

Friends of Orphans Press Release, March 13, 2012 – Pader Uganda: Friends of Orphan’s Call for Resolution for the Joseph Kony / LRA Conflict

“When two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers”

I am writing from Pader, Uganda because Friends of Orphans (FRO) believe the conversation about Joseph Kony and Invisible Children is neglecting the voices of those that matter most– the people of Northern Uganda terrorized by Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA). I know more than I would like to know about the LRA, not from watching Kony 2012, but because I was one of the now famous “child soldiers.” I was abducted at the age of fourteen with my brother by the LRA and remained with them for nearly two and a half years.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz0gGDFGgrY>

I know for real how bad the LRA is and I demand for the immediate end to this conflict. In order to end this conflict, OUR voices must be heard.

FRO disagrees with Invisible Children’s support of military action to end the Northern Uganda’s conflict. Since 1989 the government of Uganda has used military campaigns against Joseph Kony. With technical support from the American government, Operation Lightning Thunder was expected to end the war by either capturing Joseph Kony alive or killing him. Still it failed and instead spread violence to the Central African Republic, where Joseph Kony relocated. The chief result of the military attacks on Joseph Kony to date has been the dispersal of the rebels into smaller groups from their base resulting in atrocities against civilians, particularly children.

I support a peaceful means of ending this conflict over any military approach. The optimism and hope of the people in Northern Uganda for the end of violent conflict and return to peace in the region is more prominent than ever. Even though the peace talks in 2006 headed by Riek Machar did not result in a formal peace agreement between the LRA and the government of Uganda, it has brought relative peace to Northern Uganda. People have moved back to their original villages from the refugee camps. At least for now, there is no Joseph Kony in Uganda.

I encourage the peaceful means continually, since it has brought tangible results. It has saved many lives that would have been otherwise lost to the war. The people of Northern Uganda believe more in a peaceful means of resolving this conflict because it has been tried and it has worked. They have seen the results.

This is not a simple problem that can be solved with a simple solution; this will inevitably require intervention in the form of a local approach in bringing Joseph Kony to court to answer for the war crimes he committed in Northern Uganda. (as opposed to the sole I.C.C. approach which is prominent in the current debate) A systematic approach is necessary to bring Joseph Kony to justice. Reconciliation is to provide opportunities to all people affected by war and the wider communities to have a voice in peace building, reconciliation and societal healing.

The people of northern Uganda have shed too much blood. Nobody supports Joseph Kony in Northern Uganda; we are only tired of war. We need to think of practical ways to rebuild and heal our community. We are now at the beginning of a long journey. The vision of FRO is to build a northern Ugandan society in which the vulnerable are empowered to achieve their full potential. In 1999, FRO (www.frouganda.org) was founded to

work with former child soldiers, orphans, child mothers, war and HIV/AIDS affected and infected communities to rehabilitate, reintegrate and empower them. We provide education (both vocational and academic), health, peace building, human rights, income generating activities and livelihood support programs. FRO is currently working to build a radio station. (www.frocommunityradio.org) The goal of the radio station is to promote peace and human dignity throughout our area. We are also trying to amplify “the voice of the voiceless” and believe this can be achieved through radio. To do so, we need the support of all those who now know what we have endured at the hands of the LRA and will not stand for it.

Sincerely,

Anywar Ricky Richard, Founder and Executive Director of Friends of Orphans

Brief History of Friends of Orphans (FRO) and founder Ricky Anywar:

Anywar Ricky Richard is a former LRA child soldier who in 1999 founded the charity organization Friends of Orphans (FRO) (www.frouganda.org). FRO is administered by former child soldiers and abductees from Pader District. All of whom were and continue to be affected by the war in northern Uganda. FRO founder Ricky Anywar Richard and colleagues conceived Friends of Orphans in 1999 when some of its organizing members were pursuing their degrees at the University of Makerere. Our experiences as former abductees and orphans, many of whom also lost immediate and extended family members, friends and neighbors, suffered displacement and continue to suffer those losses, led us to commit to the ongoing and unmet needs of our community.

We formally learned to serve as educators, medical officers, administrators, environmentalists, and in other professions through university education and work experience. This enables us to create an organization with the vision and ability to meet the psycho-social, educational, vocational, economic development, peace building, human rights, livelihood support programs and family service, cultural and social needs of children and women affected by conflict in Northern Uganda.

Since 1999, we have launched community-based education, vocational skill training, HIV/AIDS prevention, peace building and community development programs in Northern Uganda which address the immediate and long term needs of the community, many of whom are former child soldiers, child mothers, orphans, youths and women.

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