

No Safe Place to Call Home: Child and Adolescent Night Commuters in Northern Uganda



Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

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MISSION STATEMENT

The Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children works to improve the lives and defend the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, children and adolescents. We advocate for their inclusion and participation in programs of humanitarian assistance and protection. We provide technical expertise and policy advice to donors and organizations that work with refugees and the displaced. We make recommendations to policy makers based on rigorous research and information gathered on fact-finding missions. We join with refugee women, children and adolescent to ensure that their voices are heard from the community level to the highest councils of governments and international organizations. We do this in the conviction that their empowerment is the surest route to the greater well being of all forcibly displaced people. The Women's Commission is an independent affiliate of the International Rescue Committee. The Women's Commission was founded in 1989.

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Foreword

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (Women's Commission) Children and Adolescents Project staff traveled to Gulu and Kitgum Districts in northern Uganda and to Kampala, Uganda's capital in the south, from December 2 -17, 2003. The trip's principal mission was to assist two youth organizations in developing advocacy strategies for projects the groups were planning to undertake with funding from American Jewish World Service (AJWS). The projects are youth-designed and youth-run and focus principally on addressing adolescent reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, gender issues, peer education and empowerment and youth advocacy.

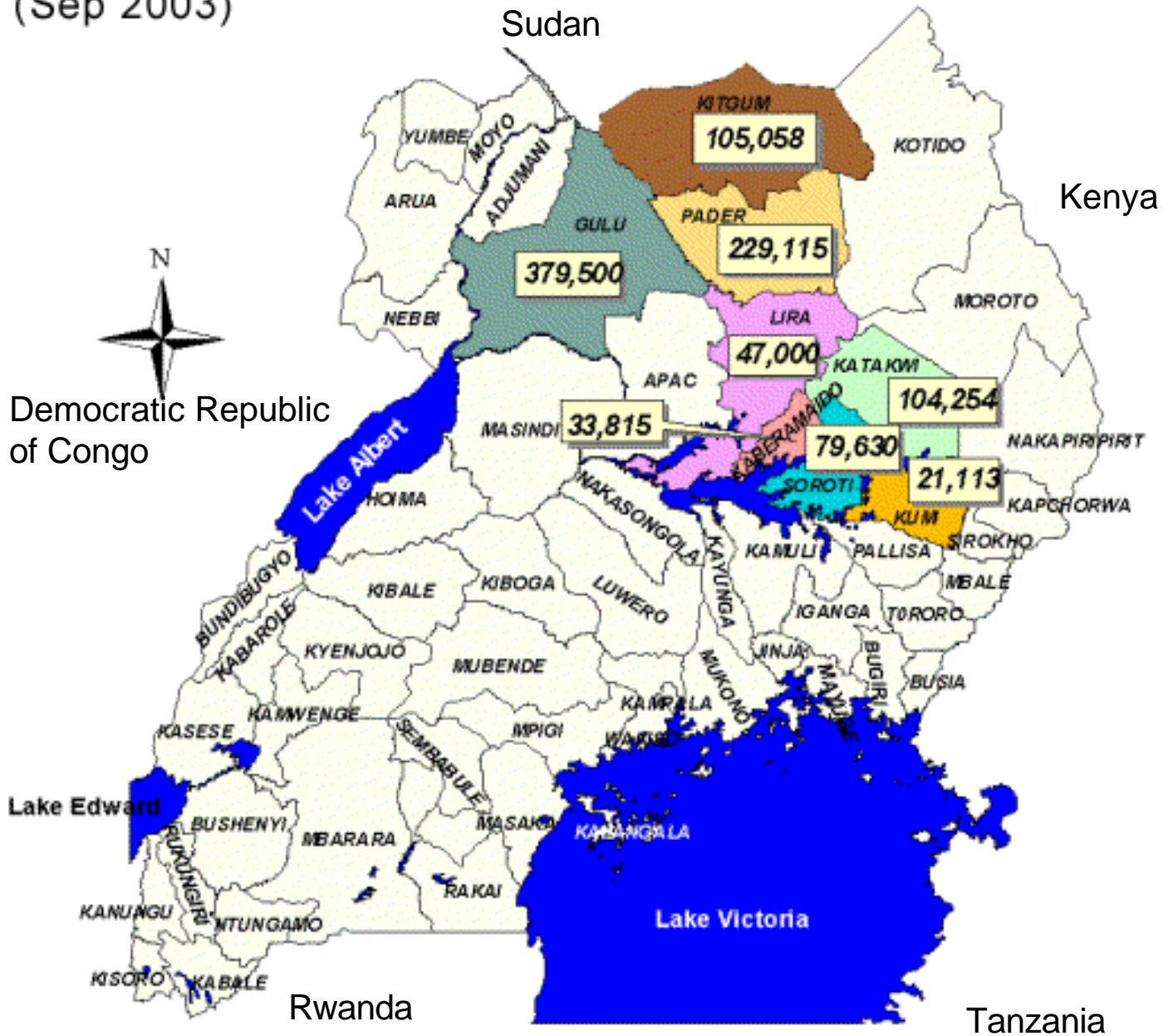
The Women's Commission participated in two five-day workshops with the youth groups – Watwero Rights Focus Initiative (Watwero) in Kitgum, and Gulu Youth For Action (GYFA) in Gulu.¹ Workshop participants discussed the challenges facing young people in their communities and assessed the achievements made thus far by youth-run organizations in addressing their concerns. They also assessed gaps and developed strategies for peaceful collaboration between young people and adults.

Women's Commission staff also worked with these and other youth partners to investigate the current protection and assistance situation for adolescents and youth. The information gained from these assessments will help the Women's Commission's ongoing advocacy efforts to improve support to Ugandan internally displaced people and Sudanese refugee young people in northern Uganda.

As part of the workshop in Kitgum, Watwero organized a team of its members and other youth from organizations in Pader District to work with the Women's Commission to investigate the situation of "night commuters" – mostly girls, boys and women who walk each night to town centers from villages and IDP camps in the conflict-affected areas seeking safety from attack by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army. The investigation team met with night commuters and those caring for them, focusing especially on gender-based violence (GBV) issues and nightly living conditions. The Watwero team and the Women's Commission also visited Labuje IDP camp in Kitgum and organized meetings with nearly a dozen community-based youth associations and groups in the area. In Gulu, GYFA members also assisted the Women's Commission in meeting night commuters and their caregivers. In addition, youth in both areas worked with the Women's Commission to interview dozens of governmental, nongovernmental and community representatives about young people's protection and assistance.

Map of Uganda

Internally-Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Uganda (Sep 2003)



FEWS NET/Uganda, September 2003;
 Source of Information: UN OCHA, UN WFP

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I. Executive Summary

“Look into the eyes of a child who has been repeatedly brutalized, tortured or raped, as I did when I visited northern Uganda, and you will never forget what you find there. This abuse of children is one of the most serious in the world. It calls for urgent and concerted action. The international community has shown an increasing understanding of, and concern for, the suffering of the people of northern Uganda. Its assistance continues to be instrumental in addressing some of the overwhelming humanitarian needs of those afflicted by displacement, disease and disability. Yet the traumatic nightmare of the people remains, haunting hundreds of thousands, sowing bitterness and destroying their future. Much more material assistance is required. An even greater requirement is the peaceful solution of the conflict in Northern Uganda.”

— Jan Egeland, *UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator*²

Amongst the growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northern Uganda are an estimated 50,000 people known as “night commuters” – most of them children, adolescents and women – who flee their homes or IDP camps each night for town centers seeking safety from attack by the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA).³ These night commuters represent only a small portion of the IDP population, but the situation dramatically illustrates how inadequate protection has led to increasing violence against children and adolescents. Many adolescent girls and boys have reported cases of sexual violence against night commuters en route to and at sleeping centers, exposing night commuters to the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Survivors of rape also risk stigmatization and have little access to medical, legal or counseling assistance. Furthermore, rape survivors suffer trauma and mental suffering from the abuse. Night commuters report inadequate adult supervision of sleeping spaces or humanitarian support and protection.

IDPs say the government of Uganda (GOU) and its military, the Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF) could and should be doing more to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and provide IDPs basic physical security. Additionally, many members of Ugandan civil society believe the GOU and the LRA should be taking stronger measures to facilitate a peaceful end to the conflict. In the absence of adequate protection by the government of Uganda, IDPs have increasingly turned to the use of government-supported local defense units (LDUs) to protect their communities. However, the GOU is doing too little to monitor its LDU recruitment, training and activity. Despite the GOU’s claims that it does not use child soldiers, IDP camp leaders and humanitarian agencies report the active recruitment of children and adolescents into LDUs.

The United Nations, NGOs, donors and the GOU have failed to adequately coordinate and implement measures to systematically monitor, advocate for and improve young people’s protection, or support their capacities to better protect themselves in northern Uganda. Furthermore, most United Nations and humanitarian agencies tend not to adequately listen to or collaborate with young people. With some important exceptions, adult-led NGOs do not create opportunities for or allow young people to influence decision-making that affects their protection. Many youth groups exist in northern Uganda that could help expand the capacity of humanitarian groups to reach vulnerable populations affected by violence and displacement. In turn, humanitarian NGOs could help youth groups build their capacity and increase the constructive influence youth have in their communities.

Since the investigation was undertaken, some further attention has been given to the situation in northern Uganda by the international community. However, these issues still need further investigation and documentation, and a more comprehensive response from the international community.

