

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND ARMED CONFLICT IN UGANDA: EMERGANCE OF CHILD SOLDIERS PHENOMENON

A. Political Instability in Uganda

Uganda is part of Eastern Africa located in 241,550 sq. km area and over 40.3 million populations. The capital is Kampala and has become member of United Nations since 1962 (Bank, 2016). Uganda has become sovereign state since 1894 after its independence from British colony.

Before British reorganized the territories of Uganda, it consisted groups of Kingdoms-Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, and Toro and communities located in Lango, Acholi, Madi, West Nile, Bukedi, Bukisu, Bosoga, Teso, Karamoja, Sebei, and Kigezi region (Moncriefee, 2004). In other word, it has heterogeneous ethnic, religion and traditional practices, social and political structure, that were brought into one political system.

The British colony used the Kingdom of Buganda in that located in the south, to conquer the territory of Uganda to be unified under British Protectorate. As the return, British gave privilege for the Buganda to have more power and influences. This made the social discrepancy between the north and the south.

The British administration recruited many people from Northern Uganda to become cheap labors and work in agricultural sectors; plantations even though many people had been recruited as armed forces from the north. While the people from the South had been introduced to industry and agriculture therefore many economics and intellectual elites were concentrated in the South (Royo, 2008).

In 1961 before independence, Uganda was granted as self-rule by British. With the granting of self-rule who formed three political parties: Uganda People's Congress (UPC) led by Milton Obote, Kabakka Yeka (KY) an ethnic party consisting Baganda people, and Democratic Party a Christian led party. The first prime minister after the independence was Milton Obote who originally came from the north with executive power, and the king was Freddie Mutesa who became the first president of Uganda. However the period of 1962 to 1966 was considered as the period of instability of Ugandan constitution (Tripp, 2010).

The constitution after independence was unclear, used both federal and unitary. Basically Uganda consisted of federal states (Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole, Toro and Busoga), and Buganda enjoyed more power privilege than others. According to the constitution, the north and the eastern districts were recognized as unitary. In fact, it was not clear whether they were unitary in the relation with central government as they were known that the central government was federal (Tripp, 2010).

Buganda's special status under British was source of political tension. Moreover, the dual loyalty King of Buganda as president to Buganda and Uganda led to constitutional crisis in 1966. It also marked as the falling of Buganda. Then Obote of UPC assumed full executive powers, declared himself as president and directly violated the 1962 constitution. The new constitution was then established as unitary and centralized state under Obote (Natale, 2007).

In 1971, a military leader called Idi Amin conducted military coup to Obote with Obote's opponents. Idi Amin was appointed by Obote as Commander-

Chief of Armed Forces. They were disappointed to Obote because of the constant consolidation of power in executive. After coup Obote, Idi Amin came to power. This changed when Amin created radical policies and declared himself as president for life and created unitary system in the constitution.

The first act after becoming president separated military from any ethnic groups in which most of those were in Acholi and Lango. Both of them were considered as oppositions, and government army started to abolish them causing of 100.000 to 500.000 were killed (Leefers, 2003). The government of Idi Amin was the most brutal dictatorship leader in post Uganda independence.

In 1978, Idi Amin invaded Tanzania. The President of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere took action by joining Obote's private forces to topple down Amin's regime. They reached Kampala in April 1979 and Amin was exiled to Saudi Arabia. Obote came to power for the second time. Under his second governance, he used violence means and Uganda continued to suffer from economic chaos and massive massacres (Natale, 2007).

Amin's administration emerged more opposition until he was overthrown in second time by Tito Okello, an Ugandan general who brought him to power before. In 1985 Okello intervened more and drove back Obote into exile. But both Obote and Okello were already peripheral figures. The only well-organized faction in this long chaos was a guerilla army leader namely Yoweri Museveni, a man who when Obote returned to power in 1980 rejected him and formed guerilla group called National Resistance Army (NRA). By 1986 NRA controlled the capital city of Kampala and Museveni became president under unitary system of

government. This period was marked as turning point of political history of Uganda (Natale, 2007).

B. Uganda's Armed Conflict

The chronology of armed conflict in Uganda can be drawn from the colonialization era and the emerging spiritual groups in which become the actors of conflict.

