

## Wanted by the ICC

The LRA's leaders: Who they are and what they've done

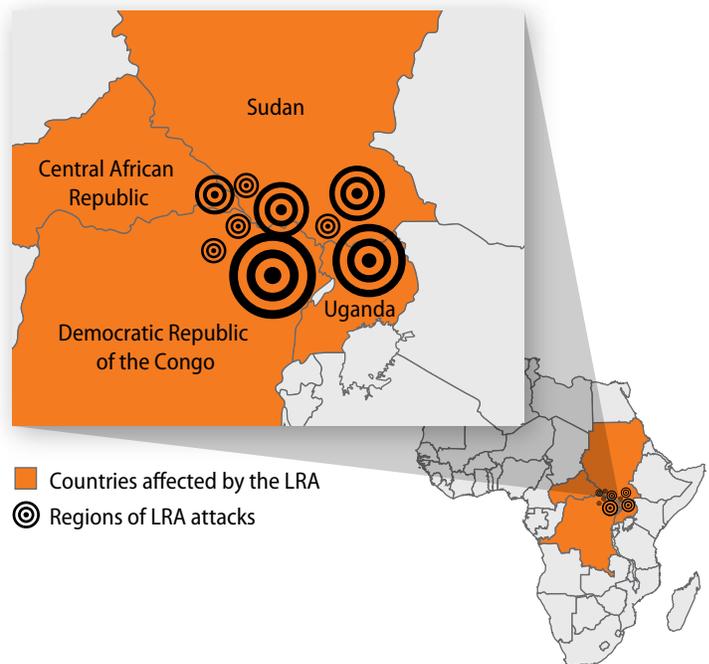
The Lord's Resistance Army, or LRA, has wreaked havoc in central Africa for more than two decades. Originating in northern Uganda and then spreading to neighboring countries, the LRA has no clear political agenda beyond a loosely articulated vision of a society that abides by the Ten Commandments. This ruthless militia directs its violence towards civilians and attacks local communities—massacring innocents, razing villages, and abducting children and forcing them to serve as soldiers, porters, and sex slaves. Finally pushed out of northern Uganda in 2005, the LRA now preys on civilians in Congo and southern Sudan and threatens stability in central Africa.<sup>1</sup>

The deadly effectiveness of the LRA is largely the result of its clear command structure and the ability of LRA leader and self-appointed messiah Joseph Kony to assert and maintain control of his top leadership and rank-and-file fighters. Throughout the LRA's military campaign, Joseph Kony has remained the militia's "absolute leader." He controls all facets of life in the bush, and many within the group believe he possesses mystical powers.

Most of the LRA's leaders have never been held to account for their crimes, though efforts are ongoing to bring them to justice. Kony and two of his key commanders are wanted by the International Criminal Court, or ICC, for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Ugandan government requested that the ICC investigate the LRA's atrocities in northern Uganda in 2003, and after reviewing the case, the ICC opened an investigation in Uganda in 2004.<sup>2</sup> In July 2005, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Kony and four other key LRA commanders: Raska Lukwiya, Okot Odhiambo, Dominic Ongwen, and Vincent Otti. Formerly Kony's second in command, Otti was killed on Kony's orders in late 2007, and Lukwiya was shot during a battle with the Ugandan army. However, despite a regional military offensive launched in December 2008, Kony, Odhiambo, and Ongwen remain at large.

The Ugandan government and army have also committed serious human rights violations in their efforts to squelch the LRA and any of its domestic support. Citing the vulnerability of rural civilians to LRA attacks, the government forced millions of northerners into camps.

Countries affected by the LRA



Yet the camps were poorly protected and miserable health and sanitation conditions contributed to the deaths of 1,000 people each week at the height of the conflict. However, the ICC can only investigate crimes committed after its creation in 2002, and to the anger and frustration of many northerners, the court has not brought charges against Ugandan government officials. For many northern Ugandans, true peace and reconciliation will only come about when the LRA and the government are both held to account.

This backgrounder focuses on the three at-large LRA commanders and discusses who they are and why they are wanted by the ICC.