Key Recommendations

- **The Government of Uganda (GOU) and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) must intensify efforts to resolve the crisis through peaceful means.**
- **The LRA must end all attacks on civilian communities and human rights abuses**, including abductions and the use of child soldiers. **The LRA must release abductees.** The LRA should cooperate on the establishment of safe humanitarian aid corridors to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches all areas affected by the conflict.
- **The GOU must stop all child recruitment into government military forces (including the Ugandan People's Defense Forces (UPDF) and Local Defense Units (LDUs));** parents and communities should not allow their children to join armed forces voluntarily and should help them resist pressure to join. Monitoring, reporting and verification mechanisms of human rights violations by government military forces are needed. Furthermore, the GOU should work closely with community leaders, including young people, to ensure that government military forces' training accomplishes the prevention of gender-based violence and accidental or arbitrary killing or abuse of power by soldiers. These trainings should also include clear messages against the recruitment or acceptance of children as soldiers.
- **GOU officials and United Nations and nongovernmental humanitarian agencies should work together, and with community and youth-based organizations, to investigate violence and rights violations against night commuters** as well as the larger internally displaced persons (IDP) population, and follow up with a comprehensive response to end abuses.
- **Kitgum District officials should work with youth groups and international NGOs to ensure night commuters have adequate and safe shelter and material assistance**, such as blankets and mats, in sleeping sites. Additionally, district officials should support the efforts of health workers, school administrators and teachers who take advantage of a nightly opportunity to provide tens of thousands of night commuters who sleep at schools and hospitals with vital information and care, including life skills, legal rights and reproductive health. Kitgum and Gulu District officials should work with health service providers, teachers and school officials to establish and strengthen care for survivors of sexual violence, including emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV/AIDS, and counseling and support.
- **NGOs and adult-led community-based organizations (CBOs) must engage and partner with youth groups and individual young people to ensure that the capacities and rights of young people are supported.** NGOs and government officials should help build the capacity of youth groups and increase the opportunities for young people to identify their protection needs and influence decision-making.
- **Young people need to continue to build links with other youth groups and adult-led organizations to find areas for cooperation.** In particular, youth groups need to work together to expand their protection role and build upon their respective capacities.

II. History of the Crisis

For the past eighteen years, war has ravaged northern Uganda. Joseph Kony and his rebel force, the Lord’s Resistance Army, profess to fight a spiritual war for the Acholi people against the government of Uganda and its military, the Ugandan People’s Defense Forces. Although Kony’s political agenda is unclear, he wants the rule of government to be based on the Ten Commandments. However, the LRA has been responsible for countless atrocities committed against its own community, including the abduction and abuse of tens of thousands of children and adolescents,⁴ who make up most of the rebel army.⁵

In March 2002, the Ugandan government began Operation Iron Fist, a military offensive against the LRA. Since the operation began, the LRA has intensified its attacks on civilian communities, increasing abductions, forced recruitment and massacres.⁶ The number of abducted young people jumped from at least 12,000 children and adolescents as of June 2002, to nearly double that by June 2003 and at least 30,000 by May 2004.⁷ These girls and boys are forced to commit unthinkable atrocities against each other and against their communities. More than half of the young people who have not been abducted live in displaced persons camps, where access to education, health care and other basic necessities is minimal and security is uncertain. Girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse, rape and sexual exploitation or enslavement.

As a result of the increased LRA attacks and abductions, unprecedented numbers of young people and their families in the area have fled their homes and are displaced, with limited access to humanitarian support. In August 2001, there were 480,000 internally displaced persons,⁸ today there are over 1.6 million⁹ – over 90 percent of the population in the affected region, and the war has also spread to areas in the north and the east previously untouched by the conflict of Uganda.¹⁰ Nearly 70 percent of the displaced population is under 25 years old.¹¹

III. Lack of Protection for Night Commuters

Approximately 50,000 people in northern Uganda continue to leave their homes each night in search of safety from attack and abduction by the LRA.¹² Girls and women among these “night commuters” report that they face sexual harassment and abuse along transit routes and in the sleeping spaces in town centers. Many of the young night commuters, who leave their homes alone and sleep without parental supervision, are increasingly exposed to the risks of HIV/AIDS and early pregnancy as they are forced or choose to become involved in sexual activity.

NGOs, hospital staff and other groups report that most major towns in the Acholi region of northern Uganda affected by the eighteen-year civil war (predominately in Kitgum, Gulu and Pader Districts) have been experiencing an influx of night commuters since the summer of 2002 (see *night commuter numbers for Kitgum in Table A*). The majority of people

Table A

International Rescue Committee Uganda Night Commuter Survey
The IRC conducted a series of surveys of night commuters in Kitgum. The IRC included the following sites among its research and calculated these estimates in December 2003.

Location within Kitgum	Number of night commuters on night of visit
Bus Park	500
Justro Pastore School	3,000
Kitgum Government Hospital	7,000
Kitgum Public School	500
Kitgum Town Council Hall	50
Ministry of Works	700
Shop Verandahs	500
St. Joseph’s Mission Hospital	8,000
Town Council Offices	100
Uganda Martyrs Center	448
Water Department	100
Administrative Works	500
Total	21,398

traveling to town centers in these areas are children, adolescents and women. While most of the night commuters travel a distance of less than two kilometers (1.5 miles),¹³ others walk as far as 10 kilometers (about six miles) each way, leaving home at night and returning the following morning. Some come from IDP camps, but most come from surrounding villages, all of which lack adequate protection by the UPDF from LRA attack.¹⁴ More recently, the night commuter crisis extended to other districts traditionally untouched by the insurgency, including Lira and Soroti.

The Women’s Commission worked with youth groups in Kitgum and Gulu to investigate the night commuter situation. They identified the motivations for nightly displacement and the conditions night commuters face in sleeping spaces and in transit, including any problems they are encountering, and proposed solutions. Interviews were conducted in Kitgum at St. Joseph’s Mission Hospital, Kitgum Government Hospital, Kitgum Public School, the bus park and shop verandahs; and in Gulu at Noah’s Ark.¹⁵ Sample questions used in interviews with night commuters are attached. (See Appendix, page 18.) The approaches used by each district to address night commuter conditions and protection in Kitgum and Gulu varied significantly.



Youth researchers (two girls in center) ask their peers sleeping at Kitgum government hospital in northern Uganda about the conditions of and abuses against night commuters.

Gulu Night Commuters

An International Organization for Migration (IOM) survey estimates that 18,000 night commuters enter Gulu each night.¹⁶ This number, however, fluctuates periodically in relation to LRA and UPDF activity in the region. In Gulu, the IOM estimated that in November 2003, 84 percent of night commuters were children and adolescents. These night commuters are required by district authorities to sleep in one of thirteen district-designated shelters.¹⁷



Night commuters are often crammed into overcrowded and uncomfortable spaces. Humanitarian aid organizations’ resources are stretched thin trying to accommodate night commuter needs.

The district-designated shelters were formed after a decision by Gulu officials to provide assistance to night commuters to prevent them from sleeping in public spaces where it was believed they were susceptible to abuse, or to prevent them from engaging in “inappropriate activities.”¹⁸ These official sleeping centers are primarily funded and managed by NGOs and are also supported by the district government, for example, through data management on night commuter statistics and UPDF guards outside sleeping centers.

At the same time, however, the local police make sweeps of the town every night to make sure that night commuters are going to the shelters and arrest individuals who do not comply. Some youth have expressed concern over these police sweeps, believing that the policy is used to “clean up the Gulu streets” rather than to provide security to night commuters. Youth explained that a few businesses were complaining of the disruptions that night commuters potentially could cause, or that adolescent night commuters were going to

nightclubs. They believe police were acting more to enforce district policies regarding where night commuters were allowed to spend their time than to provide protection to night commuters.

The majority of the shelters are designated for children and adolescents only, with separate sleeping spaces for girls and boys. A few of the centers are set aside for families. All night commuters are required to register with the district-designated shelter they sleep at, and statistics and records are collected on a computer database that is shared among all thirteen shelters.¹⁹

At Noah's Ark, one of the district shelters, night commuters are expected to arrive at the center by 7:00 p.m. They are given an opportunity to bathe and can participate in bible study, drama and debate groups, singing and prayers, and health discussions until generators and lights are turned off. Several UPDF soldiers are stationed outside the Noah's Ark main gates beginning at sundown.

Despite NGO and district support, services and resources can be stretched thin. Most of the sleeping shelters at Noah's Ark were overcrowded, with children at times literally sleeping on top of one another. Some children slept on verandahs just outside the main shelters because of the overcapacity.

When asked why they choose to commute to Noah's Ark, several young boys responded "the hospitality," referring to the amenities. This raises an additional concern. Whereas night commuter children and adolescents fleeing potential LRA abduction are receiving the types of services that provide the safety and humanitarian assistance they need, district officials and NGOs must also be cautious to not inadvertently draw additional young people and undermine the important family roles and responsibilities of parents. Many young people who slept at district-designated shelters during high levels of insecurity may consider using the shelters for the amenities they provide even during ebbs in insecurity. District officials must be cautious about replacing the role of parents by substituting the government or NGOs as caretakers and disciplinarians. Parents need additional assistance during the ongoing crisis, particularly as their means for providing for their children are eroded by the war.

