



## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

By The Rt. Rev Bishop Macleord Baker Ochola II  
*Bishop of Kitgum Diocese*

**M**r. Moderator, Members of the Organising Committee of KACOKKE MADIT, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I wish, in the first place, to thank the organisers of this Conference for inviting me to participate in the conference and for giving me the opportunity to speak to you on The Role of the Church in Conflict Resolution. The Church in whose name I stand before you today is a peace-loving institution founded on the principles of forgiveness, love and reconciliation. I am therefore very happy to see so many sons and daughters of Acholi from Uganda and from other parts of the world gathered here in London to collectively confront the problem of insecurity in Acholi. It is in that spirit that I bring to you all greetings and best wishes from the Diocese of Kitgum and the entire Christian Community in Uganda.

It is quite evident from the number of people that are present here today that a great deal of planning and preparation went into organising this conference. The people of Uganda and particularly the suffering people of Acholi in whose name we have gathered here are looking forward to a good outcome and a way forward to ending the plunder and decimation of the human and material resources that have characterised life in Acholi for the last ten years. Therefore, despite the fact that the people present in this conference come from different backgrounds and subscribe to different ideologies I urge, you dear participants, to endeavour to speak with one voice on this all-important subject of peace that has brought us here.

Different people perceive the causes of the conflict in Acholi from different perspectives. But one thing is certain: this conflict is destructive and must be brought to an end by every means available. But what are the options available? The church, right from the very beginning, has been advocating for a peaceful resolution of the conflict based on dialogue as opposed to a military solution. It is in that spirit that in 1993/14 I participated in the abortive peace talks between the Government of Uganda and Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army. It is in that spirit that in 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1996 the Church of Uganda adopted resolutions during the meetings of the Provincial Assembly condemning the violence in Northern Uganda and calling for peace talks between the Government of Uganda and the rebels. It is in that spirit that in June, 1996 the Uganda Joint Christian Council set up a Committee on Peace and Reconciliation and adopted a resolution exploring the violence and calling for a

peaceful resolution of all armed conflicts in the country. It is in that spirit that Church leaders have time and again spoken out against the use of force and in favour of dialogue and reconciliation. We hold firmly to the view that the Church's role is to advocate for peace and reconciliation using every available platform. The Church in Uganda has shouldered this responsibility courageously and in the process of so doing we have many a time been condemned and vilified by people in low places as well as those in high places who do not share our perception.

On March 13, 1997 a delegation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) visited Kitgum on a fact-finding mission. The visit was followed by a meeting of General Secretaries of the National Council of Churches of the WCC member churches from the Great Lakes region. In this way, the churches in Uganda under the umbrella of the Uganda Joint Christian Council have succeeded in placing the conflict in Gulu and Kitgum on the agenda of the World Council of Churches. This means we now have more people praying for us and more people ready to act along with us in search for a just and durable solution to the conflict in our part of the country. This momentum must not be lost! This Conference has therefore come at a very opportune time.

It has been said in certain quarters that the Government of Uganda cannot talk to Kony's Lord's Resistance Army because Kony does not have a political agenda. Our position on this is: What is more important, Kony's agenda or the agenda of the people of Acholi who want to live in peace and tranquillity? *If Kony does not have a political agenda the people of Acholi do have a political agenda. And our agenda is:*

**"STOP THE CONFLICT. RESTORE PEACE. CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR MEANINGFUL RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT"**.

In specific terms, the people in whose name we speak would like to see an immediate end to the following:-

- (1). *Violent deaths of our people in the hands of various armed groups and formations.*
- (2). *Arson perpetrated on a mass scale in our land.*
- (3). *Rape and defilement of our women and girls.*
- (4). *Abduction of our young people.*
- (5). *Forced recruitment of our people into rebel ranks.*
- (6). *The prevalence of a general atmosphere of fear*

- and disenchantment amongst our people.*
- (7). *Mass displacement of our people.*
  - (8). *Creation of protected villages which have become breeding grounds for malnutrition and deaths resulting from cholera, measles and other preventable diseases amongst our people.*
  - (9). *Destruction of our infrastructures and continuous decline in socio-economic growth.*