## The LRA command structure

### 1. Joseph Kony: Chairman and commander in chief



**Date of birth:** April 1963

**Place of Birth:** Odek village, Gulu district, Uganda

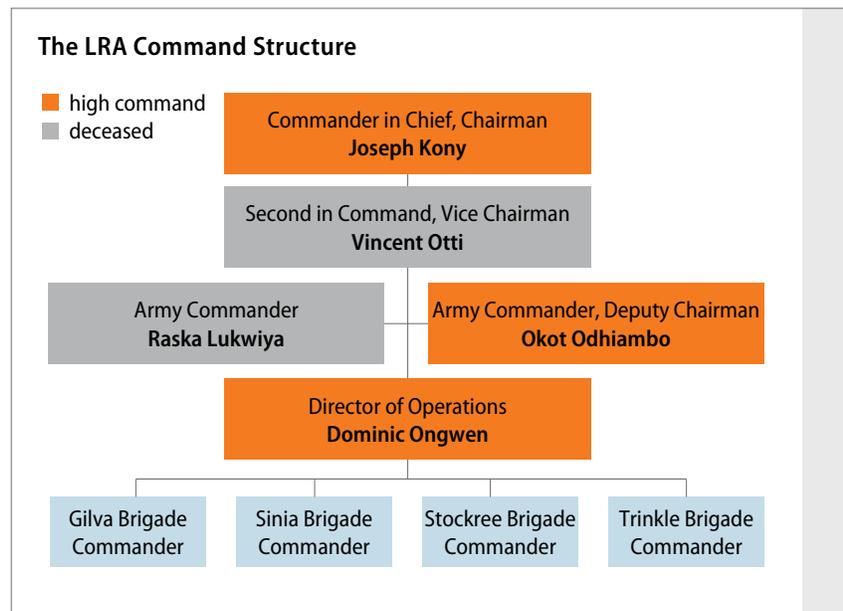
**ICC Charges:** Twelve counts for crimes against humanity and 21 counts for war crimes on the basis of his individual responsibility for the LRA's actions.<sup>3</sup> Specific crimes include rape, murder, enslavement, sexual enslavement, and forced enlistment of children.

Joseph Kony, who emerged as the head of the Lord's Resistance Army in 1987, combines cult fanaticism with ruthless military efficiency. His leadership of the militia is absolute, and he has ordered the execution of senior LRA figures on repeated occasions. Over the last 10 to 15 years, as many as 38,000 children and 37,000 adults have been abducted and used as soldiers, porters, and sex slaves.<sup>4</sup> Once in LRA hands, the children are indoctrinated about the virtues of the LRA. The indoctrination is carried out using tactics designed to coerce, intimidate, and exhaust abductees.<sup>5</sup>

It is estimated that one-third of the abductees have died, one-third are at large, and one-third have managed to escape. As stated by Stephen Lewis, the former deputy director of UNICEF, "You cannot imagine children more abused, scarred, mutilated, traumatized, and robbed of their childhood" than those abducted by the LRA.<sup>6</sup>

Kony has had as many as 50 enslaved girls in his household at one time. He controls all aspects of how abducted girls are distributed to LRA commanders. These girls are most frequently given as wives to men three times their age as rewards for good military performance and to boost morale.

Kony has repeatedly refused to participate in peace talks and has failed to sign proposed deals that his peace delegations have negotiated. The Government of Southern Sudan mediated the most recent attempt to broker a deal between the government of Uganda and the LRA, which began in 2006. While many Ugandans, activists, and diplomats were hopeful that a deal might be struck, talks fell apart late in 2008 when Kony failed to come out of hiding in the Democratic



Republic of the Congo's Garamba National Park to sign the deal. Lacking adequate leverage against Kony, subsequent efforts to get him to sign the agreement failed. In late November 2008, Kony again refused to sign a peace agreement.<sup>7</sup>

A recent military operation by the Ugandan, Congolese, and Southern Sudanese militaries (called Operation Lightning Thunder) against the LRA in northeastern Congo's Garamba National Park failed to apprehend Kony and his top commanders. In retaliation, the LRA has killed more than 1,000 people and abducted scores more since December 2008. Kony remains at-large somewhere in the porous border areas of northeastern Congo, Central African Republic, and southern Sudan.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Okot Odhiambo: Army commander and deputy chairman



**Date of birth:** Unknown

**Place of birth:** Palugala village, Gulu district, Uganda

**ICC Charges:** Three counts for crimes against humanity and seven counts for war crimes.<sup>9</sup>

Okot Odhiambo is Deputy Army Commander of the LRA and a member of the “Control Altar.” This group of core LRA leaders is responsible for devising and implementing LRA military strategy, including the standing orders to attack and brutalize civilians.