Addressing this issue will help shelters make the best use of their available resources and continue to support the important role parents are expected to and want to fulfill in their own child's security. Steps that could be taken include livelihood training and micro-enterprise loans for parents, and additional food and educational assistance for children and adolescents.

Kitgum Night Commuters

In contrast to Gulu District, Kitgum District government officials have not launched a coordinated and

comprehensive response to the night commuter emergency, according to the Kitgum representative for the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Muktar Ali Farah.²⁰ This lack of support has led to difficult and often chaotic and dangerous sleeping conditions for the nightly displaced in Kitgum.



Child and adolescent night commuters in Kitgum Government Hospital sleep in the open or make their own shelters from the rain when shelters reach their capacity.

Most Kitgum night commuters go to the two hospitals to sleep – St. Joseph's Mission Hospital and Kitgum Government Hospital, both of which have a perimeter fence. Each reported a range of 6,000 to 8,000 night commuters entering their compounds every evening, for a total of 12-16,000 people seeking safety each night in these areas alone.²¹ Night commuters also sleep at schools, on

verandahs outside stores, in parks and in the bus park in town. The headmistress of the Kitgum Public School reported that each night about 500 commuters sleep at the school, which is in the center of town.²² The nightly numbers vary according to the level of insecurity in the outlying area. According to the IRC, approximately 4 percent of the night commuters come from the nearby Labuje IDP camp, but most (87 percent) are from surrounding villages.²³

In Kitgum, all night commuters interviewed said the primary reason they journey into the town center is their fear of nighttime LRA attacks on their villages and camps. Additionally, not all night commuters return home each night. The elderly and women with children cannot always make it home each day, and many are displaced in Kitgum Town Council far away from their home villages. Some camp outside Kitgum Government Hospital but sleep alongside the night commuters inside the hospital's grounds at night.

Unlike in Gulu, these night commuter sleeping areas in Kitgum do not provide a broad range of supplies or services. Night commuter assistance and security is often disorganized. Volunteer support staff at the hospitals and schools are stretched thin, leaving many of the younger night commuters unsupervised and left to their own devices in terms of safety and shelter. St. Joseph's Mission Hospital, where the largest number of night commuters sleep in Kitgum, has, however, managed to provide some organization and protection.

Within St. Joseph's Mission Hospital, where seven temporary shelters have been erected for night commuters, many are still sleeping on verandahs and under the sky. Night commuters who come to the shelter alone sleep in girls-only and boys-only shelters; they must go to the same shelter every night and are not allowed to move between them. At St. Joseph's Mission Hospital, two teams regularly patrolled and acted as focal points for night commuters. This same strategy could be implemented at the other sleeping centers in Kitgum, but without additional support from district officials and NGOs, gaps in protection and supervision of night commuters will continue.

Many of the other sleeping areas in Kitgum do not have adequate or separate shelters for boys and girls, contributing to opportunities for adolescent night commuters to engage in sexual activities or exposing them to abuse. Women's Commission staff saw many adolescent couples walking around in the dark together and heading to darker corners of the sleeping sites. Without adult supervision or reproductive health education, many of these adolescents, who may become sexually active, place themselves at great risk of contracting or spreading HIV and other STIs and having unwanted pregnancies.

Most of the sleeping spaces, such as the public hospital and schools, cannot afford the cost of additional electricity and light fixtures, and have received no support from Kitgum District officials to provide emergency funding or tax waivers for this purpose. The darkness that covers the sleeping spaces within these sites has contributed greatly to threats of violence against night commuters as they try to sleep.



Many night commuter children and adolescents attempt to study at night and do homework in whatever available light they can find, such as this young woman at St. Joseph's Mission Hospital.

Volunteers such as Patrick Ongolla, the chief security officer at Kitgum Government Hospital, provide some security assistance to the night commuters in the absence of Kitgum District support; otherwise, neither the police nor UPDF visibly patrol or guard these sleeping areas.

Mr. Ongolla reported that on several occasions he had reached out to the UPDF asking for increased security at the hospital but was ignored.

He also expressed concern about various forms of violence – for example, fights and bullying by older youth or drunken adults – and about the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STIs, as unsupervised teenagers engage in sex during the night.²⁴ Many of the night commuters reported that although they feel safer inside Kitgum town than they do in surrounding villages or IDP camps at night, they still feel threatened en route and inside the sleeping areas. On the morning that the Women’s Commission left Kitgum, it was reported that several night commuters were abducted by the LRA at dawn as they were returning to Labuje IDP camp after spending the night at St. Joseph’s Mission Hospital.²⁵ District officials, including the police and UPDF, NGOs and youth groups, should examine the conditions and safety of night commuters in and en route to each sleeping area to provide the specific support night commuters need.

Although the Women’s Commission did not conduct a thorough investigation into young people’s access to available education, several NGOs and young people themselves affirmed that education continues to be disrupted. However, according to the IRC, 93.5 percent of night commuters attend *some* kind of schooling.²⁶ This figure, however, does not distinguish between students who attend regularly and those who attend occasionally. Women’s Commission staff witnessed many night commuter children and adolescents attempting to study at night and do homework in whatever available light they could find. One older boy spent the evening doing homework on the blackboard with a small flashlight as other night commuters slept at his feet. As already highlighted in previous Women’s Commission research, education remains one of the highest priorities for war-affected young people in northern Uganda.²⁷ However, tens of thousands of children and adolescents affected by the war in northern Uganda are not involved in educational activities and will either miss years of schooling or will never have the chance to attend school unless more support is provided immediately.²⁸

Steps taken to investigate and coordinate assistance to Kitgum night commuters

Several international and local NGOs, such as Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale (AVSI), Oxfam UK and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), have been assisting night commuters by constructing temporary shelters and incorporating night commuter assistance into their relief activities. These NGOs and others have continued to call on Kitgum District officials to develop a comprehensive and coordinated plan for protecting and assisting night commuters. During the Women’s Commission’s December 2003 mission in Kitgum, OCHA held its regular program coordination meeting, at which night commuter issues were raised. At the program coordination meeting, the Kitgum representative for OCHA, Muktar Ali Farah, responded by initiating a protection meeting to investigate the situation of night commuters. The director of Watwero Rights Focus Initiative, one of the youth groups investigating night commuter abuses and conditions with the Women’s Commission, was invited to participate in the protection meeting to provide a youth perspective and to regularly attend the OCHA program coordination meetings.

Patterns in sexual harassment and abuse of night commuter girls and women

Adolescent girls and women night commuters said they are regularly sexually harassed and at times sexually assaulted and raped as they travel to their sleeping spaces at night. They named perpetrators as a combination of adolescent boys and young men from their communities, including “*boda boda*” boys – those who wait at corners and provide rides on bicycles for a fee. Some girls and women described encountering the same group of boys or young males at the same locations each night. Others described random encounters, involving one or more males in different, unpredictable locations. UPDF soldiers are also implicated in incidents of sexual violence against them,²⁹ and do little to improve



Educating parents to let their children leave home earlier will prevent night commuters, such as these girls at the gates of Noah’s Ark in Gulu, from having to travel in the dark.

security at night in Kitgum night commuter sleeping spaces.³⁰ Some of the girls and women reported that some of the boys, as well as the UPDF, were armed and used weapons to frighten and coerce girls and women into sex.

Incidents were reported to take place on routes leading into town; others took place just outside the perimeter of fenced-in sleeping spaces; and still others occurred within sleeping spaces, especially those without perimeter fencing or other forms of protection. Most abuses were said to take place under cover of darkness, but some girls said males also harassed them in broad daylight. Authorities at every sleeping site claimed to know girls and women who had been harassed or raped during their journeys into town or in the town center.

*Lucy, 15, from Lulojo, a village about four kilometers from Kitgum Town:*³¹

I attend secondary school in the village of Lulojo outside Kitgum Town. I live with my mother and younger sister. I left home with my younger sister at about 7:30 PM one evening in October 2003 to go and sleep at the Government Hospital because I feared LRA attack during the night in the village. My mother stayed behind. When I reached Kitgum Town, five teenaged boys approached me in the darkness. They threatened me and told me they wanted me. I resisted, and I passed my little sister to some small children who were along the road. One boy grabbed my right hand, another took my left, and they pulled me aside. All five formed a semi-circle around me so that others passing by could not see me. I cried and refused to have sex with them, and I told them “I have brothers who will be along here soon.” They didn’t believe me and told me that if my brothers came they would hide and that anyway, my brothers wouldn’t see me as they passed.

All five boys stayed with me until about 10:00 PM. Then one remained, and he raped me. After he left, I went to the Government Hospital where I had intended to sleep. I stayed the night there, and reported it to someone at the hospital, who told me to go home the next day and tell my mother what had happened. My mother told me to identify the boy so that she could make him pay cash for his action. I have not been able to find the boy again.

I am worried that I might have contracted HIV, but I am afraid to get tested. After the incident, I felt itchy [in my genital area] and sought medical assistance at St. Joseph’s Hospital without saying what had happened. They suggested I buy a particular medicine, but I couldn’t afford it. Instead, I used traditional medicine, which made the itching go away. My biggest fear is that any of my friends find out what happened to me. I don’t want my friends to hear, as I fear it will spoil my name.³²

In Kitgum, there is no central reporting system for rape survivors, who face many barriers to coming forward with their experiences and do not receive support services. Even if they do come forward, few social service structures are in place to assist them. Most medical and other authorities are not trained to identify and counsel potential rape survivors, while the legal system requires parents to press charges, with survivors bearing the burden of proof.³³ Girls and women also say that speaking up would expose them to public shame. A typical method of resolving cases of rape and “defilement,” as sexual abuse is locally termed,³⁴ also often involves the girls’ parents requiring the perpetrator to “pay cash” for the offense, as described in “Lucy’s” experience.