1. The North and South Divide

The armed conflict between the Government of Uganda and a military group in Uganda was described as the worst forgotten humanitarian crisis in the world. Currently, Uganda in relative stable conditions but the legacy in the post armed conflict gave significant devastating impacts especially for its societies and also affecting in many sectors.

The origin of armed conflict in Uganda can be derived from the ethnic mistrust started when Uganda was under colonialized by British. The British administration recruited many people from Northern Uganda to become cheap laborers and work in agricultural sectors; plantations in central and Southern Uganda. While the people from the South were recruited into arm forces, the King's African Rifles (KAR), has been introduced to industry and agriculture therefore many economic and intellectual elite were concentrated in the South (Group, 2004).

Because that situation, the southerner and the northner emerged. The southener was the one who get privilege of British Colony, Christian majority,

organized by monarchy in politically and socially, majority placed administration position and control power after independent. It consisted of group of ethnic Bantu origin (Baganda, Banyankole, and Batoro). While “the Northner” consisted of Nilotic ethnic groups (Acholi, Lugbara, Langi, Karamojong) in which was marginalized under colony administration they were dominant in KAR, and consisted majority of Muslims and animism (Group, 2004) .

In the post-World War II precisely in 1945, the situation changed significantly. There are many people who wanted to fight against the colonial and mostly come from the South. It makes Britain fear of the region that their occupied, and started to recruit people in the North mostly from Acholi and Western Nile as member of KAR to against the opposition.

After independent from Britain on October 9 1862, Uganda has begun through various conditions of instability and political alternation from dictatorship, rebellion, coup de etat, and civil war. The main cause of the instability is derived from political and economic antagonism between the North and the South. They compete each other to reach political power grounded on race, ethnicity, religion, geographical, and political origin (Natale, 2007).

2. The Emergence of Rebellion Movement: Alice Auma Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) and Lord Resistance Army (LRA)

a) Alice Auma Lakwena and Holy Spirit Movement (HSM)

Alice Auma is an Acholian woman of northern Uganda who works as spiritual healer. When warfare and political killings had destroyed the societies, Alice Lakwena claimed herself as the Acholi prophet. She has given a mandate to bring message from the spiritual world giving advice to people for opposing the government intervention in Acholi's territory which is northern Uganda. The government was believed as the prime cause of lots of atrocities that happened to Acholi people especially after Obote was overthrown many of them were alarmed loss of power (Amone, 2014).

The defeat of Uganda People Defense Forces (UPDF) as government forces in battle with National Resistance Army (NRA) as it also rebelled against Milton Obote administration, motivated Alice to proclaim that she received divine instruction to fight against the evil and end the bloodshed. She referred as Lawakena (the messenger) or Lalar (the savior) and proclaimed herself as leader of Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) who against the Uganda Government since 1986 to 1988 or when Museveni came to power. It became the first political movement in Acholi's land to gain more support from the significant populations (Amone, 2014).

Through this mission, required HSM had to retake capital city, Kampala and saved the Acholi from the atrocities and possible extinction that were caused by NRA. Alice mission was performed as military action that led by

herself as commander of HSM military called as Holly Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF). But the order of Lawakema was changed after NRA sent the armed groups and they took opportunity to rob, rape, murder innocent civilians. Alice was successfully gathered the youth to get involved on finishing her mission because many Acholi people believed that she had spirit power.

In 1988, Alice escaped into Kenya because her movement had defeated by UPDF where at the first she was detained and later was given political asylum.

b) Lord Resistance Army (LRA)

Lord Resistance Army (LRA) was known as spiritual rebel group in Northern Uganda, established by Joseph Konny in the late of 1986s, when National Resistance Army (NRA) came to power under Government of Uganda. This rebel group has known as the most influential actor behind the armed conflict in Uganda at that time, causing children lost their protection.

The motives of LRA's existence derived from historical background of Uganda, in which there was economic disparity between the North as a region which dominate military position and the South as a region with more economic power. The result was people in the North were marginalized and led LRA fight against the government. LRA against Museveni's regime to re-establish country of Uganda based on their own rules. Moreover historically the nature of politic in Uganda often uses forceful means to get power (Royo, 2008).

