

# **STATEMENT BY WOMEN FROM THE GREATER NORTH OF UGANDA TO THE PARTIES: JUBA PEACE TALKS**

## **30 January, 2008**

Mr Mediator His Excellency Lt General Riek Machar; Honourable Dr Ruhakana Rugunda and the Government Negotiation Party; Mr Matsanga and the LRA/M Negotiation Party; members of the Mediation Team, thank you for the opportunity to address you all at the opening of this meeting.

We are women from Northern Uganda, we represent each sub-region in the Greater North, we are women from Acholi, Lango, Teso and West Nile. We speak as one voice and we speak on behalf of our sisters and communities who are not able to be here. We speak as the Greater North Women's Voices for Peace Network.

We would like to congratulate you for the progress made thus far in the Peace Talks. We have been following the stages very closely. As you may know the Greater North Women's Voices for Peace Network has been very active in relation to Agenda Item 3 on Accountability and Reconciliation. As women's rights and peace activists, as mothers, as women who have lost family members in this conflict and who have been harmed ourselves, we have participated in the Government Consultations and the Consultations held by the LRA/M in 2007 to put forward our views, demands and desires regarding peace, accountability and reconciliation.

As you gather here, our message to you as women from the Greater North is this. Firstly, we want peace – peace with reconciliation; peace with truth-telling; peace with justice; peace to harmonise and restore communities. Secondly, we want those with the LRA, the women and children, non-combatants, to be returned to us as quickly as possible, and for them to be fully assisted to reintegrate with medical and psychological support and other practical assistance.

At your important deliberations over the next few days we urge you to find a realistic timeframe for concluding the Peace Talks and for both Parties to re-new your commitment to the principles and the spirit of the Agreements signed to date.

We are concerned by recent developments. We are disturbed by the use of the media to spread rumours and propaganda about each Party perpetuated by the other. We do not see these as helpful developments in succeeding towards our shared goal of peace.

We are deeply concerned by rumours that the LRA may have resumed their recruitment programme. We call for this practice, should it be occurring, to stop immediately. These activities contravene the principle of the agreements and the people of the Greater North want peace. We have said that loud and clear. But we do not want that to be mis-understood as being willing to return to the kind of suffering, conflict, violence, and insecurity we in the Greater North have experienced for more than 2 decades.

**Greater North Women's Voices for Peace Network**

**Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice**

We were alarmed by the statements made by the US State Department in September 2007 which we found un-necessarily provocative given the peace process was ongoing and that the LRA/M was continuing to demonstrate its commitment to the Talks and following through on the process outlined by the Mediator for Agenda Item 3. We do not consider these sorts of statements and threats by the United States Government or other Governments to be welcome, timely, necessary, nor appropriate given the importance of these Talks.

We are also concerned by the Agreement signed between the Government of Uganda and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo which we consider to be outside the principles of the Agreements already signed. We request both the Government of Uganda and the DRC to restrain from issuing further threats to the LRA/M during the peace process and specifically that the DRC does not act to remove the LRA from Garamba. The peace process must be allowed to finish its course and we urge this meeting to produce a timetable for the successful completion of the talks which is both realistic and speedy.

Women and children have suffered in this conflict. Over 1 million of us have been displaced from our homes, much violence and brutality has occurred, we have not been able to farm our land, grow our crops, we have not been able to educate our children, we have not seen development and progress in the Greater North because of this conflict. There has been much violence committed against women by both Parties, and many others, as our communities have disintegrated. It is time for this to stop, not just for now but forever.

The Greater North Women's Voices for Peace Network is in solidarity with you in this process, we will continue to speak for women, we will continue to advocate for the success of the Peace Talks. We wish you well in these deliberations, and call again for a renewal of your commitment to the peace process and the Agreements already signed.

The women and the people of the Greater North are ready for peace.