

## Ssemogerere paper exposes war's havoc

*Here are excerpts from a paper presented in Kampala, Uganda, on May 9, 1997, by Paul K. Ssemogerere, president of the Democratic Party of Uganda (DP). The report, titled "Northern Uganda—Towards a Durable Solution; Peace, Justice and Democratic Self-Governance with Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Development," proposes a negotiated settlement to the 11-year-long war in Northern Uganda, and proposes a federal system for the country. The section printed here documents the consequences of this war on Uganda, especially its northern third.*

The Democratic Party is convinced that a programme of action embracing: an immediate cease-fire followed by a negotiated settlement, a Judicial Commission of Inquiry into atrocities committed, and the granting of substantial constitutional power for democratic self-governance to the people in the region will go a long way in addressing legitimate grievances. Exercising a reasonable degree of local autonomy, the people in Northern Uganda should then be generously assisted by Government and the international community to embark on a programme of rehabilitation, and development over which they are the masters. . . .

It is unacceptable for the international community to stand and look idly by, as hundreds of thousands of people in Northern Uganda are dehumanized and are compelled to resort to mercy-pleading on their knees, for their dear lives, before trigger-happy and, sometimes, machete-wielding combatants, perceived by them as naked oppressors and outrageous violators of human rights. The time has come to appeal for, and even to demand, peace—initially a cease-fire. . . .

The Democratic Party notes with concern and grief:

- Uganda's deplorable history of political violence, customarily wrongly blamed on political parties per se;
- the long duration, now over ten years, of the current Northern conflict under President Museveni's leadership;
- the ever-widening and unpredictable territorial coverage of this conflict;
- the scale of violence and destruction, in the conflict; and
- the unbearable cost to the country in terms of:
  - firstly, precious lives lost and missing, estimated by a Government official to be in the region of over 300,000 for Acholi alone, i.e., almost 50% of the entire ethnic community;
  - secondly, the cost in terms of thousands of otherwise

able-bodied citizens, adults as well as youth, who have fallen victim to the HIV pandemic whose considerable high incidence in Northern Uganda is directly related to the high mobility and transfer of combatants deployed for action there. It is now estimated that HIV incidence for Gulu is around 80% of women screened and is the highest in the country;

- thirdly, the cost to the nation's treasury and the resultant debilitating international debt burden, which has skyrocketed to the tune of U.S. dollars four billion (\$4,000,000,000) during the war years, from a low figure of only \$1,000,000,000 in 1986, when President Museveni captured state power;

- fourthly, the damage to, and the destruction of, the environment, wild game, domestic animals and fowl, as well as infrastructure, resulting from pollution, constant bombings and shootings, as well as other war activities including the laying of landmines, some of which, it is alleged, are manufactured in Uganda;

- fifthly, the adverse effects on the economy and people's livelihood as a result of the "villagization" policy, whereby peasants are literally forced off their farms and out of their homesteads and their everyday activities.

Consequently, in light of the above concerns, the Democratic Party deplores, in the strongest terms possible, Government's implacable position on the Northern problem, i.e., Government's insistence on only the military option within our borders, in the Great Lakes Area including the Sudan, and beyond—at whatever the cost. . . .

### Cases for investigation

**Cases for Investigations:** In the opinion of the Democratic Party, the following are a reasonable minimum for investigation under the justice programme:

(a) Violation of Human Rights, generally, especially in respect of wanton killings and looting, as well as political oppression and discrimination based on the victim's ethnic background and/or religious and political affiliation;

(b) Political harassment and persecution: for example, there are innumerable complaints of large numbers of otherwise innocent people throughout Northern Uganda who, under the pretext of security measures, have been killed, imprisoned and tortured on the basis of their political beliefs or opinions, to wit:

- the arrest, torture and imprisonment of key opposition personalities or critics in 1991, e.g., former Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and UPC leader, Omara Atubo; DP and Liberal Party leaders: Andrew B. Adimola, Zachary Olum (a former Minister) and Mzee Tiberio Atwoma Okeny, amongst many others, who languished in Luzira maximum security prison charged with the capital offence crime of treason on the basis of malicious fabrications by state agents;

- the arrest, torture and imprisonment of about 300 local leaders in Acholi in 1991, who were detained without trial

at various locations in Acholi, again on the basis of false accusations by state officials and functionaries;

- the arrest of four alleged Kony guerrillas or Kony collaborators by senior army officers in Gulu, 1996, and handing them over to a hostile and incited mob for lynching to death;

- the forceful eviction of opposition leaders, e.g., Mzee Tiberio Atwoma Okeny, from their houses and home areas.