At that time, Konny was a student that has been dropped out from his school in Gulu and claimed that he was the cousin of Alice, the leader of HSBF. It is often misunderstood that LRA was the continuation of former spiritual movement

that is Alice's Holly Spirit Mobile Forces (HSMF). The difference between LRA and Alice HSMF was both of them were against the government but LRA proposed to cleanse the Acholi generation from Uganda. LRA's leader believed to possess spiritual power by abolishing them. Then, he created his own military-based movement and recruited people in Gulu Region. He also recruited the former of Alice members after it was defeated and then adopted the Alice's discourse of the cleansing ritual (Dunn, 2004).

LRA initially operated in northern Uganda and South Sudan, but had been relocated in a forest in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2005. LRA received military assistance and other supports came from Militantly Islamic Sudanese Government. In return, LRA should fight against Sudan People's Liberation Army and Ugandan Government. A more direct influence on LRA was Uganda People Democratic Forces (UPDF) (Dunn, 2004), a group of former officers of Ugandan national army before Museveni came to power. One of UPDF commanders was the trainer of LRA's soldiers. LRA portrayed themselves more as religion fanatic group rather than well-trained and discipline fighters. Religion was used as ideology to conduct violence, ensure military discipline and create environment where commander should be respected and feared.

In 1986 both LRA and Ugandan Government began kidnapping and training the children to fight their war. LRA was originally made up from 400 fighters in the country. It consisted of 250 Ugandan and 150 flew from Sudan, Congo, and Central African Republic (CAR) (Cakaj, 2010). This number did not include women, and children. To increase the number of fighters, LRA recruited

through abducted the children in the northern Uganda to be involved as combatant.

C. Recruitment of Child Soldiers in Uganda

The practice of children involvement and participation in armed conflict is not a new phenomenon in the world. The situation of children's involvement in this armed conflict has grown significantly and alarmed the international communities.

The Ugandan Constitution in Article 34, about definition of children defines that children is person under the age of sixteen. However it is contrary with the definition from the Convention on the Rights of the Child as part of international law of children's rights in Article one that children is person under eighteen. This inconsistency makes children in Uganda often vulnerable.

They were recruited by both government and LRA, even though they knew that this kind of action violates the law. Most of children have been abducted at a very young age, between 9 to 12 years old for period more than 2 years (Edmondson, 2005). In the case of northern Uganda armed conflict, the most vulnerable children were the most recruited such as those who were internally displaced, abandoned, had no parent, and lived in rural area. They were forced to become child soldiers.

In Idi Amin's administration in 1972 where NRM under Museveni's government, the army also recruited children to become soldiers. The use of children got the peak when there was conflict between government (Museveni)

and LRA. By plight of the former child soldiers, especially in the armed conflict with LRA, it caused the children suffered.

LRA activities from 1988 to 1994 were on low scale. But after that in 1995, the neighboring country, South Sudan, tried to supply Kony by giving weapons and territory to build bases. The bases were aimed for responding the Ugandan Government. This support enlarged LRA's attack and abduction dramatically after 1996. (Royo, 2008).

The child soldiers were loss of access to get proper food, health services, shelter, education and protection. In numerous countries, children both boys and girls have been manipulated or driven to become child soldiers. In general, the recruitment of child soldiers were forced recruitment, compulsory recruitment and voluntary means (DCAF, 2006).

Forced recruitment is involvement of children into armed forces by abduction or violence against the individuals or family members. The forced recruitment clearly violates the fundamental principle of human rights especially children rights to get protection. Compulsory recruitment is also known as conscription where every child in particular country should join military exercises that conducted by the government or influential armed groups. Usually the compulsory recruitment is conducted to fulfill state needs of armed forces, but some recruits children under 18 years which violate the UN Convention on the Rights of Children on the involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

Voluntary recruitment means to join arm forces is free choice for children. Factors that influence children to voluntarily involve in armed conflict could be

from the political perspective where they are being abused by state or non-states armed forces, conflict, and invasion. While from the economic perspective, they are trapped in poverty or unemployment so by joining soldiers they can get payment. Some of children also think that becoming armed forces is kind of protection because they loss their family and ideologically there is belief that involving in war or conflict is a justness. (Legrand, 1999).

