

March 7, 2012

President Barack Obama
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

This week, Invisible Children – in partnership with the Enough Project and Resolve – launched “KONY 2012,” an ambitious advocacy campaign focused on seeing Joseph Kony, the leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and one of the world’s worst war criminals, brought to justice in 2012. For over two decades, Kony and his senior commanders have been allowed to prey on vulnerable civilians in remote and ungoverned areas of central Africa. Under his direction, the LRA has killed, raped, abducted, and mutilated tens of thousands of civilians in four separate countries. The group’s violent activities continue to destabilize the region and displace hundreds of thousands of people. For these crimes, the International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Kony and two other LRA commanders, but they remain at large and a dangerous threat to communities across central Africa.

In May of 2010, we joined you in the Oval Office for the signing of the Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act into law. On that historic day, you recognized the need to “renew our commitments and strengthen our capabilities to protect and assist civilians caught in the LRA’s wake, to receive those that surrender, and to support efforts to bring the LRA leadership to justice.”

The comprehensive White House strategy that you released in November of 2010 to address this issue included a range of measures intended to help reduce and mitigate the effect of LRA violence in the region, and produced new hope for an end to the group’s atrocities. Through its implementation, your Administration has helped improve cooperation among regional governments, expanded programs that provide early warning of LRA attack to vulnerable communities, and invested increased resources in efforts to help LRA fighters and abductees defect peacefully. Your decision to deploy U.S. military advisors to the region in October of 2011 was a welcome measure of further assistance for regional governments in their efforts to protect people from LRA attacks. For these actions, we applaud your leadership and encourage sustained commitment.

However, we fear that unless existing U.S. efforts are further expanded, your strategy may not succeed. The Ugandan and other regional militaries pursuing LRA commanders and groups continue to face daunting challenges. Their operations are hamstrung by flagging political will, weak cross-border coordination, the absence of tactical airlift, and the withdrawal of more than half of the Ugandan troops initially deployed to the field. Moreover, bureaucratic inertia and cuts in the U.S. foreign assistance budget have

drastically limited the scope of non-military aspects of the strategy's implementation, which are equally important to the pursuit of lasting peace in the region.

In the coming months, hundreds of thousands of Americans will be mobilized through KONY 2012 to provide your Administration with a clear mandate to address these shortcomings. Campaign supporters will be hosting film screenings and discussion forums within their communities, meeting with their representatives in Congress, attending Presidential campaign events, and more. While much of KONY 2012 will focus on the goal of seeing Joseph Kony brought to justice, our true objective is the complete end of LRA atrocities and sustainable recovery for affected communities. In that vein, we hope your Administration will consider taking a few key measures in the weeks and months ahead.

First, we encourage you to sustain the deployment of U.S. advisors until the LRA no longer poses a serious threat to civilians. While regional governments are primarily responsible for the protection of their own citizens, the presence of U.S. advisors in the region is enhancing cross-border information flows, providing valuable guidance for regional military operations, and provoking an unprecedented level of political interest in what has historically been a neglected crisis. Though no serious gains have been made in reducing the LRA's threat to civilians in the months since the advisors were deployed, reports from LRA defectors – and data showing a marked decrease in LRA attacks in the second half of 2011 – indicate that heightened U.S. and international interest may nonetheless be deterring the group from committing large-scale attacks. Premature withdrawal of the advisors would jeopardize these gains and likely trigger drawdowns in the efforts of other governments as well. The duration of their deployment should instead be determined by progress made in securing the apprehension of Joseph Kony and other senior commanders and the demobilization of LRA fighters and abductees.

Secondly, we encourage you to utilize funds that Congress has made available to help your Administration address the gaps in current efforts outlined above. In the National Defense Authorization Act of 2012, \$35 million was authorized to strengthen regional efforts to protect civilians and pursue top LRA commanders. These funds should be used to provide enhanced mobility, intelligence, and other support for ongoing operations, though it is crucial that any beneficiaries be monitored closely and held accountable for abuses committed against the civilian population or any other illicit activities.

Congress also directed in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2012 that up to \$10 million be used for programs that provide early warning to communities vulnerable to LRA attacks, help LRA abductees escape peacefully, and enhance telecommunications and road infrastructure in affected areas. The absence of basic infrastructure is key to the LRA's ability to perpetrate mass atrocities. As such, it is vital that your Administration utilize the full \$10 million to expand existing efforts in these areas, which currently benefit only a small fraction of the affected population. Programs to increase LRA defections – such as direct outreach to LRA commanders, expanded radio programming, aerial leafleting, the establishment of safe zones for surrender, and community sensitization – are a particularly important and underutilized means of reducing the

LRA's capacity to attack civilians. In Central African Republic (CAR), where most LRA commanders are currently located, no such efforts exist; U.S. military advisors are uniquely positioned to help expand these activities in CAR.

Lastly, increased diplomatic efforts are needed to ensure regional governments are committed to protecting the communities in Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and CAR being targeted by LRA attacks. The Congolese government, in particular, has sought to actively downplay the LRA's presence and impact on Congolese communities. Moreover, Uganda withdrew more than half of the forces initially deployed to pursue LRA commanders and groups, and their forces are no longer allowed to operate in Congo, where the LRA is committing the majority of attacks on civilians. We implore you to engage directly with the Presidents of each of the four countries – in partnership with the African Union – to enhance regional cooperation, increase the numbers and capabilities of troops deployed to LRA-affected areas, and boost efforts to encourage defections from the rebel group. The Secretary of State should also be working to secure additional support for regional efforts from European and other donor nations.

We thank you for your leadership on this issue, and are hopeful that together we can see Joseph Kony and his top commanders brought to justice and an end to LRA violence in 2012. Achieving this goal would be a relief for hundreds of thousands of people, a victory for international justice, and a tangible demonstration of your Administration's commitment to prevent and stop mass atrocities wherever they occur.

We look forward to engaging with senior members of your Administration in the coming months to help achieve these goals.

Sincerely,



Ben Keeseey
CEO, Invisible Children



John Bradshaw
Executive Director, the Enough Project



Michael Poffenberger
Executive Director, Resolve