

## Kony to LRA: Bring me ivory, gold, and diamonds

- Kony ordered LRA elephant poaching mission to DRC's Garamba National Park
- LRA fighters collecting gold and diamonds in eastern Central African Republic
- Illicit ivory, gold, and diamonds reportedly sent to Kony's hideout in Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi enclave

WASHINGTON, DC (November 19, 2014) – The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebel group is increasingly trafficking ivory, diamonds, and gold in order to obtain weapons, ammunition, food, and other supplies, the [Enough Project](#), [The Resolve](#) and [Invisible Children](#) said today. The trade may be linked to the LRA's efforts to improve relations with other armed groups such as Seleka, the Sudanese military, and central African cattle herders, according to new research. The UN Security Council is scheduled to debate the international response to the LRA crisis early next month.

"New evidence that the LRA is trafficking illicit ivory, diamonds, and gold through Sudanese-held territory must spark a stronger response from the UN Security Council and the international community," said Paul Ronan, Director of The Resolve LRA Crisis Initiative. "For too long such reports have been met with indifference, despite evidence that such trafficking strengthens the group's ability to prey on civilians."

During a recent two-week research mission to Uganda, the Enough Project, The Resolve, and Invisible Children interviewed security forces and former LRA members, including 11 Ugandan males who had defected from the LRA this year. All were former fighters or commanders with detailed information about how the group operates.

Recent LRA defectors report that leader Joseph Kony has issued standing orders for rebel fighters to loot diamonds and gold from artisanal miners in eastern Central African Republic (CAR). Most of the illicit minerals are then transported to Kony's group, which operates frequently in the neighbouring Kafia Kingi enclave, a disputed area controlled by the Sudanese military. Minerals are also reportedly traded with local civilians and members of the Seleka armed group, which controls much of eastern CAR.

"The illicit minerals trade provides the LRA with vital resources. It's time that those who buy diamonds and gold from deadly rebel groups like the LRA face international scrutiny and sanctions," said Kasper Agger, Field Researcher at the Enough Project.

The [LRA also kills elephants for valuable ivory](#). In early 2014, Kony sent an LRA group to Garamba National Park in northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to collect ivory. Park authorities observed an unprecedented spike in elephant poaching from April to August, when a total of [109 elephants were killed](#), though not all were killed by the LRA.

“Garamba National Park, which contains the largest and most viable populations of the country’s remaining savannah elephants, may lose this iconic species if nothing - or not enough – is done to ease LRA pressure on the remaining populations in the park,” said Richard Tshombe, Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society’s DRC Programs. “This would be an unacceptable disaster.”

Despite only having about 200 fighters, the LRA continues to terrorize civilians across central Africa. Attacks by the group have [displaced almost 162,000 people](#), many of whom live in fear and rely on humanitarian aid because they are unable to hunt and farm. The LRA has also abducted more than 500 people so far in 2014—more than it abducted in all of 2013.

“While we’ve seen significant progress in recent years, resulting in a reduced LRA threat, the ability of LRA commanders to collect and transport illicit natural materials demonstrates that the group continues to have the capacity to organize and execute orders throughout central Africa,” said Sean Poole, Director of International Strategy at Invisible Children. “More international support is necessary to ensure safe haven is denied to Joseph Kony and the LRA leadership—and to provide counter-LRA forces with the ability to travel quickly across the vast area of land where LRA forces are currently operating.”

### **Illegal diamond, gold, and ivory trade strengthening the LRA**

Recent defectors from the LRA report that the group is attacking civilians and artisanal miners in mineral-rich areas of eastern CAR in order to loot food, diamonds, and gold, on orders from Kony. LRA fighters have most frequently targeted mining sites near the town of Nzako, in Mbomou prefecture, and the town of Sam Ouandja, in Haut Kotto prefecture. A former LRA officer testified that his group of 30 members would store their diamonds in a small metal bottle, 10 centimetres long and two centimetres wide, which took them roughly one year to fill. Once full, the bottle was reportedly transported by trusted fighters to Kony’s group in the Kafia Kingi enclave.

Though other armed groups have a far more substantial stake in eastern CAR’s illicit mineral trade, the LRA’s involvement in gold and diamond trafficking could help the group resupply and rebuild. The actual trade takes place in remote areas and among a handful of people. One LRA defector reported that he was an eyewitness to an exchange where an LRA group traded members of the Janjaweed a half-liter plastic bottle filled with gold in exchange for AK-47 machine guns and ammunition.

Other defectors reported that in late 2013 and early 2014, LRA groups traded similar amounts of gold and diamonds near the town of Nzako to members of Seleka, armed actors who control much of eastern CAR. In October 2014, the [UN Panel of Experts on the CAR released a report](#) indicating that LRA groups near Nzako “have collaborated at the logistical level” with a Seleka group led by “Colonel” Ahmed Sherif. The UN report includes a photo allegedly showing a meeting between Sherif and LRA commander Okello Palutaka in February 2014.

