

# News Watch

## Kony 2012: A View from Northern Uganda



Posted by [Dan Morrison](#) of [National Geographic News Correspondent](#) on March 9, 2012



Evelyn Amoy was kidnapped by the Lord's Resistance Army at age 12 and was first raped by its leader, Joseph Kony, at 15. One of dozens of girls selected to be Kony's concubines, she had three children including Mercy, 14 months, before escaping to freedom in January 2005. Photographed March 31, 2006, in Gulu, Uganda, by Dan Morrison.

*The release this week of the video [Kony 2012](#) and a viral social media campaign by the American NGO Invisible Children has jacked awareness of the vicious Ugandan rebel group the [Lord's Resistance Army](#) into the stratosphere. It's also provoked a significant [backlash](#) from experts who say the film is [simplistic](#), [manipulative](#), and that it narcissistically focuses on the filmmakers themselves over their African subjects. Invisible Children has [responded](#) to some of that criticism, and debate over the film and its prescriptions [continues](#) across the web, much of it under the Twitter hashtags [#Kony2012](#) and [#StopKony](#).*

*In this post, my friend [Anywar Ricky Richard](#), a former child soldier of the Lord's Resistance Army, and director of the northern Ugandan organization [Friends of Orphans](#), responds to the clamor:*

I am writing from Pader, Uganda, because I believe the recent conversation about Joseph Kony, the Lord's Resistance Army, and Invisible Children is not including the voice of those that matter most– the people of Northern Uganda. I know more than I would like to know about the LRA, not from watching “Kony 2012” or reading insightful accounts of the conflict, but because personally I have seen it, have lived it, and have been in it. I was one of the now-famous “child soldiers.” I



was abducted at the age of 14 with my brother by the LRA, and remained with them for nearly two and half years. We were picked up in front of our home; our powerless family members were burned to death in our grass-thatched house while we were forced to watch and hear them cry for help. I saw brutality beyond description. I saw tortures, rapes, killing, abduction, and war. Since 1999, through Friends of Orphans, I have worked to rehabilitate countless former child soldiers and others affected by the war to reverse the massive

damage the LRA has done to my community and to our youth. I know how bad the LRA are and I demand for the immediate end to this conflict. I believe for this to happen, OUR voices must be heard. (Photo is of [Anywar Ricky Richard](#))

At this moment, the optimism and hope of the people in northern Uganda for the end of violent conflict and the return of peace is more prominent than ever. This is a direct outcome of the protracted negotiation that previously took place in southern Sudan. Even though the peace talks (2006 – 2008) sponsored by the government of South Sudan did not result in a peace agreement between the LRA and the government of Uganda, it has brought relative peace to Northern Uganda, and people have moved back to their original villages from the refugee

camps where many had been confined for more than a decade. At least for now, there is no [Joseph Kony](#) in Uganda.

I support the peaceful means of ending this conflict rather than the military approach. I encourage it continually, since it has brought tangible results and has saved many lives that would have been otherwise lost to the war. The people of Northern Uganda believe more in a peaceful means of resolving this conflict because it has been tried and it has worked, they have seen the result.

Invisible Children are known in Northern Uganda as an organization supporting the education of former abductees, which is much needed in the region. But they are not known as a peace building organization and I do not think they have experience with peace building and conflict resolution methods. I totally disagree with their approach of military action as a means to end this conflict.

Since 1989 the government of Uganda has consistently used military campaigns against Kony including major operations like Operation Iron Fist (2001) and [Lightning Thunder](#) (2008 – 2009). Operation Lightning Thunder was highly expected to end the war by either capturing Kony alive in his haven in the Congo or killing him. It was carried out by the armed forces of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Sudan with technical support from the United States government — and still it failed. Instead of ending the war, Lightning Thunder spread the LRA's atrocities to the Central African Republic as Kony relocated there. The only known result of the military attacks on Kony is the dispersal of his forces into smaller groups, resulting in new atrocities on civilians including the 2004 Baralonyo attack in the Lira district of Uganda, the Kanga Pa-aculu attack in Pader district, and many others. It is also well known that a majority of the LRA's soldiers are abducted children, and that he uses these abducted children as human shields. As a result, any attack will be on the abducted children.

So, how can this be done? Instead of campaigning for military action as a means to end this war, I suggest a continuation of the failed peace talks. I would urge everyone involved in the process to examine what made the peace talks fail and how can we improve and reinstate the process. For example, the government of Sudan, a key player in the financing the war, was not involved in the previous peace talks. I strongly believe they can play a greater role.

Furthermore, there seems to be a continual call for Kony to be taken to the International Criminal Court if captured. Communities agree that if Kony is captured he should be brought to book. Some want Kony to be taken to the ICC while others say he should be tried in Uganda to bring closure to the communities affected. This becomes ever more complicated because others suggest that both parties involved in the war should be investigated and possibly tried. People like [Olara Otunnu](#), the president of the Uganda People's Congress, have written widely about the involvement of the Ugandan People's Defense Force in various atrocities during this conflict. The Government of Uganda has denied any wrongdoing. What is certain is that this is not a simple problem that can be solved with a simple solution. Only a systematic approach can bring

Kony to book and provide opportunities to all people affected by the war to have a voice in peace building, reconciliation and societal healing. This will prepare the communities of northern Uganda for true rehabilitation.

What we want is to stop the war in a way that will not cause any more atrocities. We've shed too much blood. Nobody in northern Uganda supports Joseph Kony; we are tired of wars and want to look at ways in which sustainable peace can be restored.

We thank Invisible Children for making people aware of what has happened in Northern Uganda and request they continue to focus their enthusiasm and resources toward building a better Uganda.

*Anywar Ricky Richard is a former LRA child soldier and founder of Friends of Orphans. Ricky and FRO were recipients of the 2008 Harriet Tubman Freedom Award and the 2008 Humanitarian Award from World of Children.*

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