

### 13. Call to action

... Let us be committed to peace in our whole nation, search for solutions to end war and insecurity, then we shall live together joyfully as a nation and fully embrace genuine development. (Isaiah 2:3) "Let us hammer our 'swords' into ploughshares, 'our spears into sickles.' "

The greatest treasure we can leave to the next generation is the culture of peace. It is the precious gift with which we should plan to enter into the new millennium.

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## Interview: Macleord Baker Ochola

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# Ugandan bishop: Time is running out

*The Right Reverend Macleord Baker Ochola of the Kitgum Diocese of the Anglican Church of Uganda, was interviewed by Linda de Hoyos, via telephone, on Nov. 5:*

**EIR:** Could you tell us why the Prayer for Peace in Kampala on Nov. 2 was called, and what your aims are?

**Bishop Ochola:** The Prayer for Peace was mainly to sensitize the people of Uganda, to be aware about peace. The aims of the Prayer for Peace are:

1. To make all participants and all Ugandans fully aware and convinced that God Almighty is the God of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. God wishes all his children to live in peace and harmony.

2. To proclaim to all that all religions in Uganda share the common and fundamental belief in peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Religious leaders and all their members should always be united in peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace promotion.

3. To implore God to empower us and the entire nation in finding peaceful means and initiatives to end the war in the northern and southwestern parts of Uganda, so that all parts of the country can enjoy peace, happiness, and development.

4. To make a united religious cry and appeal to all those who are behind these conflicts to heed the voice of God and of the people, to stop acts of violence, and seek ways of peace and reconciliation.

5. To make an appeal in the name of God to all those groups which have abducted Ugandan children and citizens, and those who are keeping them prisoners or are abusing them in any way, to be moved by the sufferings of the parents and relatives and the entire people of Uganda, and release them unconditionally. Anyone who has information regarding

these abducted Ugandans and children has a moral and religious and human duty to reveal that information which can lead to the freedom of these people.

6. On this day, when the Christian churches are focussed on All Souls, we want to remember all Ugandans who have met violent deaths in the current insecurity in parts of our nation. May they rest in peace. We want to pray for all their parents and relatives to have God's courage and consolation.

The expected results:

1. To have continued, strengthened, and more committed collaborations among all religious leaders and their members to peacemaking and peacekeeping and promotion through joint action and strategies.

2. To be committed to promotion of peacemaking, the religious and ethical values of the non-violent method, and peaceful resolutions of conflicts and strategies for prevention of conflict.

3. To begin a joint religious effort for peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation from the grass roots for purposes of regular reflection, prayer, information-gathering, and education.

4. To continue to sustain the hope that peace is possible throughout Uganda if only Uganda became a peace lover, peace maker, and peace keeper.

So, in brief, we are actually trying to help the people of Uganda to become aware of the cry of the people who have been crying for peace, especially in northern Uganda, for more than 11 years now.

We are also appealing to the international community, which has been so much aloof for more than a decade now, when the children of Uganda were being abducted, being killed, and people's properties were being looted and destroyed. The international community kept quiet all this time. So, we are appealing to the international community to become aware of our situation, so that altogether we can join hands to bring about peace in Uganda.

**EIR:** If there were peace inside Uganda, do you think this would result in a decrease in the external deployments of the Ugandan forces that we have seen in Rwanda, eastern Zaire, and other places?

**Bishop Ochola:** Yes, I think the global dimensions of the war in the Great Lakes region are there, simply because there are some people who are not for peace, and there are others who would like to promote their own interests. But, we are saying that God has created people to live in peace. People have been created in the image of God; that is why we have community. We live in community. Living in community means peace. So, we are discouraging our government and other governments in the region from pursuing these violent attitudes that will destroy the peace of others in the region. That is what we are trying to do as a church, and also to discourage the international dimension of it. We are aware that it is not just something that is done within the Great Lakes region, without the great powers from outside Africa.