Other adolescent girls reported that at times boys in groups come up to girls, particularly those who walk alone later at night, and tell them “I love you,” or “I want you to be my lover.” Some girls said if they refused to tell the

boys they loved them, they risked being forced away from their routes by the boys and raped. Other girls said that a number of schools are being used as rape sites in the evening. Girls said the boys and young men ranged in age from their mid-teens to their twenties.

*Lizzy, a 15-year-old night commuter from Pamoro living in Labuje IDP camp:*³⁵

I am in S2 at Kitgum Town College, and I live in Labuje IDP camp near town. I am an orphan. I have come to St. Joseph's Hospital three to four times per week to sleep for the past three months. I usually arrive by 8:00 PM. There is a problem near Kitgum Boys School. I see the same boys, a group of about five of them, bothering me and other girls at the same place every night. Girls need to leave earlier, in daylight, to increase our security. I also think police should patrol schools where abuses take place.

Other girls and I often walk alone for several reasons. Many times our parents remain behind, and those who are orphans like me have no one to accompany us. I lost both parents, and earlier this year, I also lost my elder brother when he was killed by the LRA. As an orphan, I receive help to continue my education, although most young people at Labuje are unable to attend school. After school, I must prepare my dinner, which takes a lot of time, and I cook for others.

I normally sleep on a piece of ground just in front of a covered verandah where others sleep. When it rains others and I stand under the veranda, and we do not rest well. As the day breaks, I walk alongside others and head home.³⁶

Patrick Ongolla, the chief security officer at Kitgum Government Hospital, explained that cases of violence are reported to him daily, and he is asked to resolve them but cannot leave the hospital grounds to investigate them all. Mr. Ongolla explained how in May 2003, he stopped a rape case in progress: *"A girl was just outside the hospital grounds when she was attacked by an adolescent boy trying to rape her. When it happened, another boy ran here to tell me and I ran out after them. When I got there, he was on top of her, and I literally pulled him off her. It was around 7:30 PM, and I detained the young man all night and then took him to police in the morning. That was as much as I could do. The only emergency help available is really from the NGOs, and that is not enough."*³⁷ Mr. Ongolla explained that the girls' parents would have needed to follow up, and that he had not heard any more about her case. In another incident, Mr. Ongolla explained a case where a boy followed a girl 500 meters before attacking her. The boy had been part of a group but then broke off and followed the girl. He had apparently been watching her and told her he wanted her for a long time, but she did not know him. He then raped her. Later, the boy was identified and offered an apology, but the mother of the girl said he "must pay cash."

*Alice, 63, from Lolojo:*³⁸

Every night I come to sleep at the Kitgum Public School with my four grandchildren. I have been caring for them since 1986 when the rebels killed their parents. They are here with me in this classroom, where we sleep each night. About 120 women and children stay in this one classroom each night. We have problems with bed bugs. We don't have blankets or mats for sleeping on. We sleep under desks, and there is not much room. We also lack clothes and have got malaria. Sometimes we also do not eat, and we try to do work for food.

We have trouble with boys and soldiers as we come to sleep here. Over the past year, I have seen people beaten by boys and some beaten by soldiers, who say we are late coming into town. There is also raping and sexual abuse. One time earlier this year, I was walking in from Lolojo alone and one soldier among a group of soldiers came and abducted two girls from along the road who were walking near me. They were 13 or 14 years old. He had asked them, “Where are you going?” and “Do you want to come to town?” After that, I saw the girls later on, and they told me they had been raped and that the soldier told them, “If you go to the local councilors, I will beat you.”

Someone also tried to rape me once, too. It was right here in the field, recently [motions to the area just outside Kitgum Public School where she sleeps]. A boy came up to me and said “Stop woman, where are you going? I am old enough for you.” He leapt at me and tried to push me down, but I struggled, and he ran away. Since then, nothing has happened to me, but every day, there are these threats.³⁹

Although Gulu District officials and humanitarian organizations have taken some steps to address the situation of night commuters, they must do more to prevent gender-based violence and assist survivors. Rose, a volunteer for the girls’ section at Noah’s Ark night commuter center in Gulu, said, “*Girls frequently tell me that older boys beat or rape them as they come to our center each night. Just several weeks ago, a girl reported to me that a boda boda driver forced her friend [to have sex] after he offered to bring her to the sleeping center. Just in the last month, about five girls have told me that they were forced. We don’t test them for AIDS though.*”⁴⁰ Rose also explained that the boys often force girls to have sex in a big vacant lot right outside their center. She said that the boys rape the girls after dark and before government soldiers, who keep guard over the center, arrive. Once volunteers at the center realize that this is occurring in the field, they attempt to chase after the boys, who always get away. She also explained that the local police started giving warnings over the local radio to all *boda boda* drivers that they would be punished if caught harassing night commuters. She feels that the warnings have helped a little.

Understanding Why Some Boys Perpetrate GBV

During the Women’s Commission’s investigations into GBV against night commuter girls, several older boys on the investigation team questioned other boys about why their peers rape girls. Their responses were informative and have helped youth groups in Kitgum assess how they might address this issue with boys. Some of the boys explained that the breakdown of traditional courtship customs and spaces has caused some boys to become more aggressive in their interaction with girls, at times harassing, abusing or raping them. Whereas boys were previously expected to seek the approval of a girl’s parents prior to courtship, the lack of livelihood opportunities for young men has also made it too embarrassing for adolescent boys to approach the parents of girls they want to get to know. Without appropriate, safe and supervised spaces for adolescents to interact, boys have at times resorted to approaching girls in spaces they know girls frequent, such as the roads on which night commuter girls travel alone and the spaces girls go to sleep.

Some boys also described the rising social pressure for them to be physically or emotionally involved with girls and the breakdown of traditional cultural norms that dictate what type of behavior is considered acceptable. In other cases, boys were simply being opportunistic and taking advantage of the situation of night commuters.

***David, a 17-year-old from Labuje IDP Camp:*⁴¹**

I know of older boys that menace and rape girls as they come into town. I don't agree with what they do, but I do understand that they feel lots of pressure to meet girls. We used to have places we could go and talk to girls we found pretty. Eventually we would go to their parents asking if it was okay to marry their daughter. Those traditional places and customs are gone now. The war has made it very difficult to interact with girls.

Without a place to meet girls, boys are forced to meet girls in other ways. Some boys think that because so many girls are on the road at night, this is a good opportunity to talk to them. Some boys think that because the girls dress in "revealing" clothing, the girls want to be approached. I don't agree with this, but when you don't have a job and have very little money, how can you approach a girl or her parents to tell them that you are interested in their daughter?

I feel lots of pressure from other boys to approach girls on the road and in the dark. They tell me that it is okay to force a girl to "love" me, but I don't agree. We should have a fun place where we can talk to girls. We need jobs, too, so that we can feel confident enough to approach a girl's parents. These boys who rape girls are breaking lots of traditional values of our people. Normally village leaders would punish them, but with this war, the adults are not around to promote our traditional values.⁴²

Typically, a village community would decide as a group how to deal with a perpetrator of GBV, but with the breakdown in social cohesion, boys' harmful behavior is left unchecked. Some of the boys interviewed by the Women's Commission explained that younger boys often end up looking to the example set by older and outspoken boys. This was clearly evident when a group of menacing adolescent boys surrounded a team of female researchers and the girls they were interviewing at Kitgum Public School during Watwero's investigation. The boys openly expressed that certain sexually violent activities were acceptable and even threatened to "harass" some of the night commuter girls later.

***Ronald Opira, Watwero director and co-investigator in Kitgum:*⁴³**

Some of these boys can be very menacing and cause lots of trouble for girls. Even tonight, I overheard several older boys saying to a group of girls and younger boys that it is okay to harass the girls. They were saying that it is okay to force girls to love them. This really worries me. They even were bold enough to say that they were going to force some of the girls to love them tonight. This is not a good example for the younger boys who look up to them.

Instead of approaching the older boys directly, I asked the younger ones who the older boys are. The younger ones said that they are boys who go to school here, and come around at night just to



Youth leaders such as Ronald Opira (left) have taken steps to work with school officials like Beatrice Okaka, the headmistress (center) at Kitgum Primary School to ensure that night commuters sleeping in school grounds are being monitored.

choose which girls they want to “love.” They do this every night. I plan on going to the school officials tomorrow morning to report on what I witnessed and see if we can take disciplinary actions against these older boys.

It is so unfortunate. Schools are supposed to be a safe place, even for the night commuters who come here to escape violence. School and district officials need to do more to watch what is going on at night in this school.⁴⁴

The District education officer for Kitgum lives at Kitgum Public School. Despite many night commuters sleeping just outside his front door and on his kitchen floor, he had not taken any significant actions to increase the coordination of night commuter protection. Oxfam was in the process of organizing a perimeter fence around the school grounds to provide some protection and orderliness.

Ronald Opira later reported that he met with the school administrators to report the incident. Since then, the boys have disappeared from the night commuter sleeping sites and have not been noticed by any of the girls. Ronald believes that this is “a sure sign that if protection measures are put in place, there will be some security or safety for girls.”⁴⁵ Clearly, young people need stronger adult supervision and greater interaction with older youth who can set positive examples and improve community monitoring and support for protection.

