

# History

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The area now known as Uganda has been divided along racial and language lines [since at least the 4th century BC](#).<sup>[27]</sup> [Bantu](#) speaking agriculturists such as the [Baganda](#) people in Uganda's south and east created different and competing social and economic structures from the [Nilotic language](#) speaking [Acholi](#) in the north, whose economic system was centred around hunting and livestock herding.<sup>[27]</sup> The ethnic and cultural divisions within Uganda continued to exist during the years of the British [Uganda Protectorate](#). The agricultural Baganda people worked closely with the British. In contrast, the Acholi and other northern ethnic groups supplied much of the national manual labor and came to comprise a majority of the military.<sup>[28]</sup> The southern region, with its rich soil and fertile land, became the center of agricultural development.<sup>[29]</sup> The livestock raising Acholi dominated north of Uganda was relatively poorer than the cash-crop agricultural economy of the south. Following the country's [independence in 1962](#), Uganda's ethnic groups continued to compete with each other within the bounds of Uganda's new political system.

In 1986, [Alice Lakwena](#) established the [Holy Spirit Movement](#), an armed resistance movement claimed to be inspired by the [Holy Spirit](#) of God. Lakwena portrayed herself as a prophet who received messages from the Holy Spirit of God. She expressed the belief that the Acholi could defeat the government run by [Yoweri Museveni](#) (following Museveni's own victory in the [Ugandan Bush War](#)) by casting off witchcraft and spiritualism embedded in their culture. According to her messages from God, her followers should cover their bodies with [shea nut](#) oil as protection from bullets, never take cover or retreat in battle, and never kill snakes or bees.<sup>[30]</sup> [Joseph Kony](#) would later preach a similar superstition encouraging soldiers to use oil to draw a cross on their chest as a protection from bullets. During a later interview Alice Lakwena distanced herself from Kony, claiming that the spirit does not want them to kill civilians or prisoners of war. Kony sought to align himself with Lakwena and in turn garner support

from her constituents, even going so far as to claim they were cousins.<sup>[31]</sup> Meanwhile, Kony gained a reputation as having been possessed by spirits and became a spiritual figure or a medium. He and a small group of followers first moved beyond his home village of Odek on April 1, 1987.<sup>[32]</sup> A few days later, he met with a group of former [Uganda National Liberation Front](#) soldiers from the Black Battalion whom he managed to recruit.<sup>[32]</sup> They then managed to launch a raid on the city of [Gulu](#).<sup>[32]</sup>

By August 1987, Lakwena's Holy Spirit Mobile Force scored several victories on the battlefield and began a march towards the capital [Kampala](#). In 1988, after the Holy Spirit Movement was decisively defeated in the [Jinja District](#) and Lakwena fled to [Kenya](#), Kony seized this opportunity to recruit the Holy Spirit remnants and members of [Ugandan People's Democratic Army](#), another northern rebel group, including its founder [Odong Latek](#). Latek convinced Kony to adopt conventional [guerrilla warfare](#) tactics, primarily surprise attacks on villages. The LRA also occasionally carried out large-scale attacks to underline the inability of the government to protect the population. Until 1991, the LRA raided the settlements for supplies, which were carried away by villagers who were abducted for short periods. The fact that some [National Resistance Army](#) (NRA) government forces, in particular former members of the Federal Democratic Movement (FEDEMO),<sup>[33]</sup> were known for their lack of discipline and brutal actions ensured that the LRA were given at least passive support by segments of the Acholi population.<sup>[34]</sup>

March 1991 saw the start of Operation North, which combined efforts to destroy the LRA while cutting away its roots of support among the population through heavy-handed tactics.<sup>[35]</sup> As part of Operation North, an ethnic Acholi government minister [Betty Oyella Bigombe](#) created the "Arrow Groups" village guards, mostly armed with bows and arrows. The creation of the Arrow Groups angered Kony, who began to feel that he no longer had the support of the population. In response, the LRA mutilated numerous Acholi whom they believed to be government supporters, and the rebel retaliation caused many Acholi to finally turn against the insurgency. After the failure of Operation North, Bigombe initiated the first face-to-face meeting between representatives of the LRA and government. The rebels asked for a general amnesty for their combatants and to "return home", but the government stance was hampered by disagreement over the credibility of the LRA negotiators and political infighting.<sup>[34]</sup> At a meeting in January 1994, Kony asked for six months to regroup his troops, but by early February the tone of the negotiations was growing increasingly acrimonious and the LRA broke off negotiations, accusing the government of trying to entrap them.<sup>[34]</sup>

For a decade starting in the mid-1990s, the LRA was strengthened by military support from the government of [Sudan](#),<sup>[36]</sup> which was retaliating against Ugandan government support for rebels in what would become [South Sudan](#). In 1994, convinced that the Acholi were now collaborating with the Museveni government, Kony began to terrorize civilians with his increased military strength, resulting in a series of mass atrocities such as the [killing or abduction of several hundred villagers](#) in [Atiak](#) in 1995 and the [kidnapping of 139 schoolgirls](#) in [Aboke](#) in 1996. The government responded with creation of the so-called "protected camps" beginning in 1996. The LRA declared a short-lived ceasefire for the duration of [Ugandan presidential election, 1996](#), possibly in the hope that Yoweri Museveni would be defeated.<sup>[37]</sup> In January 1997, the LRA killed more than 400 and displaced about 100,000 people in a raid on the town of [Lamwo](#).<sup>[33]</sup>