**EIR:** What toll has this war in northern Uganda taken on the economy and the population?

**Bishop Ochola:** The total population of Kitgum is 357,184. The total population of Gulu is 337,172. Now, out of this, in Kitgum, we have more than 100,000 people living in camps. Because of the insecurity in Kitgum from January to July, they ran, left their homes, and came to live in camps. They have been forced by insecurity to live in camps. The total of those displaced people was 64,000 people from one county of Lamoia in Kitgum district. Then, of late, in Aruu County, people have been forced by the military to go into the camps. The military is saying that this was necessary because the military does not want the rebels to abduct or kill people in the villages. A total of 44,000 people are now in the camps in Aruu County. These are what we now call protected villages. They were forced to go there, according to the government, because of insecurity.

**EIR:** What are these camps composed of?

**Bishop Ochola:** These camps are just an area where you are driven without any assistance whatsoever, no food, no nothing, not anything; no provision for food, no sanitation, no health facilities for you. You are just forced to go there. If you have food, well and good. If you don't have food, too bad for you. This is what it means.

**EIR:** There is no assistance to the people in these camps?

**Bishop Ochola:** They were just told to go, and that's all. There was no arrangement whatsoever.

**EIR:** There is a news report that people have starved to death in these camps in the recent period.

**Bishop Ochola:** Yes, people are dying. It is true. People have been dying, especially the children, of measles, pneumonia, malaria, diarrhea, and many other related health problems.

**EIR:** There is no international press that has gone up there?

**Bishop Ochola:** The government has to show the good will to declare the area a disaster area, so that the government can appeal to the international community, like the non-governmental organizations, and governments like the U.S.A. and others, to come and help. But this has not been done officially by the government, so people feel that they cannot interfere in Ugandan internal affairs.

**EIR:** Is this food problem compounded by the drought?

**Bishop Ochola:** There have been droughts for the last two years consecutively. In 1996, we had a long drought and very poor yields at the end. Now, we have drought again, from May up through October of this year. So, we have lost all our crops in the first planting season. Even in the second season, in July, we could not plant. Now rain has come, but we have no seeds. We have no food. People are dying. So we are in a very bad situation.

**EIR:** Does the government give a reason for not declaring a disaster?

**Bishop Ochola:** Not yet. As far as I know, there are no reasons given. We are just wondering why it is not being done, in spite of the fact that people are dying. There is real need.

**EIR:** These populations are what they call "at risk"?

**Bishop Ochola:** Yes, they are at risk—very high risk. In Gulu, it is even worse, because already almost two-thirds of the people are in the camps. In Kitgum, it is only 109,000 people in the camps. But in Gulu, over 200,000 people are in the camps. So, you can see the situation. That means they don't have access to their land, they cannot produce food, and therefore they have to depend entirely on relief food. For how long, is what we don't know. Who is going to give food that will go forever?

**EIR:** When was this policy of protected villages begun?

**Bishop Ochola:** In Gulu, it started last year. We objected to it, but the government went ahead and put in those protected villages. In Kitgum, it started at the beginning of this year. Because of insecurity, people just ran from their homes and found themselves in those camps, and then, in September, people were forced by the military to go to the camps in Aruu County.

**EIR:** Do you see any modalities for the war in the north to end? Museveni said on Oct. 29 that he would grant amnesty, against his will, to the rebels.

**Bishop Ochola:** I think that was a positive statement, but it has to be followed by talks. You can't just say things like that and have it remain like that. If the war is to end, the government and rebels must talk to each other, so they can end the war. Right now, we don't know; there is war and insurgency in the north, there is war and insurgency in the west, so the government has to show that good will, and talk to all these people and end the war.

**EIR:** Since the government has been unable to end this war in 11 years, has its military option failed?

**Bishop Ochola:** What I want to say, is that if the government has the political will to end the war, it can be done. But the war has been going on for more than 11 years, simply because the government did not have the will to end the war. Yes.

**EIR:** Is the Sudan People's Liberation Army [SPLA] active in this area also?

**Bishop Ochola:** They are there at the border, and they also come to Uganda. They don't operate from Ugandan soil, but they have access to Ugandan soil, really.

**EIR:** Does that compound the problem, or is it irrelevant?

**Bishop Ochola:** It is a big problem. That is why Sudan is supporting [Joseph] Kony's rebels [of the Lord's Resistance

Army], because Sudan is claiming the Ugandan government is supporting the SPLA.

**EIR:** There are peace talks between Sudan and SPLA leaders in Nairobi now, and the Kenyan foreign minister has indicated they are going well. Would it help the situation in Uganda if there were peace in southern Sudan?