The primary responsibility of addressing the -concerns enumerated above lies with the Government of Uganda which has been entrusted, under the constitution, with the duty of leading this country on the path of peace, unity and development. It is our right as citizens of Uganda to ask Government again and again to address these concerns because we have a contract with the Government. In the same way, we have an inescapable moral duty to urge Joseph Kony and his group to listen to the voice of reason and lay down the weapons that have been used to kill and to maim our people and to strike terror in the whole of GuLu, Kitgum and some parts of the neighbouring districts of Apac, Lira, and Moyo for the last ten years or so. Therefore, *our message to Joseph Kony is*

“TOO DONG OROMO WA”  
 “THE PEOPLE OF ACHOLI WANT PEACE NOW!”

This conference should send out to the world a clear and unequivocal message and that message is that the people of Acholi want to live in peace with one another and with the rest of the people of Uganda and all other peoples of the world. Th furtherance of that principle:

- (1). This Conference should express its indignation and abhorrence of the carnage and destruction that have characterised life in Acholi sub-region for close to eleven years now.
- (2). This Conference should re-affirm the desire of the people of Acholi in Uganda and in the Diaspora for an immediate end to the carnage and a speedy, expeditious restoration of peace and stability in the sub-region.
- (3). This conference should express the opposition of the people of Acholi in Uganda and in the Diaspora to the use of violence as a means of conflicts.
- (4). This Conference should urge the Government of Uganda and the Lord’s Resistance Army to seek an end to the conflict through dialogue and other peaceful avenues.
- (5). This Conference should express its opposition to and condemnation of any plan, scheme or conspiracy in whatever quarter and at whatever level to make Acholi a permanent battle field.
- (6). This Conference should express its opposition

to and condemnation of any plan, scheme or conspiracy in whatever quarter and at whatever level to depopulate Acholi, drive its people into exile or decimate its resources.

- (7). This conference should express its support for the initiatives taken thus far by the churches and Non-Governmental organisations in Uganda to promote the cause of peace and reconciliation in the country.
- (8). This Conference should urge the World Council of Churches in collaboration with the Uganda Joint Christian Council to facilitate dialogue between the Government of Uganda and various rebel groups in the country.
- (9). This Conference should come out with a Work Plan or Programme of action that should, inter-alia, include:
  - (a) vigorous advocacy for a general legally based amnesty for all people who have taken up arms in the course of the insurgency whether willingly or under duress;
  - b) advocacy for the establishment of a Truth Commission to probe into the violations of the fundamental human right and freedoms of the people from August 1986 to date and the establishment of the commission as a basis for meaningful r reconciliation;
  - (c) advocacy for a package for resettlement of ex-combatants and displaced people,;
  - (d) advocacy for a comprehensive rehabilitation and reconstruction programme for war-ravaged infrastructures;
  - (e) advocacy for a package for repatriation and resettlement of the Acholi in the Diaspora;
  - (f) advocacy for a Special Development Fund for the war torn districts of Gulu and Kitgum
- (10). This Conference should state in clear and unequivocal terms the wish and desire of the people of Acholi to co-operate with the Government of Uganda, as by law established, and to live in peace with one another and with the rest of the people of Uganda as well as the neighbouring people of the Republic of Sudan.

I expect that this Conference will see the necessity to publicise whatever resolutions that may be adopted in the course of our deliberations and put in place a mechanism for ensuring effective follow-up actions. I have in mind a Task Force consisting of three to five people, appointed by this Conference, whose mandate will be:

- 
- (a) to bring the resolutions of this Conference to the attention of all people concerned including the Government of Uganda and Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army;
- (b) to co-ordinate follow-up actions including advocacy campaigns;
- (c) to monitor the developments relating to the concerns addressed at the Conference and keep the participants and other interested parties informed of such developments; and

- (d) to examine the possibility of organising a similar Conference in the near future to review achievements and constraints and work out other strategies for pushing the peace agenda forward.

We, for our part, will be more than willing to co-operate with such a Task Force.

I thank you, once again, for giving me the opportunity to share our views with you.

*I SAY ALL THIS FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY!*