

Southern Sudanese long for capture of Uganda rebel (Sudan)

But hunting insurgents in the vast bushlands of southern Sudan is a tough challenge, given the distances involved, presence of landmines and the harsh terrain.

(28.10.2005)

Their own long war just over, southern Sudanese are praying for the capture of a brutal Ugandan rebel boss whose cross-border revolt is souring their first taste of peace.

Believed hiding in the vast and rugged terrain of southern Sudan, Joseph Kony and other leaders of his Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) face a new offensive from three different armies: Uganda, Sudan, and ex-southern Sudanese rebels.

Local people hope it will be the last stand for the self-styled mystic whose brutal tactics have turned him into Africa's most wanted rebel leader following arrest warrants from the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC).

"We'd like him to be taken out and to be killed," said John Iokova, 19, who works at a market in Juba, the capital of southern Sudan. "We don't like him here in Sudan. He's killing people, cutting them with knives."

The LRA's 19-year-old fight against the Uganda government has displaced 1.6 million people, killed tens of thousands and forced 20,000 children into service as fighters and sex slave.

Uganda's northern Acholi region has borne the brunt, but southern Sudan has increasingly been affected too.

With LRA massacres, kidnappings and livestock raids on ethnic Acholi areas of southern Sudan, at least 9,000 locals have fled into safe parts of northern Uganda this year.

Under pressure from the ICC warrants, the Khartoum government has granted Uganda unprecedented permission to hunt him anywhere in the south for a month.

Locals say the hundreds of Ugandan soldiers who have subsequently come over the border are more than welcome. "We need these things to stop. We are very happy when the Ugandans came in to hunt Kony," said Joseph Malish, 25, a honey merchant.

Southern Sudan's president, Salva Kiir, whose new government of former rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) is based in Juba, shares those sentiments.

The SPLM has agreed to mount joint operations against the LRA with its old foes in the Sudanese military and Ugandan forces. That would be the first major military cooperation between the SPLM and central government since the January signing of a peace deal to end two decades of north-south war.

SEARCH-AND-DESTROY

But Kiir is concerned about Sudan's alleged past ties with the LRA. "He (Kony) had been so close with the Sudanese army, who were actually giving him support. So they might have been covering him up in wherever he had been hiding," he said.

Khartoum denies any support for the LRA, a charge long levelled at Sudan's Islamist rulers by Uganda.

Talking to reporters recently in Juba, Kiir added that the SPLM would in fact prefer Kony and Uganda to negotiate peace.

"He can argue his case and whatever he has been fighting for can be considered, if he was really having a cause to fight," Kiir said. "Because you don't just fight for the sake of fighting, you fight for the cause of the people."

The LRA has never given coherent reasons for its insurgency.

Uganda's government doubts talks can work.

"We have made very many attempts in the past to reach out as a government to Joseph Kony and talk peace, all in vain," said Ambassador Busho Ndinyenka, Uganda's consul general in Juba.

"I welcome any solution from any corner that would solve this conflict without firing a single bullet. But I want one thing absolutely clear: the Ugandan government is committed to ending the LRA -- one way or the other."

Just 5 km (3 miles) outside Juba, Ugandan soldiers have massed for search-and-destroy operations against Kony, who they say is hiding 50 km (30 miles) to the southeast in a Sudanese government-controlled area near Liria.

Uganda also has set up camp in Yei, near where Ugandan sources say Kony's deputies are operating. Kampala has sent in four attack helicopters as well as tanks and armoured cars.

But hunting insurgents in the vast bushlands of southern Sudan is a tough challenge, given the distances involved, presence of landmines and the harsh terrain.

"You cannot just walk into the camps. There are so many natural obstacles that can really camouflage the rebel," Kiir said, speaking from experience as a guerrilla eluding Sudanese forces. But their days of hiding in Sudan are numbered, he said.

Von: 26 October 2005 <http://www.alertnet.org> (Reuters) by C. Bryson Hull

[<<< zurück zu: News](#)
