EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) is likely weaker than it has been in at least 20 years. LRA groups are scattered across an area in central Africa the size of California, and morale among the Ugandan combatants that comprise the core of its force is at a new low. At least 31 Ugandan LRA combatants, which is approximately 15 percent of the LRA’s core Ugandan fighting force, defected in 2012 and through the first six months of 2013. As of May 2013, there were approximately 500 total combatants and dependents within the LRA, operating primarily in Central African Republic (CAR) and Democratic Republic of the Congo (Congo). Of these 500 people, approximately 250 are combatants, including up to 200 Ugandans and 50 low-ranking fighters abducted primarily from ethnic Zande communities in CAR, Congo, and South Sudan.

Pressure from Ugandan military operations against the LRA in CAR and Congo has contributed to the breakdown of morale and discipline within the ranks of Ugandan LRA combatants. Launched in December 2008 with significant US support, Ugandan operations have been unable to decisively dismantle the LRA’s command structure or comprehensively protect civilians from LRA attacks. Nor are they likely to do so soon, as Ugandan troops are not permitted to operate in Congo and have suspended operations in CAR since the March 2013 coup there. However, over the past four years, the Ugandan military has protected major population centers, kept LRA groups on the run, disrupted their communications, and made basic survival extremely difficult. Ugandan LRA combatants are growing disillusioned with the LRA leadership’s failure to maintain contact with fragmented groups or provide a realistic strategy to accomplish its long-time goal of seizing power in Uganda. Some are also disillusioned with the group’s recent shift towards forms of banditry, including the harvesting of elephant ivory.

In response, LRA leader Joseph Kony has attempted to reconsolidate his control over the rebel group. In the past year, he has ordered the execution of several senior officers, including those who have disobeyed orders to not sleep with abducted women whom Kony had taken as his “wives.” He has ostracized others, particularly elderly fighters unable or unwilling to endure the grueling life in the forests of eastern CAR. In their place, Kony has transferred operational leadership to the youngest remaining generation of Ugandan fighters. He has also allowed the use of High Frequency (HF) radios to improve coordination between groups, even though he is most likely aware that such communications may be monitored by the Ugandan army with the help of the US military.

Kony has also tried, with limited success, to reach out to former backers in the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF). LRA groups acting on Kony’s orders have been in contact with SAF officers in Kafia Kingi, a disputed enclave along the border between Sudan and South Sudan, at least since the end of 2009. An LRA group, likely including Kony, was reportedly based near the Dafak SAF garrison in Kafia Kingi for over a year, until February or early March 2013. Recent defector reports indicate Kony may have returned to Kafia Kingi since then. However, the SAF has so far refused to provide the LRA with substantial military support.

The apparent weakening of the LRA’s internal cohesion, their long tradition of holding civilian populations hostage to deter attacks, and the historic failure of military operations to achieve a decisive victory suggest that the most timely and cost-effective approach to dismantling the LRA is to encourage increased defections. The large majority of people in the LRA were forcibly conscripted, and most, including many Ugandans, want to defect. However, obstacles to defection force many to remain with the LRA. Would-be escapees face a gauntlet of deterrents, including the risk of LRA punishment if they are caught, long journeys from remote LRA bases through unfamiliar and treacherous territory, and the risk of being harmed or killed by local communities or military forces they encounter.

When LRA members manage to defect, they face an uncertain future. Reintegration support for returnees is shamefully inadequate. Former abductees, particularly adults, must often face the challenge of rebuilding livelihoods, overcoming trauma, and coping with community stigmatization with little support. Awareness of these difficulties, combined with the risks of attempted
escape, discourages many from defecting.

However, a well-resourced and dynamic disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) strategy could help break Kony’s grip on the rebel group, allowing hundreds of abductees to peacefully return to their families, and help keep civilians safer from further LRA attacks. If executed well, such a strategy could produce a positive feedback cycle in which information from defectors helps DDR actors design more effective initiatives that can increase the rate of defections.

Currently, an alphabet soup of actors is attempting to put together such a strategy, with local civil society groups, the international organization Invisible Children, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUSCO), and US military advisers playing leading roles. They have used a range of tactics, including FM radio broadcasts, leaflets, helicopter-mounted speakers, and Safe Reporting Site (SRS) locations to reach LRA members with “Come Home” messages, while also working with local communities to ensure defectors are safely received.

However, DDR initiatives are far from their full potential. They are largely being implemented where international actors have established bases, but this covers just a fraction of the territory LRA groups operate in, and even in those areas implementation is sparse and uneven. Despite proven cases of success, DDR receives a fraction of the funds spent on military and humanitarian operations in LRA-affected areas. DDR efforts are also hampered by the bureaucratic inefficiencies caused by the need to coordinate efforts among dozens of actors across multiple borders – as well as the lack of interest from regional governments preoccupied with other crises.