*“Kony issued orders that diamonds and gold are important to the LRA and that they should be given to Kony.” – LRA defector*

The [LRA also continues to kill elephants for valuable ivory](#). In early 2014, Kony sent a group of 20 to 30 LRA members, including Major Owila and possibly Kony’s own son Salim, to DRC’s Garamba National Park to collect ivory by uncovering previously hidden caches and killing additional elephants. The LRA group arrived in Garamba around May of this year and spent several months in

the area. Recent defectors indicate that the group may already have departed with a substantial amount of ivory—approximately 40 to 50 tusks, destined for Kony’s group.

It is, at present, unclear how many elephants the LRA has killed, but park rangers from Garamba observed an unprecedented spike in elephant poaching from April to August, during which time a total of [109 elephants were killed](#). Some of the elephants were, however, killed by other armed poachers, including some who shot elephants from helicopters.

The mission led by Owila is likely the first major LRA poaching operation since 2012, when LRA commander Binany Okumu delivered approximately 30 elephant tusks poached from Garamba Park to Kony’s group in Kafia Kingi. The ivory was trafficked through eastern CAR, where Binany was killed in January 2013 by Ugandan troops as he was traveling back toward the DRC.

Defectors report that LRA officers trade the ivory with cattle herders and Sudanese businessmen in remote markets, including Deim Bushara and Songo, two small towns in South Darfur just north of the border with Kafia Kingi. Some of these businessmen are reportedly working closely with Sudanese government officials. Other defectors reported that LRA officers sold ivory in exchange for Sudanese Dinar, which they then used to buy medicine, sugar, food, and bullets from markets in the CAR, Kafia Kingi, and South Darfur.

### **The LRA command structure**

The LRA command structure continues to revolve around leader Joseph Kony, who controls an LRA force dispersed over an area the size of California that encompasses parts of the CAR, DRC, and Kafia Kingi. Defectors report that Kony’s immediate entourage operates in the border area between Kafia Kingi and the towns of Birao and Sam Ouandja in the CAR, where Kony has established a handful of semi-permanent camps between which he moves. In total, Kony commands an estimated 150 male Ugandan fighters that comprise the LRA’s core fighting force, divided between approximately 15 to 20 groups. This core is reinforced by approximately 50 lower-ranking combatants abducted from the CAR, DRC, and South Sudan. LRA defectors, however, testify that Kony may have issued orders to abduct more young boys to refill the LRA’s ranks with new fighters.

Kony rules the LRA through fear and by promoting commanders who are loyal to him, while arresting or killing those who defy his orders. This year Kony appointed a Ugandan LRA officer named “Aligach” as his chief deputy, effectively replacing senior commander and International Criminal Court (ICC) indictee Okot Odhiambo, who was likely [killed by the Ugandan army in late 2013](#). LRA defectors report that Aligach is “*very young, maybe around 25 years, so he is easy to manipulate [by Kony]*.” In early 2014, Kony also promoted Alphonse Lamola, in LRA “imprisonment” for much of the past two years, to command LRA groups operating in eastern CAR. Dominic Ongwen, the other remaining ICC indictee within the LRA’s ranks, is reportedly operating in northeastern DRC.

Kony has also been grooming his two oldest sons, Ali and Salim, who are believed to be in their early twenties, for increased leadership roles within the LRA. Some defectors report that Kony has even performed rituals to begin transferring his spiritual powers to them. Such a transfer of power would signal a fundamental shift within the LRA, which Kony has led since he established the group in the late 1980s. However, defectors indicate that few LRA commanders would acknowledge Kony’s sons as leaders, making a bitter succession struggle and widespread defections a more likely outcome if Kony died or were captured.

Few LRA members have seen Kony in recent years, but they receive his orders through radio messages and satellite phones or from oral messages delivered by LRA runners. Kony’s presence also

serves as a powerful deterrent to would-be defectors within the LRA, who fear being punished on his command. Some even fear his professed ability to monitor their movements and read their thoughts. An international soldier who is fighting the LRA explained,

*“Kony exercises complete and full control of the LRA. He disciplines soldiers, puts people to arrest, and orders groups to release their children, which they care for. They might not do it today or tomorrow, but they will do it at some point.”*

This year, Kony issued orders that some commanders were only allowed to have one “wife” and that other women and children should be released. This order led to disputes within the LRA, including when Kony’s half-brother David Olanya reportedly questioned why Kony was still allowed to have several wives. Olanya was then arrested for speaking out against Kony. LRA commanders ultimately obeyed Kony’s orders to release women and children, and 72 of them were able to leave long-term captivity in northeastern DRC in August and September 2014.