The children in Uganda became very vulnerable, reflecting to the social condition. The roads were lack of repair and villages became isolated. It caused also less ability to receive book supplies and visitation from education officers. High level poverty that caused food scarcity triggered the rebellion to come to school and bring the children for becoming soldiers. The LRA taught them to against the government who failed in giving them good services.

The government army and LRA were the actors behind the children becoming combatant. They got improper treatment causing negative impact that changes their life in approximately two decades. During the armed conflict children lost their rights to get basic needs, such as education, health services, and protection under the law.

Majority of recruitment in Uganda used forced method. LRA came to houses and asked the parents to give their child for military training in order to secure the village when the government comes to them. Unfortunately, parents who did not sacrifice child were killed brutally. Besides, LRA came suddenly to schools where there were a lot of children. LRA caught children especially those who returned from schools. This happened in area where LRA did not have

enough power to support their forces. The reason why actually both government and rebel group like LRA recruited the children was there were not enough adult volunteers and they thought that children were easy to be trained and in fact that the half of population mostly consisted of children (Royo, 2008).

In the 1980 the conflict between LRA and government remained largely in nature. LRA began to focus on attacking civilian especially Acholi who was considered as government's supporters. Originally made up from 200 to 300 people, LRA started to expand its member by recruiting children (Dunn, 2004). They were abducted, forced, to serve as combatant. The children that escaped would be tortured or killed. Aside of becoming combatant LRA forced the children to kill their own family members or neighbors.

Recruited children were forced to perform brutal action as combatant such as killings, shooting, participating in violence, pillaging, often being involved in beating the fellow children who would escape from rebel camp. In some ways they were often forced to carry heavy loads and acted as personal servant to the rebel groups member. Majority of girl children were sexually abducted and served as wives to the rebel (Skinner, 1999).

It is estimated that at least 60.000 – 80.000 young people, majority boys and girls aged 1- 18 years were abducted to be combatant in LRA (Atim, 2013). It is also reported that three of five young boys experienced violation that causes bad physical injuries, while most of young girls experienced sexual abuses, forced marriage and child bearing while joining LRA.

Instead of forced recruitment, there were still a lot of children who becoming child soldiers voluntarily. When the armed conflict was ongoing, many of them lost their family member that caused nobody else could protect their life. Therefore, to gain more protection, becoming combatant was one of better choice. High level property in Uganda caused children not to be able to come to the school, to get jobs that could fulfill their needs so they joined rebel group such as LRA to get someone that fed them and provided shelter (Amone, 2014).

Instead of child soldiers, not only did armed caused child soldiers, it also caused the emergence of night commuters especially those living in Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps or villages. They flew from their homes and walked miles to avoid abduction from LRA. They went to protect places such as hospitals, because none protected them.

According to survey conducted by Annan in 2008, male and female youth have experienced serious crimes which illustrated below (Atim, 2013):

Table 3. 1 Treatment of Children during becoming combatant

Violent acts witnessed or received	Male	Female
Someone took or destroyed their personal property	81 %	90%
Heard gun fire regularly	77%	71%
A parent disappeared or was abducted	15%	16%
Another family member or friend disappeared or was abducted	66%	88%
Witnessed beatings or torture of other people	70%	46%
Another family member or friend was murdered or died violently	56%	46%
Someone shot bullets at you or your home	46%	16%

A family member received s serious physical injury from combat or landmine	39%	21%
Witnessed a killing	55%	35%
A parent was murdered or died violently	30%	18%
Witnessed the setting of houses on fire with people inside	39%	26%
Received a severe beating to the body	39%	18%
Witnessed massacre	38%	19%
Being forced to carry heavy loads or do other forced labour	45%	19%
Received serious physical injury in a battle or rebel attack	24%	11%
Being tied up or locked up as a prisoner	31%	7%
Witnessed the rape or sexual abuse of a women	11%	10%
Someone attacked you with a panga or other weapon	13%	8%
Being forced to have sex (with a women or men)	1%	6%

Source: *Children and Youth: Necessary Transitional Justice Mechanism and Outcomes in Uganda*. Kampala: Feinstein International Center (FIC)

D. Children Security in Armed Conflict and the Impacts on Children in the Post of Armed Conflict

The conflict between the government of Uganda and LRA has had diverse impacts on children. Many of children who were abducted by LRA died on bushes even though some found way to return from army to civilization. As Atim cited, abduction and forced recruitment by LRA led to physical injuries and sexual violence.