A better coordinated, multi-pronged approach is needed to improve existing DDR efforts. More thorough investigations of LRA activity, particularly in northeastern CAR and Kafia Kingi, are needed to maintain an up-to-date understanding of the rebel group. DDR actors must continue to refineCome Home messages, adapting them to take advantage of LRA group movements and internal friction, as well as to provide practical information to help defectors escape safely. DDR actors must also expand the infrastructure needed to deliver those messages, ensuring that FM radio towers, leaflet drops, helicopter sorties, and Safe Reporting Sites saturate the full geographic range of LRA movements. They must also collaborate with local communities to ensure that defectors are received safely and collaborate with United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), and national security forces to minimize the risk of LRA reprisal attacks. Finally, a surge in reintegration support is needed to increase the “pull factor” for would-be defectors.

Though the LRA has ceased to be a political threat to any regional state, it continues to menace vulnerable civilians across a large swath of Africa. The coming months represent a critical window of opportunity to encourage as many defections as possible before Kony is able to reconsolidate control of the LRA, renew motivation in the ranks, and diminish opportunities to discourage defection. It would be a tragedy if momentum were lost and Kony given the opportunity to reinvigorate his forces in his usual fashion – by committing new atrocities against innocent civilians.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**To the African Union**

- Request permission from authorities in CAR for the US and the Ugandan military (UPDF) to immediately begin helicopter speaker broadcasts and leaflet drops in the prefectures of Mbomou, Haut Kotto, and Vakaga;

- Request permission from the Sudanese government to conduct Come Home message leaflet drops and radio broadcasts in the disputed Kafia Kingi enclave.

**To the Congolese government**

- Acknowledge the threat LRA attacks pose to civilians in Haut Uele and Bas Uele districts;

- Grant permission to the US government and NGOs to conduct helicopter speaker broadcasts over Congolese territory.

**To the Ugandan government**

- Negotiate, through the AU, the resumption of LRA pursuit and civilian protection operations in eastern and northeastern CAR as soon as security permits;

- Promptly return Ugandan combatants who leave the LRA to Uganda, refrain from forcing them to join the UPDF, and institute a policy of giving all former combatants a six-month “readjustment period” in northern Uganda before allowing them to join the military;
• Publicly announce if any senior LRA commanders will be held liable for crimes committed, and ensure all other returning members of the LRA are granted amnesty upon returning to Uganda;

• Fully fund rehabilitation programs for former combatants and communities in northern Uganda affected by the conflict;

• Fully fund the Amnesty Commission’s operations and resettlement activities.

To the US government

• Authorize another six-month rotation of US military advisers to deploy to forward locations in LRA-affected areas;

• Benchmark ongoing US assistance – including the deployment of military advisers and DDR initiatives – against progress in dismantling the LRA’s command structure and demobilizing remaining combatants;

• Ease restrictions on approvals for DDR-focused flights and expand airlift capacity to allow for rapid reactions to Come Home messaging opportunities across all LRA-affected areas of CAR;

• Direct USAID to significantly increase funding for community-based LRA defector reintegration assistance;

• Direct the Department of Defense to make significantly more funds available to US military advisers in the field for flexible, needs-based defection efforts such as leaflet distribution, helicopter speaker missions, and community sensitization;

• Encourage the sustainability of SRS locations by providing funding to support the project for at least one year after US military advisers withdraw from the region.

To UPDF troops and US military advisers in eastern CAR and South Sudan

• Continue to provide civilian protection at all SRS locations in eastern CAR and South Sudan;

• Continue to employ a policy of rapid reaction to civilian attacks followed by relentless pursuit;

• Immediately resume the distribution of Come Home messages by leaflets and helicopter broadcasts in eastern CAR;

• Using MONUSCO’s model, establish mobile FM radios at strategic UPDF deployments in eastern CAR.

To MONUSCO DDRRR and peacekeepers

• Expand leaflet drops and begin helicopter speaker broadcasts in Haut Uele and Bas Uele districts;

• Establish SRS locations in Haut Uele and Bas Uele, complete with civilian protection mechanisms;

• In the short-term, expand mobile FM radio broadcasts to all MONUSCO bases in Haut Uele and Bas Uele where the mission does not already have a permanent radio;

• In the medium-term, create permanent FM stations at bases in Duru and Ango;

• Develop and expand civilian liaison and intelligence gathering activities;

• Develop a more effective civilian protection system.