**Bishop Ochola:** If both of them are serious, it would be very helpful. If the SPLA stops the war, and if the government stops the war, then Uganda will be at peace. Because we don't have any quarrel with the people of the Sudan. Because the people of Sudan have all along lived with the people of Uganda peacefully, for a long, long time. This is purely a war between Garang and the government of Sudan, not with the people of Uganda.

**EIR:** Do you see any role for the United States to play?

**Bishop Ochola:** Yes, the United States should really not fuel the conflict in other people's countries, like Uganda, like Sudan, or in Zaire, or in other parts of the world. If anything, the United States should be very careful not to interfere with these ethnic conflicts in Africa.

**EIR:** Do you see any positive role for the United States?

**Bishop Ochola:** The positive role of the United States should be in development, to help rehabilitate the countries like Uganda, which have really become impoverished because of this war. This war has destroyed a lot of things in northern Uganda, and probably now in western Uganda, especially the infrastructure—like schools, hospitals, and so on. All the infrastructure is gone. So, we need the help of a country like the United States of America, to come openly and help in development.

**EIR:** Roads, clean water, sanitation, all these types of infrastructure are lacking?

**Bishop Ochola:** In those camps, there are no drugs, no latrines, no safe water resources, no health facilities. At least 50% of all the children in the camps are suffering from malnutrition. Adults are underfed. Sometimes they have food, sometimes they have no food for months. People are really suffering terribly.

**EIR:** Is there anything else you want our readers to know?

**Bishop Ochola:** What I want to say, is that because of this war, which has been there for more than 11 years, the people in those areas have lost their dear ones, who have been killed in ambushes, who have been killed in cross fire, and abducted; people are dying because of diseases related to this kind of situation; the problem of confinement in the camps—all this has made our people not only impoverished, but everybody, all of us, are traumatized. The trauma is just overwhelming. Yes.

Remember, the people have lost their livestock through

cattle rustling carried out by the Karamajong. The people, because they are now in the camps, they have lost their agriculture. These are the two means of livelihood of our people—agriculture and livestock. People cannot survive without these. At least, they might survive without their livestock, but without agriculture, if they are kept in the camps, eventually everybody will die. Because you cannot feed people in the camps for too long. Something must be done. And that is why we are really appealing to the government for a peaceful means to solve the war in Uganda, to bring about peace in Uganda.

**EIR:** Then, time is beginning to run out?

**Bishop Ochola:** Yes. Of course, it has been running out for the last 11 years. Every time you delay, people are dying, people are being killed, and the problem is not solved, the suffering of the people is increasing day by day.

**EIR:** It looks like more than a third of the population is in these camps. Time is running out for their lives.

**Bishop Ochola:** Yes. Also, this war has created a large-scale disparity in the geographical distributions of resources and development and distributions of incomes among the social groups in Uganda. Household incomes in the north are generally very low compared to the household incomes in the south, and the gap is widening very badly. Education attendance is very low, and illiteracy is still very high in the north. For the last ten years, many of our schools were destroyed, many of our schools were closed, apart from those in the towns like Kitgum and Gulu. You can imagine that the rural children did not have the opportunity to come to Gulu or Kitgum to go to school. Recently, I visited some schools in my diocese, and I was so surprised that in some secondary schools, where the number was 240, it has now dropped to 140. This is because parents can no longer afford to educate their children in schools. So, our children will not have education.

Another problem that we have is that 16% of all the children in the north, are orphans. Either their parents have been killed in the war, or they died of AIDS. So you see, we have people who have no parents to look after them, and even the foster parents, if they cannot afford to look after their own children, they cannot afford to look after their brothers' children who are orphans.

I would like to end this interview on a very sad note. I lost my wife in a land-mine explosion in May. She died in a land mine that was actually planted by the rebels of Joseph Kony, just within Kitgum town. She died. There are many people who have become the victims of this war, like myself, simply because the government is not listening to the cry of the people: Stop this war, stop this killing, stop this unnecessary killing of innocent people. If Kony has been doing this for the last 11 years, he should not be allowed to continue to do this. The moment we say, we are continuing the war, then many people will continue to die a senseless death, like my wife.