- the arrest, torture and imprisonment of opposition supporters in Arua, e.g., Mr. Kaku Langalanga, Abdulah Musa, a one Matia [sic], etc., who are dumped in Luzira maximum security prison on a trumped up charge of treason—there to languish on remand without any early and fair trial in sight.

- the recent arrest in Arua of hundreds of people and their subsequent imprisonment in local prisons there, but without any proper prior police investigations and without any prospect for an early and fair court hearing.

- the alleged wave of terror, in Arua, in the form of arrests, threats and killings directed at staunch multipartyists and, in particular, people who campaigned for Presidential candidate Paul Kawanga Ssemogerere, who include:

- (i) one Ali, a water seller in Arua Municipality, who was allegedly tortured in the dreaded Gilgil Military barracks, and died a few days afterwards;

- (ii) Alex Drandua, a prominent Pharmacist, who was gunned down near his home in Arua Municipality;

- (iii) four businessmen: Binaisa Amule, Isaac Okulega (Manager of Top Ten Traders), Asen Langalanga and Isaac Oscar, who were rounded up by military personnel in April 1997 and are said to be undergoing torture without being tried in the law courts;

- the arrest and detention without trial of thirty-six (36) workers at Kakira Sugar Works (all originating from West Nile) following a strike at the factory over salaries, and labeling them collaborators of a rebel group operating in West Nile, the West Nile Bank Front (WNBF).

- (c) Violations of Human Rights and commission of various atrocities, including heterosexual rape and rape by homosexuals, against, in particular women, children and the youth.

- (d) Corruption, whereby it is alleged for instance, that senior officials in Government and the military are exploiting, and even perpetuating, the military situation in the North, in order to profiteer in various transactions there.

- (e) Allegations of massacres as at Namokora, Kona-Kilak, Alero, Anaka, Acholi-Bu, etc., in Acholi[land] in 1986, as well as various incidents of bombing of civilian and non-military targets by helicopter gunships, as at Alokulum in the early 1990s.

- (f) Allegation of extensive arson, i.e., wholesale destruction of stored dry food by the setting on fire of granaries in the countryside. . . .

## **Genocide and Acts Against Humanity**

While the Democratic Party does not assert that genocide has been committed in the North or any other part of the

country, it is a matter of public knowledge that some of the allegations levelled against combatants border on accusation for genocide. Accordingly, and in order to clear the air in this regard, two things are necessary. First, there is need to state what genocide and acts against humanity mean. Second, it is necessary to institute and conduct a credible Commission of Inquiry into all serious allegations of atrocities committed in the war to put the issue at rest, one way or the other.

# **The 1991 assault on Northern Uganda**

*Here are excerpts from a 1991 research paper of the Ugandan Peoples Congress, on the violence perpetrated by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni in that year in northern Uganda.*

## **2.2 Cases of Human Rights Violations by NRM-A**

### **2.2.1 Atiak—Gulu District**

In March 1991, an Assistant District Administrator of Gulu district convened a public meeting at Atiak Trading Center and its surroundings. The people gathered at 9:00 a.m. as directed and waited. Army and government officials did not come until after 5:00 p.m., when they started addressing the people. As it got dark, the people who were obviously wary of the insecurity in the area, attempted to disperse before the end of the meeting. Soldiers inexcusably and randomly opened fire on the crowd. Over 100 people were killed, many fled into the bush with bleeding bullet wounds and died and many more were injured. The government admitted five dead and 25 injured. . . .

### **2.2.2 Owino Market—Gulu town**

At the start of the most recent military operation against the “rebels” in Acholi (Gulu and Kitgum) and Lango (Lira and Apac) in April 1991, soldiers surrounded Owino Market in the center of Gulu town and shot 25 people dead and injured many others. Thousands of innocent people were rounded up and marched to Pece Stadium in Gulu, half-naked and having been forced to abandon all their commodities and belongings at the marketplace. Unfortunately, it rained heavily that day, soaking the crowds at the stadium. They stayed in the open for about a week, while being “screened” by the soldiers. Each day, as darkness fell, women were separated from the men; and each day and night they were being whipped allegedly because their sons and daughters were “rebels in the bush.” Again, the resident minister ordered a commission of inquiry, whose results have not been heard of.