To Come Home message actors

• Ensure communities in CAR, Congo, South Sudan, and Uganda have substantial input into Come Home message campaigns and SRS projects;

• Collectively distribute 300,000 Come Home leaflets per month for the next 12 months;

• Continue to refine Come Home messages to ensure LRA members receive practical information on how to safely defect;

• Launch specific Come Home message campaigns targeting the 20-25 LRA officers most likely to defect;

• Expand the input of former Ugandan LRA combatants into Come Home message campaigns, including by forming an advisory council of former combatants, and compensate them for their efforts;

• Improve collective monitoring and evaluation of the relative success of different Come Home messages and mediums, including by creating a collective database of all returnees from the LRA that tracks what factors influenced their escape.
To donors

- Fund the construction or expansion, with accompanying local capacity building to broadcast Come Home messages, of community FM radio stations in Bakouma and Bangassou, CAR; Ango, Congo; and Raga, South Sudan;

- Increase funding for organizations such as Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), World Vision, and others that provide medical and psychosocial assistance to Ugandan LRA returnees;

- Increase funding for livelihoods projects in northern Uganda that benefit LRA returnees, including former male combatants, as well as host communities;

- Increase funding for reintegration programs in CAR, Congo, and South Sudan that support community-led projects that benefit both LRA escapees and communities victimized by LRA violence;

- Ensure that reintegration programs in CAR, Congo, and South Sudan provide support for adult escapees, particularly those living in remote rural areas;

- Provide funds for a comprehensive mapping of the LRA command structure and combatant force, combining existing information with supplementary research.
LOOSENING KONY’S GRIP

Map: Estimated location of LRA groups

Legend
- International boundary
- Administrative boundary
- Community
- Estimated location of LRA group

Estimated location of LRA groups as of April 2013, denoted by group commander

DR Congo
1) Major Thomas Okello “Odano”
2) Major Denis Obol “the one-eyed”
3) Second Lieutenant Okello Ray

CAR
4) Major Michael Odooki “Gwee”
5) Jon Bosco Kibwola
6) Second Lieutenant Richard
7) Major Massimiliano Watmon
8) Second Lieutenant Doo
9) Second Lieutenant Okwera
10) Captain Bosco Oroko Loriada
11) Otto Ladeere

Kafia Kingi
12) Joseph Kony*

Unidentified location
Major Okot Luwila
Major Kidega Murefu “Min Tigi Tigi”
Okot Odhiambo
Captain Otim Larwedo

*Kony’s group may be operating in northeastern CAR
On November 28, 2012, two male Ugandan combatants and three girls defected in Mboki, CAR, one of the first successful cases of LRA members utilizing a Safe Reporting Site.

On March 21, 2013, four LRA combatants released 28 women and children near Digba, DR Congo, the largest single return of long-term LRA members since January 2012. The group consisted of seven boys, 13 girls, and eight women.
Map: Counter-LRA military bases vs. LRA area of operations

Legend
- International boundary
- Administrative boundary
- Community
- AU RTF base
- AU RTF (UPDF) base
- US military base
- UNMISS base
- MONUSCO base
- Estimated LRA area of operations
  January 2012 – June 2013

Note: Locations of military bases are current as of June 2013. The map does not show all military deployments in the region, only the most notable bases used by counter-LRA forces.
Map: Come Home message range vs. LRA area of operations

Legend
- International boundary
- Administrative boundary
- Community
- Safe Reporting Site
- Defection flier drop site
- Helicopter speaker mission
- Estimated LRA area of operations January 2012 – June 2013
Map: FM radio Come Home broadcast coverage vs LRA area of operations

**FM radio Come Home broadcasts**
1. DDRRR Bangadi: 40km signal radius, 2.5 hours/day
2. DDRRR Dungu: 40km radius, 4.5 hours/day
3. Dungu FM: 15 km radius, 1.5 hours/day
4. Radio Ani Dusa: 29km radius, 0.5 hour twice per week
5. Radio Okapi: 100km radius, 1 hour/day
6. Radio Zereda: Approximately 55km radius, 1 hour/day
7. Radio RTK: 150km radius, 2 hours/day
8. Radio Zereda: 100km radius [125km planned radius], 1 hour/day
9. Radio Okapi: 100km radius [175km planned radius], 1 hour twice per week
10. Radio Ani Dusa Repeater [Ezo]: 75km radius, 1 hour twice per week
11. Radio Okapi Repeater [Tambura]: 75km radius, 1 hour twice per week

**Future FM radio construction**
12. Banda community FM: 150km planned radius

**FM radios with no Come Home broadcasts**
13. Ango
14. Wau

**Other radios with Come Home broadcasts**
DDRRR mobile FM: Deployed periodically to Congolese towns with UN peacekeeper deployments, 30-50km radius
UBC (Kampala): Shortwave radio that reaches all LRA-affected areas

Current as of July 2013
ANNEX I. ESTIMATED LRA COMPOSITION

Estimated LRA composition, April 2013

- Ugandan men
- Non-Ugandan men*
- Women**
- Children

*Primarily Zande abductees from CAR, Congo, and South Sudan
** Including approximately 40-60 Ugandan women

Estimated LRA combatant capacity, 1999-2013*

* A significant majority of LRA combatants are Ugandan males, but some Ugandan women and abductees from CAR, Congo, and South Sudan also serve as combatants

Estimated number of armed LRA combatants vs total membership, April 2013

- Total LRA membership
- Armed combatants

Note: These graphs represent estimates of membership within the LRA. At least 59 reported adult males could have been counted twice in the groups under the “LRA groups with unidentified status or location” section in Annex II. Some groups, however, might not have been mentioned at all due to lack of information from former combatants.