In March 2002, the [Uganda People's Defence Force](#) (UPDF) launched a massive military offensive code-named Operation Iron Fist against the LRA bases in southern Sudan, with agreement from the [National Islamic Front](#). In retaliation, the LRA attacked the refugee camps in northern Uganda and the [Eastern Equatoria](#) in southern Sudan, brutally killing hundreds of civilians.<sup>[33][38][39][40]</sup> By 2004, according to the UPDF spokesman [Shaban Bantariza](#), mediation efforts by the [Carter Center](#) and the [Pope John Paul II](#) had been spurned by Kony.<sup>[41]</sup> In February 2004, the LRA unit led by [Okot Odhiambo](#) attacked [Barlonyo](#) IDP camp, killing over 300 people and abducting many others.<sup>[33][42]</sup> In 2006, [UNICEF](#) estimated that the LRA had abducted at least 25,000 children since the conflict began.<sup>[43]</sup> In January 2006, eight [Guatemalan Kaibiles](#) commandos and at least 15 rebels were killed in a botched UN special forces raid targeting the LRA deputy leader [Vincent Otti](#) in the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#).<sup>[44]</sup>



The conflict forced many civilians to live in [internally displaced person](#) (IDP) camps, such as this Labuje IDP camp near [Kitgum, Uganda](#) in 2005

According to the UN [Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA), the LRA attacks and the government's counter-insurgency measures have resulted in the displacement of nearly 95 percent of the Acholi population in three districts of northern Uganda. By 2006, 1.7 million people lived in more than 200 [internally displaced person](#) (IDP) camps in northern Uganda.<sup>[43]</sup> These camps had some of the highest mortality rates in the world. The [Ugandan Ministry of Health](#) and partners estimated that through the first seven months of 2005, about 1,000 people were dying weekly, chiefly from [malaria](#) and [AIDS](#). During the same time period of January-July 2005, the LRA abducted 1,286 Ugandans (46.4 percent of whom were children under the age of 15 years), and violence accounted for 9.4 percent of the 28,283 deaths, occurring mostly outside camps.<sup>[45]</sup>

In 2006-2008, [a series of meetings](#) have been held in [Juba](#), Sudan, between the government of Uganda and the LRA, mediated by the south Sudanese separatist leader [Riek Machar](#). The Ugandan government and the LRA signed a truce on August 26, 2006. Under the terms of the agreement, LRA forces would leave Uganda and gather in two assembly areas in the remote [Garamba National Park](#) area of northern Democratic Republic of Congo that the Ugandan government agreed not to attack. In December 2008-March 2009, however, the armed forces of Uganda, the DR Congo and South Sudan launched aerial attacks and raids on the LRA camps in Garamba, destroying them, but the efforts to inflict a final military defeat on the LRA were not fully

successful. Rather, the U.S.-supported [Operation Lightning Thunder](#) resulted in brutal revenge attacks by scattered LRA remnants, with over 1,000 people killed and hundreds abducted in Congo and South Sudan, and hundreds of thousands were displaced while fleeing the massacres. The military action in the DRC did not result in the capture or killing of Kony, who remained elusive.<sup>[46]</sup>

During the Christmas of 2008, the LRA [massacred at least 143 people and abducted 180](#) at a concert celebration sponsored by the Catholic church in [Faradje](#) in the Democratic Republic of Congo,<sup>[47]</sup> and struck several other communities in the near-simultaneous attacks: 75 people were murdered in a church near [Dungu](#), at least 80 were killed in Batande, 48 in Bangadi, and 213 in [Gurba](#).<sup>[48][49][50]</sup> By August 2009, the LRA terror in this country resulted in displacing as 320,000 Congolese, exposing them to a threat of famine, according to UNICEF director [Ann Veneman](#).<sup>[51]</sup> That same month, the LRA attacked a Catholic church in [Ezo, South Sudan](#), on the [Feast of the Assumption](#), with reports of victims being [crucified](#), causing Sudanese Archbishop John Baptist Odama to call on the international community for help in finding a peaceful solution to the crisis.<sup>[52][53][54]</sup> In December 2009, the LRA forces under [Dominic Ongwen](#) [killed at least 321 civilians and abducted 250 others](#) during a four-day rampage in the village and region of [Makombo](#) in the DR Congo.<sup>[33][55]</sup> In February 2010, about 100 people were massacred by the LRA in [Kpanga](#), near DR Congo's border with the [Central African Republic](#) and Sudan.<sup>[56]</sup> Small-scale attacks continued daily, displacing large numbers of people and worsening an ongoing [humanitarian crisis](#) which the UN described as one of the worst in the world.<sup>[57]</sup> By May 2010, the LRA killed over 1,600 Congolese civilians and abducted more than 2,500.<sup>[58]</sup> Between September 2008 and July 2011, the group, despite being down to only a few hundred fighters, has killed more than 2,300 people, abducted more than 3,000, and displaced over 400,000 across the DR Congo, South Sudan and the Central African Republic.<sup>[59]</sup>

By July 2011, 90 percent of people in the LRA areas of activity in the Democratic Republic of Congo still lived in fear of their safety, feeling completely abandoned and believing that neither [their government](#) nor the [MONUSCO](#) UN peacekeepers care for their security, according to [Oxfam](#) survey.<sup>[59]</sup> In March 2012, Uganda announced it will head a new four-nation [African Union](#) military force (a brigade of 5,000, including contingents from the DR Congo, Central African Republic and South Sudan) to hunt down Kony and the remnants of the LRA, but asked for more international assistance for the task force.<sup>[3][23]</sup>