*“The high number of women and children was becoming a liability... It’s not easy to give security to everyone; the children are crying, and it’s hard to hide. Also, it’s not easy to get food for everyone when we are not farming.” – LRA defector*

Others defectors said that the release was a tactical move to “confuse the enemy” [Ugandan and US troops pursuing LRA forces]. One defector explained,

*“Kony knows that everyone is aware that he is in Darfur [Kafia Kingi] now, so he is trying to confuse the enemy. He might leave some fighters there, but most will move into DRC to take attention away from him.”*

Kony has previously used similar tactics in which he and other senior commanders have hidden in safety far away from the frontlines. The UN peacekeeping mission in DRC, MONUSCO, recently issued a [statement](#), saying they would increase cooperation with other counter-LRA forces. This is a welcome step from a peacekeeping mission that has long struggled to protect civilians from LRA attacks and abductions.

### **Crafting a comprehensive strategy to end the LRA**

The LRA’s trafficking of illicit gold, diamonds, and ivory, and its continued presence in the Sudanese-controlled Kafia Kingi enclave, highlights the need for renewed strategies to defeat the rebel group. Currently, responsibility for responding to the LRA crisis lies with a wide variety of regional and international actors. Ugandan troops, acting under African Union authorization and supported by US military advisers, are leading counter-LRA military operations. UN peacekeeping missions in the DRC (MONUSCO), the CAR (MINUSCA), Sudan (UNAMID), and South Sudan (UNMISS) also have mandates to operate in LRA-affected areas. Abdoulaye Bathily, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) of the UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), and Lt. Gen. Jackson Tuwei, African Union Special Envoy for the LRA Issue, coordinate the overall UN and AU response to the LRA crisis.

In early December, SRSG Bathily will brief the UN Security Council on the LRA crisis. In the presidential statement released following the briefing, Council members should express concern about the LRA’s presence in Kafia Kingi and LRA involvement in trafficking of natural resources. Council members should also direct UNOCA to report on progress made in addressing these issues in its next briefing.

Denying the LRA safe haven in Kafia Kingi and reducing the trafficking of natural resources will require action from a number of UN actors. UN experts and leaders who are focused on the CAR, Darfur, and the DRC should consider recommending a travel ban for Kony, and they should direct more resources towards investigating LRA trafficking activities and LRA relations with other armed groups. In the DRC, MONUSCO should increase patrols in communities surrounding Garamba National Park, reinforce cooperation with park rangers, and step up campaigns to encourage LRA defections. MINUSCA should investigate reports that LRA members are collecting gold and diamonds in eastern CAR and trading with Seleka members. SRSB Bathily and UNOCA must help coordinate and encourage such efforts from UN actors for whom the LRA is not a primary focus or responsibility.

As one of the few international actors able to influence the Sudanese government, the African Union also has a critical role to play in addressing the LRA crisis. AU LRA envoy Lt. Gen. Tuwei should expand diplomatic engagement with Khartoum, encouraging Sudanese leaders to share information on LRA movements in Kafia Kingi and ensure Sudanese troops there are not trading with or providing support and safe haven to LRA commanders. In particular, the African Union should seek to undertake a fact-finding mission to Kafia Kingi. Lt. Gen. Tuwei should also encourage LRA-affected governments in the CAR, DRC, and South Sudan to fully participate in the AU's counter-LRA initiative. Lt. Gen. Tuwei should encourage the Ugandan government to maintain its critical deployment of counter-LRA troops until the LRA's senior leadership is dismantled.

The US government continues to provide Ugandan troops with aircraft and intelligence tools needed to pursue top LRA commanders, including in areas where the LRA is trafficking gold, diamonds, and ivory. However, the dispersal of LRA groups into far-flung areas of the CAR, DRC, and Kafia Kingi has revealed the limits of existing assets. Obama Administration officials should immediately deploy additional long-range aircraft and more context-appropriate and flexible intelligence assets to the theater of operations, while US Congress should authorize necessary funding for counter-LRA efforts.

US military advisers, who have worked closely with Ugandan troops since 2011 to track and engage LRA groups, should expand intelligence collection on the LRA's involvement in natural resource trafficking, including by stepping up coordination and information-sharing with MONUSCO and Garamba Park rangers in northeastern DRC. Counter-LRA forces should also bolster defections campaigns, with the aim of generating a steady stream of LRA defectors that can provide more detailed information on the LRA's interaction with Sudanese military and Seleka troops and the group's involvement in the illicit natural resources trade.

Kony and the LRA's trafficking of natural resources through central African countries, increased abductions, and alliances with armed rebels requires a sustained, comprehensive, and well-coordinated approach by many international actors. Such a concerted response can dismantle a weakened but not yet fully neutralized threat to hundreds of thousands of people.

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