1. Slavery, forced marriage, and sexual abuse

During armed conflict, women or girls have been abused extremely by LRA. Approximately 8000 females had given birth of children within armed conflict in which it was estimated that 40% of females gave birth one child while another 15% had 2 or more children (UNHCHR and UHRC, 2011).

The sexual abuses victims consisted of females and some boys also required special treatment and assistance including reproductive health and fistula repairs, but these services were not available in Uganda. Moreover several of them were infected HIV/AIDS as a result of rapes and sex slaves and therefore required medical treatment in their lifetime or drug therapy.

The former forced wives often difficult to be accepted by societies in their family or community. They were suffering from rejection, discrimination, and harassment even by their own families. As a result, they moved to some peripheral region. Many of them got difficulty to return to school. So, because of low of education they could not get proper job to get income.

2. War wounded and victims' mutilation

Thousands of children victims got serious injuries and mutilation caused by LRA attacks and UPDF gun shots in the middle of armed conflict. They were living with serious injuries not only from bullet but also shrapnel, macheted by LRA attacks, and hit by bomb fragments that done by UPDF within the conflict. Many of them also got burned by LRA in IDP camps or villages where children majority wounded while the adult were possible to run away and children were trapped in burning area (Amone, 2014).

The mutilation often done by LRA as the form of punishment especially for children who wanted to escape or did not obey what LRA ordered. This includes cutting people's ears, legs, cutting of female breasts and genitals, and rapping female children using castration. The study from doctors and medical team of Child Soldiers Organization (CSO) a non-governmental organization stated that the majority victims mutilated by LRA 70% were women. In addition, the female who rejected to be married by LRA soldiers were also mutilated (UNHCHR and UHRC, 2011).

3. Psychological Harm

Child soldiers did not only experience the brutal treatment but also witnessed the harm of others such as their own family, friends, neighbors, or others. They saw their love ones killed, mutilated, raped, abused, tortured, and humiliated. More than that, they also were forced to injure or kill their love ones or others, to cheer and dance while others were getting tortured, abused, and murdered.

4. Forced displacement

By the height of displacement in 2005, approximately 2 million people, mostly Acholian including children have displaced from their origin. There were more than 240 IDP camps during the height of conflict especially in the North Uganda. They were living in IDP camps where there was lack of protection therefore children were often forced to be recruited as combatant while their own family had no enough power to fight the rebellion. World Health Organization (WHO) and Uganda Ministry of Health surveyed in 2005 from January to July in Acholi land found that the total mortality was 25,694 people in which 10,054 were children under five years (UNDP, Uganda Human Development Report : Unlocking the development potential of northern Uganda, 2015).

5. Night Commuters Children

While the IDP could provide enough protection to the children, they chose to flee to other more secure places. Besides they flew to hospital or bus station, living at the street, public facilities such as hospital, bus station, as their best choices to live. They considered that living in the street was the way to get more money. They tried to sell water bottles, scrap metal and recyclable plastics (UNDP, Uganda Human Development Report : Unlocking the development potential of northern Uganda, 2015).

Many of them felt that living there were better than at their home or camps. There were more groups such church that care to them by giving food or small job. However the challenges was harder, they should survive every single day. The girls suffered from rape, prostitution, early and unwanted pregnancy.

6. Lack of basic needs (education, protection, health, food and shelter)

In the post armed conflict, children were seriously traumatized. They lost their chance to get normal educational, social, and moral development. However, when they came to school, the rebel army, LRA often caught them to become part of LRA. They were abducted to be soldiers. Besides, LRA killed and shot people who became enemy of LRA (UNDP, Uganda Human Development Report : Unlocking the development potential of northern Uganda, 2015). The government also did same thing with the rebel group to recruit children. Protection was useless because government army also contributed for making children lost their protection.