Solutions suggested by girls to end the sexual harassment and abuse they are suffering:

- End the insecurity so they do not need to commute at night in the first place.
- Leave home earlier – specifically, convince parents to allow girls to leave in daylight, forgoing or completing household chores earlier.
- Walk with others.
- Improve lighting along main transit routes to sleeping sites.
- Post police and UPDF who are clearly identifiable (e.g., with a badge if they are UPDF) along the routes and investigate areas where problems are reported, including schools.
- Parents should accompany the young people.
- Boys and girls should have separate and secure sleeping spaces.
- Adults and youth leaders should regularly monitor sleeping spaces and be available to resolve problems and disputes.

Girls said that the later they leave home, the higher their risk of harassment and abuse. Darkness falls quickly after 7:00 PM, and when it is not raining, most night commuters arrive at their sleeping sites by 8:00 or 8:30 PM.⁴⁶ Girls said they have major responsibilities for household work, which often delays their departures. Many girls also complained that their parents drink a lot of alcohol and do not make the journey into town with them each night. They said that some parents say they are going to accompany them at night but then choose not to go. Girls said they often wait for their parents and end up leaving late when they do not come along. Some girls said their parents at times say they will follow along later at night and then do not, leaving girls and boys to make decisions about where to sleep and to care for themselves without adult supervision. Many young people also said that if they do not arrive in town early enough, they will not get a “good sleeping spot” and will be exposed to rain and risk physical abuse.

Although the conditions and organization of sleeping arrangements for night commuters in Kitgum and Gulu are very different, girls and women are facing sexual violence in both areas. Furthermore, night commuters in Kalongo, Pader and Soroti have received less attention and support than in other districts.⁴⁷ Further investigations into the conditions of and abuses against night commuters and IDPs should be implemented in all affected areas. These investigations should be followed by community awareness programs and training of service providers and

security personnel. The status of night commuters should be regularly monitored to ensure abuses are not continuing and that assistance programs are implemented accordingly.

IV. Recruitment of Children into Local Defense Units

“Peace is what we need,” said Lanek James Avarphy, the civilian “camp commander” of Labuje IDP camp in Kitgum, echoing the sentiments of many civil society organizations in the region. In the absence of peace or an active peace process, however, he and other IDPs seek ways to protect themselves. In response, GOU officials at the local level, aided by the UPDF, have promoted the formation of local defense units (LDUs).⁴⁸

Labuje IDP camp was formed in August 2003 after several communities felt threatened when the wife of an LRA commander escaped from UPDF custody. Fearing the LRA commander’s attack on his wife’s community, more than 12,000 people fled from their villages and hastily constructed a camp near Kitgum town center. Without UPDF protection, or education, life skills or livelihood opportunities, young people are “going for recruitment,” the camp commander stated.⁴⁹ Labuje Camp’s commander reported that the UPDF is training and arming members of the IDP camp, including those who are under 18, in order to create a local militia to improve security. Training takes place both outside and inside the camp.

Local district councils, which are responsible for recruiting LDU members, have done little to monitor human rights and protection aspects of the recruitment efforts.⁵⁰ In a message to district local leaders by the UPDF Fifth Division second in command Lt. Col. Samuel Kiwanuka Aronda said, “There [is a] need to mobilize the youth to join the local militia.” He also said “The LDUs [will] protect the internally displaced peoples camps and roads, while the UPDF pursue the LRA rebels in the bush.”⁵¹

Ultimately, the UPDF should be providing enough protection that there would be no need for LDUs. In light of the fact that civilians are forming militias, LDUs must be held accountable by both the government forces that train and fund them as well as the community they are volunteering for. LDUs must adhere to international human rights standards, including with regard to the recruitment of children. According to Human Rights Watch, children as young as 12 have been actively recruited into the LDUs.⁵² Both local district councils and the UPDF must take responsibility for this violation of human rights standards.⁵³ According to Major Shaban Bantariza, spokesperson for the UPDF, LDUs are under government control: “Every bullet they have is accountable to us.”⁵⁴

Because some communities are choosing to have local militias, pushed to do so by the absence of any other options for protection, there is an even greater need for sufficient training, monitoring and accountability of LDUs. Without effective training and stronger accountability, abuses such as GBV, alcohol abuse, accidental killings⁵⁵ and child recruitment perpetuated by government military forces will continue. In addition, many IDPs expressed their fear that LDU members could take advantage of being armed to settle personal scores or engage in criminal activities, influence political elections or quell political opposition.

V. Youth Groups Promote their Own Protection with NGO and Government Support

Young people have the capacity to critically examine their surroundings and barriers. In a war where young people are the target of the violence, they must navigate the obstacles to their security and well-being every day. Young people have developed some strategies to overcome abduction, rape and a lack of education or livelihood opportunities. Some young people have created networks and partnerships to organize their efforts and assist their peers, work with local leaders, influence some change within their community and promote their own protection.

Youth groups are at their strongest when they link with other youth groups and are supported by a wide range of government, CBO and NGO partners and donors. Adult-led organizations, however, have not always provided youth groups enough effective assistance through organizational and capacity support, or by providing youth groups opportunities to bring their concerns to local, national and international leaders. Some NGOs that assist youth groups retain decision-making power for themselves and diminish the autonomy of youth groups, preventing them from learning and growing.

Organizations that provide assistance to youth groups must monitor and evaluate the impact of their assistance, not only for their own accountability purposes, but to ensure that they are having a positive impact on the young people. Equally important, youth groups must be involved in assessing how assistance has been either beneficial or detrimental to their protection goals. Programs which at first appear to be helping young people may, in fact, further frustrate and marginalize youth groups.

There are specific steps NGOs can take to provide stronger youth group support. The key is to begin by asking young people themselves. Youth groups partnering with the Women's Commission have offered feedback on ways in which all organizations, intergovernmental and nongovernmental, can adapt their approach to further ensure young people will have their voices heard and their activities implemented.⁵⁶

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

The war in northern Uganda is a war on children and adolescents. They suffer death, physical and psychological injury, including rape, and a lack of educational and livelihood opportunities. Yet, young people continue to survive and some continue to hope. They do so with the support of one another and also with the support of caring and compassionate adults. The humanitarian community, the United Nations, donors, Ugandan civil society and the GOU must work together to resolve the crisis while still providing ongoing and immediate humanitarian assistance and physical security. There must be further investigations into the needs of and abuses against young people, night commuters and the 1.6 million IDPs. Protection and assistance strategies must also be coupled with strong monitoring mechanisms to ensure that IDPs' needs are being addressed and their abuses ended.

The GOU bears the principal responsibility to protect and assist its citizens, but the international community must continue to pressure the GOU to fulfill this responsibility. UN agencies, donors and NGOs should monitor the conduct of government and civilian military forces. Donor governments need to apply additional pressure on the GOU to prioritize achieving a peaceful solution to the conflict in northern Uganda. The GOU and the international community must also reach out to the LRA to release civilians, particularly children and adolescents, as well as to end all abductions.

The United Nations must work with NGOs and Ugandan organizations, including youth groups, to address the many humanitarian needs and concerns of young people in northern Uganda. Violence against young people

needs to be brought to an end, and survivors of rape require appropriate counseling and care, including voluntary testing for HIV and other STIs. Children and adolescents should not be used as soldiers on either side of this conflict. Attention, assistance and protection for night commuters is essential.

The protection of young people is a participatory effort that must occur at local and international levels. Young people have to be given a safe space to not only offer their opinion on what security and participation means, they must also have the financial and capacity-building support of adults as they take steps to address insecurity. Young people are more than future leaders, they are today's leaders, and the future of northern Uganda may very well reside in building their capacity and security now.

Recommendations

General re. youth groups

- ❑ **Youth groups should be given a platform for expressing their concerns, determining agendas and maximizing their influence on decision-making.** Community leaders, humanitarian NGOs, UN agencies, and district health, education, government, and military officials should ask youth directly for their opinions, concerns and solutions.
- ❑ **Community leaders, humanitarian NGOs and government agencies need to provide youth groups greater levels of independence, while still providing support as needed.**
- ❑ **NGOs and donors should consider the organizational and financial limitations of youth groups and assess the requirements they impose on youth groups** (and funding to youth groups) to ensure that they do not restrict youth membership on committees and forums or dampen youth creativity and energy.
- ❑ **Community civic and religious leaders, humanitarian NGOs, UN agencies and district health, education, government and military officials should collaborate with youth groups**, which have energy and experience, and connections to other youth groups in outlying villages and IDP camps, to address night commuter concerns and protection.

Government of Uganda

- ❑ **The UPDF must increase protection against LRA attacks in all regions of northern and eastern Uganda, near villages, in IDP camps and on routes to and from camps.**
- ❑ **The UPDF should strengthen IDP camp and village security through increased patrols and community cooperation to prevent the need for young people to commute each night.**
- ❑ **The GOU must adequately train government military forces in human and child rights and increase soldiers' awareness and sensitivity to child protection issues.** The GOU must also monitor the effectiveness of government military forces' training, and include civilians and youth leaders to help ensure that government soldiers are not violating human rights and stop violations that do occur.
- ❑ **The GOU must monitor and stop all child recruitment into government military forces.** Government officials and government military forces must investigate and address lapses in the recruitment process that allow adolescents to join LDUs voluntarily.
- ❑ **The GOU should not distribute weapons to children, and should be careful to not aggravate ethnic or tribal conflicts through weapons distribution.** If the GOU distributes weapons to civilians, it must closely scrutinize the recipients, so that weapons will not be used to engage in abusive, criminal or destabilizing activities.
- ❑ **The GOU needs to strengthen laws against gender-based violence and prosecute perpetrators.** These steps should be coupled with community campaigns to address the lack of support for girls victimized by GBV.