Odhiambo allegedly led the LRA's massacre at Barlonyo Internally Displaced Person camp in Lira District on February 21, 2004, where at least 300 people—and likely hundreds more—were burned, shot, and slain with machetes. In 2004, at Joseph Kony's orders, Odhiambo allegedly commanded another attack against a camp in northern Uganda, resulting in more killings, enslavement, and abductions of children.

Odhiambo served successively as brigade commander of Trinkle and Stockree brigades and was appointed army commander in 2004 following successful attacks in the Langi area of northern Uganda. After Joseph Kony had his right hand man Vincent Otti killed in October 2007, Odhiambo earned the additional title of LRA deputy chairman. Former LRA commanders and members have described Odhiambo as a “ruthless killer,” as “the one who killed the most,” and as “a ‘bitter’ man who will kill anyone,” according to the ICC.<sup>10</sup>

It is widely believed that in February 2008, Odhiambo led a group of LRA rebels from the Central African Republic into southern Sudan and attacked the town of Yubu, killing 11 people and abducting 27 others.<sup>11</sup>

Odhiambo is now believed to be at-large in the Dungu area of northeastern Congo.

### 3. Dominic Ongwen: Director of operations



**Date of birth:** Unknown, but estimated to be in his early 30s

**Place of birth:** Lamogi, sub-county, Gulu district in Uganda

**ICC Charges:** Three counts for crimes against humanity and four counts for war crimes, including cruel treatment of civilians, murder, and pillaging.<sup>12</sup>

As the former head of the Sinia brigade, one of the four LRA brigades, Ongwen is also a member of the LRA's "Control Altar."<sup>13</sup> In 2007, he was promoted to director of operations, the third-highest position in the LRA's command structure. Ongwen—believed to be around 32—is the youngest person ever to be charged for crimes against humanity by the ICC. Before he was abducted by the LRA in the late 1980s at the age of 10, Ongwen was an illiterate orphan who worked on a farm.

At Kony's orders and as a brigade commander, Ongwen executed the LRA's offensives during its 2002-2003 incursions into Lira and Teso districts in northern Uganda. During these large-scale attacks, the LRA clashed with the Ugandan military on multiple occasions. In this campaign, an estimated 2,200 people were murdered and 3,000 abducted. The campaign also resulted in the deaths of many LRA commanders, but Ongwen gained the reputation of being able to emerge from the bloodiest of battles with the majority of his fighters alive.

Ongwen remains at-large in northeastern Congo.

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### Deceased LRA commanders

#### Vincent Otti

Before his death at 61, Otti rose to the position of vice chairman, second in command to Joseph Kony, and was thus a member of the "Control Altar."<sup>14</sup> Otti also served as a lead LRA representative in peace negotiations with the Ugandan government between 2004 and 2007. Many within and outside of the LRA believed he wanted peace. In July 2005, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Otti—as well as for the four other LRA leaders above—on 33 separate counts of war crimes. Otti was reportedly killed at Kony's orders in October 2007 because of his interest in pursuing peace and the potential threat he posed to Kony, given the loyalty LRA rank-and-file members felt for him.<sup>15</sup>

#### Raska Lukwiya

Raska Lukwiya was a high-ranking LRA commander who was in charge of supplies and logistics for the militia in 2005 and later served as Army Commander of the LRA, Kony's third in command, behind Vincent Otti. During Uganda's 2002 military operation against the LRA, known as Operation Iron Fist, Lukwiya was believed to have been killed, but it was later confirmed that he had survived and was based in southern Sudan with Kony. In July 2005, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Lukwiya on charges of enslavement, cruel treatment, and attacks on civilians. Lukwiya was later killed in fighting with the Ugandan army in northern Uganda in 2006.

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## Bringing an end to the LRA: What you can do

Visit Enough's website to learn more about the international humanitarian organizations helping northern Ugandans rebuild their communities and engaging in rehabilitation work throughout the region.

