and reunite with their families. We urge those remaining in the LRA's ranks to seek opportunities to escape, and take advantage of offers of reintegration support. We have encouraged the UN to work with governments in region to establish a region-wide process to facilitate the safe return, repatriation, and reintegration of those who leave the LRA's ranks. USAID has funded programs to support the rehabilitation of former abducted youth in CAR and the DRC, and their reunification with their families.

At the same time, we continue to work to support those communities who have suffered at the hands of the LRA. In the last two fiscal years, we have provided over \$50 million in humanitarian assistance to populations affected by the LRA in CAR, the DRC, and South Sudan. We look forward to the day when we can stop providing humanitarian assistance and focus on development. In northern Uganda, that process has begun. With the LRA's departure, northern Uganda has undergone a visible transformation in just a few years. The population is able to move freely, stores are open, and fields are being cultivated. Ninety-five percent of the people who once lived in displacement camps have gone home to rebuild their lives and the United States has played a leading role, among donors, in supporting northern Uganda's recovery.

A future free of the LRA is possible. The United States believes it is in our interest to help our partners in the region to realize that dream. That is why, despite significant budget constraints, the United States has taken a number of steps over recent years both to increase and improve our support to the region for countering the LRA and their impact.

However, the challenges facing our regional partners remain great. As we have learned over the last twenty-five years, ending the LRA will not be accomplished easily. We continue to ask all donors to step up their efforts and help address critical funding gaps. Just last month on my trip to Asia, I discussed the counter-LRA effort and appealed for support. We also continue to engage with other partners who are providing support for different aspects of this effort, especially the European Union with whom we co-chair the International Working Group on the LRA.

Finally, success in countering the LRA will ultimately depend upon the continued resolve and partnership of the affected countries. Although CAR, DRC, South Sudan, and Uganda have many differences, they are bound together by this common regional threat and have a shared interest in working together to end it. They have all lost lives to the LRA and made sacrifices to combat the LRA. Their continued cooperation is essential to finish this fight. We welcome the African Union's role in facilitating greater regional cooperation, and we hope they will move quickly in this regard.

For our part, the United States will continue to stand with the people and governments of Africa as they stand up and work together to end the LRA's reign of terror, and establish sustainable peace and security. Doing that is on the right side of history, on the right side of our values, and on the right side of our strategic interests.

Thank you.

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