- ❑ **District officials should establish GBV programs for night commuters** that include establishing and training health and other personnel to identify GBV victims for confidential counseling.
- ❑ **District officials must be cautious about replacing the role of parents by substituting the government or NGOs as caretakers and disciplinarians.** District social workers should work with parents who need additional assistance and explore how the community can integrate support to families at home.

Humanitarian Agencies

- ❑ **Humanitarian and government agencies should strengthen capacity-building and financial support to youth groups.** Workshops, trainings and capacity-building should be followed up with funding for project startup and project mobilization.
- ❑ **Humanitarian and government agencies should support, collaborate with and advocate for the smaller youth groups,** particularly youth groups in difficult-to-reach regions and outlying communities, in addition to larger and more established youth groups which already receive support.
- ❑ Besides offering night commuters assistance and protection on the road and at sleeping sites, **social workers, NGOs, in collaboration with youth, should conduct awareness campaigns to promote community involvement in the prevention of abuses against night commuters.**
- ❑ **UNICEF should take a stronger leadership role in child protection through improved coordination, material support and partnership with humanitarian NGOs and youth groups.** UNICEF should build upon the strong efforts taken by a range of NGOs and community organizations in northern Uganda, and should further its collaboration with OCHA.
- ❑ **UNICEF should support life skills training that include reproductive health, including HIV, and GBV information, and a peer education component.** This should include an increase in accessible reproductive health materials, including UNICEF reproductive health kits, and services.
- ❑ **OCHA should continue its strong advocacy for increased international monitoring of UPDF actions to protect civilians and examination of the impact of donor military assistance on the humanitarian situation in northern Uganda.** UN personnel and international and local NGO staff should engage in coordinated monitoring and reporting of these and other protection concerns.
- ❑ **Intergovernmental and nongovernmental human rights organizations should monitor and report on abuses by government military forces, the LRA and civilians and pressure the GOU to address any documented abuses.** For example, The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers and UNICEF should investigate and monitor the degree to which children are being actively recruited or are volunteering to join government military forces.

Community Leaders

- ❑ **Community leaders should support youth groups as they create peer protection networks, implement community sensitization work on gender issues, and take specific steps to involve parents and young people to increase protection of night commuters.** Volunteer staff at night commuter sleeping centers should also work collaboratively with youth groups.
- ❑ **Youth groups should continue to explore creative ways to provide leadership for night commuter protection and peer outreach.** For example, youth leaders could train their peers to work in groups along night commuter routes; help young night commuters plan walking schedules and accompany groups of children and adolescents as they commute to town centers; reach out to parents to raise awareness about night commuter concerns; and work with community leaders and educators on how they can improve night commuter safety.
- ❑ **Kitgum night commuter volunteers and local health officials should take advantage of the situation to educate large numbers of nightly “audiences” about reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and other STIs, sanitation and other important health-related issues.**

- ❑ **School administrators, NGOs and youth groups should provide young night commuters who sleep in or near Kitgum schools with additional tutoring, access to educational resources such as text books and paper, and lighting so that they can do their homework.**
- ❑ **Community business leaders and NGOs should work with young people to increase livelihood opportunities,** which would give young people a more constructive way to use their energy and increase their self-esteem and connection to the community.
- ❑ **Community leaders should work with parents on solutions that minimize the shame of rape survivors;** connect parents and youth and adolescents to services that provide emergency contraception, post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV/AIDS, and counseling and support. Night commuter centers should also ask NGOs to help provide these services to night commuters.
- ❑ **Community leaders, including district officials, teachers, religious and cultural leaders, parent groups and youth should examine ways to reestablish parental and community responsibility for healthy youth interactions,** for example, by supporting youth who want to establish safe spaces for young people to interact and socialize.
- ❑ **Community programs should receive additional government support so they do not become an additional burden on an already-taxed system.**

VI. APPENDICES

Acronyms

AJWS	American Jewish World Service
AVSI	Associazione Volontari per il Servizio Internazionale
CBO	Community-based organization
GBV	Gender-based violence
GOU	Government of Uganda
GYFA	Gulu Youth for Action
IDP	Internally displaced person
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LDU	Local defense unit
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
OCHA	(UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
UPDF	Ugandan People's Defense Forces

Sample questions asked of night commuters by youth and Women's Commission researchers

- What time do you leave your home, and what time do you reach your sleeping space?
- Do you always accomplish your daily work at home before you leave?
- Where do you leave from, and how far do you walk to the sleeping area? How long does it usually take?
- Are you accompanied as you go and in the location where you stay?
- How and why do you choose the location you sleep in – the general area and the specific spot?
- Do boys and girls sleep in the same spaces?
- What are you afraid of, if anything, as you are displaced from your home nightly? Do you feel safe? Why or why not?
- Do you experience any problems along your transit routes or in your sleeping spaces? Are there specific times or areas that are less secure?
- What do boys, men, soldiers or others say or do to you?
- If you are bothered along the way, how do you respond? Can you get help?
- Why are some boys and men bothering and even raping girls and women “night commuters”? What are some solutions to keep them from doing this?
- Where do you feel more insecure, in transit or in your sleeping spaces?
- What are the conditions like in your sleeping spaces?
- What type of security is present in the sleeping areas?
- Are boys and girls supervised? Are they socializing on their own, and are some having sex? If so, are they using condoms?
- Are you provided shelter, food, sanitary supplies, water, latrines or other material support?
- What do you do when it rains?
- When do you return home, and do you go directly home?
- What are your general needs? What other problems do you experience?
- What solutions do you have for increasing your protection and improving your living conditions as “night commuters”?

Kitgum Investigative Team:

Twelve young people ranging in age from 15 to 30 and from several youth groups visited four night commuter sites over five nights. Before beginning their investigation, the youth developed a list of questions and a strategy to interview night commuters and collect testimonies of gender-based violence en route to or within the sleeping areas. The young people met with available officials overseeing several of the more organized sleeping sites and commenced their interviews in teams of two or sometimes individually. Both boys and girls were involved in the investigations and spent up to four hours each night at each site. The sites visited in Kitgum included St. Joseph's Hospital, Kitgum Government Hospital, Kitgum Public School and verandahs and the bus park in Kitgum.

Gulu Investigations:

In Gulu, Women's Commission staff and three members of Gulu Youth for Action conducted similar interviews with young night commuters at the Noah's Ark Night Commuter Center.

Youth Groups

Bajere Youth Association (BAYA)

BAYA's mission is to improve environmental and agricultural opportunities and livelihood for youth. Members also engage in activities to improve access to HIV/AIDS information.

Bajere Youth Association

c/o Kitgum Diocese

P.O.Box 189

Kitgum, Uganda

Phone +567 83 06393

Bare Care Uganda

Bare Care supports orphans and formerly abducted children through educational assistance in the form of school fees. They also promote modern agricultural and agro-forestry practices amongst rural poor women and children. Throughout all their activities, Bare Care implements HIV/AIDS reduction, education and awareness building programming. Bare Care also buys clothes for the needy.

Bare Care Uganda

P.O. Box 68

Kitgum, Uganda

Tel: +256 77 351296

Child Salvage Initiative (CSI)

CSI promotes HIV/AIDS education and awareness through drama and economic activities. CSI offers trainings to adolescents, youth and orphans to improve the standard of living and support child education. CSI employs child development and cultural awareness activities to increase awareness of the impact of HIV on the Acholi people.

Gulu Youth for Action (GYFA)

GYFA's goal is to work with local leaders to ensure and increase the participation of young people. GYFA also aims to create a non-competitive partnership with other community-based youth-led organizations while building their collective capacity to identify and address youth issues in northern Uganda. GYFA has a specific interest in addressing HIV/AIDS, gender-based violence, gender sensitivity in programming and humanitarian assistance, reproductive health and livelihood opportunities.

The Executives GYFA

c/o Save The Children Denmark-Gulu

P.O. BOX 593

Gulu, Uganda

Luo Development Incorporated (LDI)

LDI strives to enhance gender participation in peace building and development while also increasing the capacity of its members and other young people in the Gulu district. NGO supports cultural leaders in cleansing and healing ceremonies as part of reintegration initiatives and maintains a network of peace clubs throughout the region. LDI has been funded by the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy and works in cooperation with Rural Development Incorporated in Gulu.

Pader Concerned Youth Association (PCYA)

PCYA advocates for the care and protection of young people by talking with displaced children and adolescents on issues that concern them and is involved in activities that raise the standard of available livelihood and micro-enterprise resources. It also promotes social and religious values in relation to AIDS awareness, family planning

and sex education. PCYA has few staff but has a growing membership from different professional backgrounds who help PCYA promote human rights advocacy at the local and national levels.

*Pader Concerned Youth Association
C/o Watwero Rights Focus Initiative
P.O Box 91
Kitgum, Uganda*

Pader Youth Rehabilitation

The Pader Youth Rehabilitation project aims to improve the living conditions of youth by creating job opportunities and enhancing HIV/AIDS reduction and awareness. One of their income generation activities involves carpentry training and services.