Join Enough in calling for President Barack Obama to appoint a special envoy for Africa's Great Lakes region to help put in place an effective counterinsurgency strategy to defeat the LRA. Visit Enough's [Take Action page](#) for more information.

Call your representative and senators and urge them to co-sponsor the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009. This bill calls on the U.S. government to use its leverage with the government of Uganda to press for meaningful leadership in developing and reconstructing the North, and also compels President Obama to craft a comprehensive strategy to help dismantle the LRA. For more information on the devastating effects of the conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan government in northern Uganda, see "Survivors: Stories of War and Perseverance".

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## Endnotes

- 1 For more information on the devastating effects of the conflict between the LRA and the Ugandan government in northern Uganda, see "Survivors: Stories of War and Perseverance".
- 2 Visit the ICC website for more information on the investigation of the LRA's atrocities in northern Uganda: [www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC/Situations+and+Cases/](http://www.icc-cpi.int/Menus/ICC/Situations+and+Cases/)
- 3 The warrant of arrest for Joseph Kony lists 33 counts on the basis of his individual criminal responsibility including: Twelve counts of crimes against humanity (murder, enslavement, sexual enslavement, rape, and inhumane acts of inflicting serious bodily injury and suffering) and 21 counts of war crimes (murder, cruel treatment of civilians, intentionally directing an attack against a civilian population, pillaging, and forced enlisting of children).
- 4 "Abduction: The Lord's Resistance Army and Forced Conscription in Northern Uganda" (UC Berkeley Human Rights Center and Tulane University, 2007) available at: <http://www.humanrightsblog.org/reports/archives/004190.html>
- 5 "Complicating Victims and Perpetrators in Uganda: on Dominic Ongwen" (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2008)
- 6 Stephen Lewis "I Too Accuse Him of Crimes Against Humanity," *The Globe and Mail*, July 28, 2008
- 7 Henry Mukasa and Raymond Baguma "Kony Fails to Show Up for Peace Signing," *The New Vision*, November 30, 2008, available at: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/662089>
- 8 For more information on Operation Lightning Thunder, see Enough's joint statement with Resolve Uganda, "No Excuses: the End of the Lord's Resistance Army is in Sight."
- 9 The warrant of arrest for Okot Odhiambo lists 10 counts on the basis of his individual criminal responsibility including: Two counts of crimes against humanity (murder and enslavement); and eight counts of war crimes (murder, intentionally directing an attack against a civilian population, pillaging, and forced enlisting of children).
- 10 See the ICC's website for the unsealed arrest warrants of all three living indicted LRA leaders: <http://www2.icc-cpi.int/menus/icc/situations%20and%20cases/situations/situation%20icc%200204/related%20cases/icc%200204%200105/uganda?lan=en-GB>
- 11 Barbara Among "LRA Deputy Chief Ready to Surrender," *The New Vision*, January 28, 2009, available at: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/669560>.
- 12 The warrant of arrest for Dominic Ongwen lists seven counts on the basis of his individual criminal responsibility including: Three counts of crimes against humanity (murder, enslavement, and inhumane acts of inflicting serious bodily injury and suffering); and four counts of war crimes (murder, cruel treatment of civilians, intentionally directing an attack against a civilian population, and pillaging).
- 13 "Trial Watch: Dominic Ongwen," available at: [http://www.trial-ch.org/en/trial-watch/profile/db/facts/dominic\\_ongwen\\_574.html](http://www.trial-ch.org/en/trial-watch/profile/db/facts/dominic_ongwen_574.html)
- 14 "Obituary: LRA deputy Vincent Otti," *BBC*, January 23, 2008, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7083311.stm>
- 15 "Otti executed by Uganda rebels," *BBC*, December 21, 2007, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7156284.stm>

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Enough is a project of the Center for American Progress to end genocide and crimes against humanity. Founded in 2007, Enough focuses on the crises in Sudan, Chad, eastern Congo, northern Uganda, Somalia, and Zimbabwe. Enough's strategy papers and briefings provide sharp field analysis and targeted policy recommendations based on a "3P" crisis response strategy: promoting durable peace, providing civilian protection, and punishing perpetrators of atrocities. Enough works with concerned citizens, advocates, and policy makers to prevent, mitigate, and resolve these crises. To learn more about Enough and what you can do to help, go to [www.enoughproject.org](http://www.enoughproject.org).

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