

Sudanese churches seek action on Ugandan rebel group

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February 9, 2011

Juba, Southern Sudan, February 9 (ENInews)--Church leaders in Southern Sudan have called for urgent strategies to end threats caused by northern Uganda's rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The leaders said attacks are escalating, threatening a fragile peace in a region that will celebrate independence on 9 July.

"The LRA regularly harasses innocent people along the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Southern Sudan and Central Africa Republic borders," the Rev. Ramadan Chan Liol, the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) general secretary told ENInews in Juba. "We feel it is urgent that we find ways of reaching a lasting peace with the LRA ."

The LRA started in 1987 in northern Uganda, with leader Joseph Kony stating his aim was to overthrow Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni's government and replace it with one led by the Ten Commandments. "Last month we lost a nun into the hands of the LRA in northern Congo ... there have been sporadic disappearances and killings, abduction, wounding and displacement of the people in Western Equatoria (in southern Sudan)," Roman Catholic Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala of Tombura-Yambio diocese in Southern Sudan said in a statement received by ENInews on 7 February.

He said the LRA had murdered more than 2,700 people in southern Sudan, and abducted over 3,500 others since September 2008, when the latest wave of attacks began. "Many of our children are still in the hands of the LRA. We do not know if they are alive or dead. Those who have managed to escape bear the physical and mental scars of suffering and will never be the same again," he said.

Both Sudanese and Ugandan church leaders call for a negotiated settlement to the conflict. "I feel the best solution is dialogue. This means there is a peaceful resolution to it," said Chan.

Retired Anglican Bishop Macleod Baker Ochola of Kitgum, chairman of a group of religious leaders that supports peace initiatives, said faith leaders opposed military options against LRA because they had failed in the past, hurting the local people.