Pongwongo Youth Initiative Development Association (PYIDA)

PYIDA strives to improve the living conditions of orphans by providing for their basic educational needs and providing them with HIV/AIDS information utilizing drama and songs.

Watwero Rights Focus Initiative (Watwero)

Watwero was started in 1998 in Kitgum, northern Uganda by educated, unemployed youth, whose first several dozen members set out to keep busy and attempt to generate some income for themselves. Watwero aims to identify adolescents' concerns, interests and ideas for improving their lives. Watwero has several branches and seeks to empower young people economically and socially. They undertake a variety of income-generation projects, and offer workshops and grassroots programming in HIV/AIDS sensitization, peace education, gender awareness, the elimination of gender-based violence and support to GBV survivors, and most recently a specific initiative to work with night commuters. Watwero has also become a key voice of young people in Kitgum by being members or leaders of international protection meetings and investigations. Watwero's greatest strength is its ability to draw upon the energies of many partnering youth organizations in the region.

*Watwero Rights Focus Initiative
Uhuru Drive Plot 147A, Kitgum Town
P.O. Box 91
Kitgum, Uganda*

Youth Amalgamated Development Association (YADA)

YADA's mission is to build greater community awareness of the danger of acquiring HIV/AIDS, while also fostering greater sensitivity to people living with AIDS. YADA also works with young people to combat poverty through skills training including income generation activities, such as tree planting and environmental protection activities.

Youth Out Poverty and AIDS (YOPA)

YOPA's mission is to increase HIV/AIDS education, reduce poverty and preserve the environment. All its activities include a strong focus on human rights and peace building. YOPA provides psychosocial support and counseling to youth affected by the conflict in northern Uganda and by HIV/AIDS. YOPA conducts HIV/AIDS sensitization projects, agricultural trainings and workshops, including tree-planting activities.

*Ocira Lazarus
Youth Out Poverty and AIDS
P.O. Box 89
Kitgum, Uganda
Tel: +256 77 424691*

International Human Rights Instruments

* - ratified/acceded to by Uganda. ** - signed by Uganda.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the primary UN document establishing human rights standards and norms while defining the political, social, economic, civic and cultural rights of human beings.

International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights

http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ccpr.htm

The Covenant on Political and Civil Rights details the basic civil and political rights of nations and individuals and became international law in 1976. Among the rights of nations is the right to self-determination and to own, trade and dispose of their property freely. Some of the many rights of individuals include the right to life, legal recourse, and liberty and freedom of movement.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ceschr.htm

In addition to forbidding the exploitation of children and requiring that all nations cooperate to end world hunger, this covenant describes the basic economic, social and cultural rights such as the right to self-determination, free primary education and wages sufficient to support a minimum standard of living.

Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/h_cat39.htm

Establishes the UN Committee Against Torture and bans torture under all circumstances. In addition to defining torture, requiring states to take effective legal measures to prevent torture, it declares that it does not justify the use of torture even in cases of state emergencies, external threats or as a result of orders from superior authorities or officials. This convention also forbids states to return a refugee to her/his country if there is reason to believe that s/he will be tortured.

Convention on the Rights of the Child *

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

Bans discrimination against children and provides for special protection and rights particular to minors (under the age of 18).

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict *

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/6/protocolchild.htm>

Declares the use of child soldiers during war unacceptable and establishes the minimum age (18) for individuals to be involved in direct hostilities, compulsory recruitment and for any recruitment by nongovernmental armed forces.

ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/ratification/convention/text.htm>

Convention 182 signatories must take action to prohibit and eliminate slavery, debt bondage, prostitution, pornography, child soldiering and other forms of abusive child labor.

Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/92.htm>

The fourth Geneva Convention outlines 159 articles specifying and promoting the protection of the rights of civilians in areas of armed conflict and occupied territories.

1977 Additional Protocols to the four Geneva Conventions *

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/93.htm>

Supplementary to the four original Geneva Conventions, the two protocols were adopted in 1977 in an effort to offer more protection to victims of both international and internal armed conflicts.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

Commonly referred to as the “international bill of rights for women,” CEDAW defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.

African Charter on Human and People’s Rights

<http://www.africaninstitute.org/html/africancharter.html>

The Africa Charter is Africa’s own human rights convention that outlines the human rights norms and principles founded on the historical traditions and values of African civilizations. It includes four main categories of rights and duties: individual rights, the rights of people, duties of States and duties of individuals.

African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child **

<http://www.africa-union.org>

The African Children’s Charter codifies the responsibilities of the state, community and individual in the protection of the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of the child. Its signatories are bound to ensure that no one under the age of 18 is recruited into the armed forces or participates in hostilities. States parties are also required to submit reports to an 11-member African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child who will monitor compliance with the African Children’s Charter.

Guiding Principles on Internally Displaced People

<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu2/7/b/principles.htm>

In addition to defining “IDPs,” the Guiding Principles address the specific needs of internally displaced persons worldwide. They identify rights relevant to the protection of persons from forced displacement and to their protection and assistance during displacement as well as during return or resettlement and reintegration.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court *

<http://www.un.org/law/icc/>

The Rome Statute provides for the establishment of a permanent International Criminal Court to investigate and prosecute people accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Endnotes

¹ Both Watwero Rights Focus Initiative and Gulu Youth for Action were formed as a result of adolescent-designed and -led research and advocacy undertaken with the Women's Commission beginning in 2000, in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee Uganda, World Vision Uganda and other partners. Young people from Pader District were also involved in the workshop in Kitgum, including members of the Pader Concerned Youth Association, a group also formed by former adolescent study researchers and youth coordinators, and the Youth Amalgamated Development Association (YADA). A representative from Luo Development Incorporated (LDI) also participated in the Gulu workshop. A report of the participatory action research undertaken previously by many of these and other young people with the Women's Commission, *Against All Odds, Surviving the War on Adolescents in Northern Uganda*, (Women's Commission, 2001), is available from the Women's Commission's website, www.womenscommission.org. The Children and Adolescents Project section of the website also describes some of the follow-up advocacy undertaken with the young people in northern Uganda and outlines several policy and program improvements achieved in the region. Additional talking points about the current humanitarian crisis for IDP young people in northern Uganda are also available.

² Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "When the Sun Sets we Start to Worry," November 2003, p.3.

³ Night commuter statistics were still being collected by a variety of NGOs and UN agencies during the Women's Commission December 2003 trip to northern Uganda. The Women's Commission estimated the number of night commuters at 50,000 after collecting specific data from surveys conducted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and from other NGOs reportings on IDPs numbers in Kalongo, Pader and Lira. IRC and IOM numbers for Kitgum and Gulu alone total 39,774; much higher than most published estimates which stated only 15,000-20,000. Some NGOs have done periodic counts of night commuters at main sites in other districts. Once estimates for Lira, Pader, Soroti and other districts are added to Kitgum and Gulu, the total number of night commuters can be estimated to be at least 50,000. These numbers are also cyclical depending on the changing level of insecurity in each district. Whereas no one knows the exact number of night commuters, their numbers generally rise and fall periodically in relation to LRA and UPDF activity in the region. International and GOU agencies need to implement further and more in-depth investigations into the actual numbers, as well as to the needs of night commuters.

⁴ The principal international standard for determining who "children" are remains the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states in Article 1 that a "child" is "every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." Thus, note that national standards may differ. Additional chronological definitions provided by United Nations organizations that acknowledge differences in and overlap between and within childhood and adulthood are also instructive: Children: under 18; Adolescents: 10 to 19; Youth: 15 to 24; Young people: 10 to 24.

⁵ Heike Behrend, *Alice Lakwena and the Holy Spirits War in Northern Uganda*, James Currey Publishers, Oxford, 1985-97.

⁶ Global IDP Database, *Concerted military offensive by the National Army to fight rebels* (March 2002-2003), <http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/IdpProjectDb/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/9CD67FA54ED9EE13C1256D430049B894>

⁷ Fewer than 100 children were abducted by the LRA in 2001. Between June 2002 and May 2003, an estimated 8,400 children were abducted. Children account for approximately three of every four abductions. 3,927 children between ages five and seventeen were registered as abducted in Pader District alone in the year 2002.

<http://www.db.idpproject.org/Sites/idpSurvey.nsf/wViewCountries/092BBA41FB6AA9FCC1256DDE0031EF4E>

Additional numbers provided by Mads Oyen (October 7, 2003 email) and UNICEF/Uganda report: *Abductions in Northern and Southwestern Uganda: 1986-2001*, November 2001.

⁸ IRIN, OCHA, Nairobi, *Uganda: Northern IDPs Trapped by Fear of Rebels*, July 24, 2001. This IRIN report cites the World Food Program's estimate that there were 480,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in "protected villages" or displaced persons camps in northern Uganda in 2001. In addition, Norber Mao, an MP from Gulu and a member of the Acholi Parliamentary Group, stated in August 2001 that 480,000 Acholis in Gulu and Kitgum were internally displaced (*Uganda: Acholi Leaders Urge Government to Dismantle IDP Camps*, IRIN, East Africa News Brief, OCHA, August 23, 2001). The United Nations' *Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Uganda 2001* (OCHA, United Nations, November 2000, p. 17) reports that over 75 percent of the population are internally displaced (370,000 people in Gulu and 82,645 people in Kitgum).

⁹ IDP Project: *Sources*: GoU, 11 November 2003, OCHA September, March, April 2003, OCHA April/May, June, July/August 2002, January/February 2002, February 2001, UN Humanitarian Coordination Unit (UNHCU) 24 January 2002, 14 July 2000, 20 December 2000, OCHA 23 October 1998.

¹⁰ For example, the LRA has attacked, killed, wounded and abducted civilians as far southeast as Soroti, Kumi, Kaberamaido and Katakwi Districts, and there has been unprecedented violence by the LRA further south in Lira District, where hundreds of thousands of people are newly displaced. The Acholi Districts of Kitgum, Gulu and Pader continue to be subjected to violent attacks.

¹¹ According to the IDP Database, 70 percent of all Ugandans are under 25 years in age. UNAIDS estimates that 50 percent of the population in Uganda is under 15 years. <http://www.unaids.org/en/geographical+area/by+country/uganda.asp>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Analysis of data gathered from night commuters in Kitgum by IRC Kitgum...suggests more than three-quarters of night commuters travel a distance less than 2 kilometers to night commuter sites in Kitgum." Email from Leila Al Faiz, IRC Uganda, June 19, 2004.

¹⁴ "[In Kitgum]...87% come from nearby villages and town suburbs in Kitgum rather than IDP camps." Email from Leila Al Faiz, IRC Uganda, June 19, 2004.

¹⁵ The Women's Commission, with Watwero Rights Focus Initiative, Gulu Youth for Action and additional youth organizations, visited the following night commuter sites: in Kitgum: St. Joseph's Mission Hospital (12/6/03), Kitgum Government Hospital (12/7/03), Kitgum Public School (12/8/03), bus park and verandahs (12/9/03); in Gulu: Noah's Ark (12/13/03).

¹⁶ IOM, *Gulu District Night Commuters Survey*, November 2003. The IOM conducted its survey at the request of Uganda's Office of the Prime Minister, Department for Disaster Preparedness, and with support from the Swedish International Development Agency and in cooperation with Gulu District Council and Gulu Community Services Department.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Background on Gulu's coordinated approach to night commuters was reported by Deacon Omunkoikoi, acting manager of Noah's Ark, interview with Women's Commission staff and Gulu Youth for Action, December 13, 2003. Mr. Omunkoikoi outlined the services Noah's Ark provides.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Women's Commission telephone interview with Mr. Muktar Ali Farah, OCHA Kitgum Representative, March 12, 2004. Mr. Farah reported that the number of night commuters continues to fluctuate with the level of insecurity, but as of mid-March had decreased to approximately 7,000 nightly. He attributes this to the relative security around Kitgum coinciding with the movement of the insecurity to the Lira and Pader districts where attacks have escalated. Mr. Farah reported that NGOs have increased their support by building additional shelters; however, sleeping spaces are still mixed. There is still no direct UPDF protection for night commuters in Kitgum, but a reporting system for night commuter abuses has been established. Mr. Farah also reported that increased attacks in Lira and Pader have caused the numbers of night commuters in those districts to increase as well, although no exact numbers have been gathered.

²¹ Women's Commission and Watwero Rights Focus Initiative interviews with Dr. Laurence Ojom, St. Joseph's Mission Hospital, Medical Superintendent, December 6, 2003; and Patrick Ongolla, Kitgum Government Hospital, December 7, 2003. At peak moments of insecurity, Mr. Ongolla reported, more than 10,000 people have arrived each night at Kitgum Government Hospital.

²² Women's Commission and Watwero Rights Focus Initiative interview with Beatrice Okaka, headmistress, Kitgum Public School, December 8, 2003.

²³ Email from Leila Al Faiz, IRC Uganda, June 19, 2004.

²⁴ Women's Commission and Watwero Rights Focus Initiative interviews with Patrick Ongolla, Kitgum Government Hospital, December 7, 2003.

²⁵ These reported abductions have not yet been confirmed and no exact numbers were available at the time of the Women's Commission December 2003 mission.

²⁶ Email from Leila Al Faiz, IRC Uganda, June 19, 2004.

²⁷ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Against All Odds: Surviving the War on Adolescents. Promoting the Protection and Capacity of Ugandan and Sudanese Adolescents in Northern Uganda*, May 2001.

²⁸ Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies*, February 2004, pp.10-11.

²⁹ United States Congressional Human Rights Caucus, *Child Abduction And The Conflict In Northern Uganda*, January 29, 2004. Rwt David Onen Acana II, His Highness Paramount Chief of Acholi, Uganda; Geoffrey Oyat, Save the Children; Samuel B. Tindifa, Human Rights and Peace Centre, Uganda; Richard O'Brien, Center for the Prevention of Genocide. Will Ross, "Uganda army in 'rights abuses'" *BBC News*, July 16, 2003.

Joyce Namutebi, "Army Implicated in IDP Rape Cases" *New Vision* February 3, 2004.

³⁰ Women's Commission interviews with IDPs and international NGO and UN staff, Kitgum and Gulu Districts, northern Uganda, December 2003. Such accounts were also reported by young people and the Women's Commission in its 2001 participatory research and advocacy work with young people in northern Uganda, revealing little improvement over the three years since.

³¹ The Women's Commission and Watwero Rights Focus Initiative, Gulu Youth for Action and additional youth organizations interviewed night commuters as well as officials working at the sleeping sites. Names and villages have been changed in some testimonies to protect their identity and confidentiality. The Women's Commission did not have time to verify testimonies and further investigation is needed into the issue of GBV in Kitgum. The Women's Commission asked youth groups to follow up with those interviewed as needed, including designating a community-based organization to assist and support young people who reported being raped. There are no established GBV assistance programs in Kitgum. The timing of incidents reported to the researchers and the Women's Commission ranged from up to a year ago to within several weeks of the Women's Commission mission.

³² Interview, December 8, 2003

³³ The Uganda National Women's Council deputy chairperson, Pauline Kirasha, has asked parliamentarians to enact stronger laws against rape. She believes current laws are too weak: "Our children are suffering from defilement and rape due to weak laws. We want Parliament to put in place strong laws that will help to catch them."

-- Darius Magara, "Enact Strong Laws – Kirasha" *New Vision*, March 18, 2004.

³⁴ Under Ugandan law, "defilement" includes any sexual contact outside of marriage involving girls younger than 18 years of age, regardless of consent or the age of the perpetrator. While defilement carries a maximum sentence of death, that punishment has never been given to a convicted rapist. Violence against women, including rape, remains common. Polygamy is legal under both customary and Islamic law, and a wife has no legal status to prevent her husband from marrying another woman. Men may also "inherit" the widows of their deceased brothers. From: *AFROL Gender Profiles: Uganda*, AFROL, undated, www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/profiles/uganda_women.htm.

³⁵ See footnote 27.

³⁶ Interview, December 8, 2003

³⁷ See footnote 27.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Interview, December 8, 2003

⁴⁰ See footnote 27.

⁴¹ See footnote 27.

⁴² Interview, December 8, 2003

⁴³ See footnote 27.

⁴⁴ Interview, December 8, 2003

⁴⁵ Ronald Opira, "Follow-up on boys at the night commuter sleeping site," email to Matthew Emry, February 26, 2004.

⁴⁶ Many interviewees said that when it rains, night commuters try to leave home and arrive in sleeping spaces early, in hopes of obtaining a space under some form of shelter.

⁴⁷ Women's Commission telephone interview with Mr. Muktar Ali Farah, OCHA Kitgum Representative, March 12, 2004.

⁴⁸ Some LDUs have gained national notoriety after well-publicized victories of the LRA in periodic encounters. The Arrow Boys are amongst the better-known militias.

⁴⁹ Women's Commission interview, Lanek James Avarphy, Labuje IDP camp commander, Labongo Layamo Sub-county, Labuje IDP Camp, Kitgum, northern Uganda, December 6, 2003.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Justin Moro, "Army to Boost LDUs," *New Vision*, March 10, 2004.

⁵² Human Rights Watch, *Stolen Children: Abduction and Recruitment in Northern Uganda*, March 2003: Young people are also pressured to fight for the Ugandan army. Boys who manage to escape from LRA captivity, particularly those with combat experience, are pressured to join the UPDF while in UPDF custody for debriefing. <http://www.hrw.org/press/2003/03/uganda032803.htm>

⁵³ There are four kinds of international law in relation to child soldiers: international human rights standards, international humanitarian standards, international criminal standards and international labor standards. The relevant standards are outlined in the 1977 Additional Protocols to the four Geneva Conventions and the Convention on the Right of the Child (1989); the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; The Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court (1998); ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention 182 (1999); and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000). Uganda is a signatory of the CRC and the Optional Protocols, and is a member of the OAU.

⁵⁴ UN OCHA IRIN, *Uganda: Feature - Eastern Teso region stands up to the LRA*, September 30, 2003.

⁵⁵ LDUs, which are said to be well trained, are well known to have shot, wounded and killed civilians in the darkness of night, suspecting them of being LRA. In the later weeks of December 2003, OCHA Kitgum reported that a supply of 30-40 AK-47 rifles was delivered to the militia in Labuje IDP camp. Not long after the weapons were supplied, the militia commander was shot by his own colleagues when one night, drunk, he failed to respond to requests to identify himself.

⁵⁶ Youth leader opinions and background information was provided to the Women's Commission during the Women's Commission mission in December 2003 and follow-up telephone interviews on February 9, 2004.