

## Negotiation by intrigue will not bring us peace

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12.03.06

On Nov. 27, 2006, the Gulu LC5, Norbert Mao, published an article in the New Vision, in which he reported the following, there was a verbal scuffle between his quartet delegation including Col. Ochora, Oulanyah and Owiny Dollo and some members of the LRA Juba delegation, namely Ms. Josephine Apire and Ayena Odongo. The LRA delegation reportedly accused Mao of attacking the LRA delegation on local radio programs. Mao reportedly denied the accusation while Ochora simply kept mum as the best defense. Mao went on to add that the Uganda press has reported several incidents of heated exchanges between some of them and the LRA delegation. While not denying the report, he pleaded that the incidences need to be contextualized.

First of all, some of us had read in newspapers an account of what happened. However, given the habits of spinning the public relations yarn by most Ugandan journalists, such accounts left us wondering about their validity. Therefore, it is reassuring that Mao's article did confirm first hand what happened.

While I agree with Mao that the events he reported need to be looked at in context, his attempt to do so fell short of allaying the concerns of the people. While Mao should be commended for his honesty, his report portrays a tragic situation as far as the peace process is concerned because it seems to confirm the accusation leveled against him, which is more serious than merely attacking the LRA Juba delegation on the radio. It is what is seen as his ***betrayal*** of the public trust in the Juba peace process. He is being seen as undermining the Juba talks by dealing directly with both Kony and Museveni, bypassing the Juba negotiation.

In his article, Mao claimed that in his confrontation with the LRA Juba delegation, his greatest offense is to have a superior knowledge of what is going on in the war affected areas, to know that the interests of the people of northern Uganda are paramount as the northern question goes beyond the LRA, and to have a clear idea about what the rebel combatants want. In my opinion, Mao is wrong in trying to play victim here by believing that he is being wrongly accused for merely having a clear understanding of the situation. It is equally important what he does with his superior knowledge and understanding of the situation.

First of all to recognize that the interests of the people of northern Uganda are paramount as the northern question goes beyond the LRA requires an understanding of the various interests in northern Uganda and how they are articulated and by whom and to what end. Although we may all be united by the desire for peace, we are quite divided by how that peace should come about. Some northern people are with the government; some are in the opposition,

while others are in between. Some of them support the International Criminal Court (ICC) while others are opposed to it. Worse still, some are pure political opportunists or schemers trying to cash big from the peace talks Unless, we recognize all these various interests and how they interact with each other, it would be very difficult to find a formula that can work to bring them together, if at all possible. At best, Mao's claim is in fact a reflection of the Museveni syndrome that he and he alone knows what is best for everyone.

While in his piece, Mao tried to show a way out of the current impasse by suggesting the need to be conciliatory, he is in fact not creating a reconciliatory condition between him and the LRA Juba delegation. On the one hand, he pointed out how it was a show of intolerance by some of the LRA Juba delegation to criticize his delegation to see Kony, he himself was busy criticizing the Juba delegation publicly. If he assumed a position of superior knowledge on what is going on in the war-affected areas and a very clear idea of what the rebel combatants want, then what he did in this piece was everything but conciliatory. It appeared to be more of a put down instead of a constructive criticism of the group.

Consistent with what appeared to be a put down criticism, Mao went on to accuse the LRA Juba delegation of arrogance and petty radicalism, which he concluded will not guarantee a better future for the combatants. He also went on to accuse the LRA delegation for not being civil with the mediator and for accusing the mediator of bias.

More than anything else, the above view is quite revealing why the LRA Juba delegation might have been upset with the Mao delegation. First of all, for Mao to claim that he knows the interests of the LRA combatants better than the LRA delegation in Juba is to presuppose that the LRA High Command which selected members of the delegation does not know the interests of its combatants. Alternatively, the LRA leadership does not know its own interests. In either case, Mao's criticism is directed at the top LRA leadership and not members of the Juba delegation.

Secondly, Mao's overriding concerns for the future of the LRA combatants contradicts his view that "***the interests of the people of northern Uganda are paramount as the northern question goes beyond the LRA***" quoted previously. If he believes in that statement, which is correct, then, he cannot make the deliverance of a settlement that will guarantee a better future for the combatants the central objective of the negotiation while consigning issues that relate to a better future of the multitude of people still languishing in the Internally Displaced People's (IDP's) camps to petty radicalism. Obviously, the interests of the combatants must be taken into account, but those of the vast majority caught in between the LRA and the government must be at the top of the list. Besides, a better future of the combatants lies in the attainment of a durable peace in the war affected areas. After all, both the LRA and the government claim that they have been fighting to protect the Acholi people. It

should follow therefore, that neither the LRA, the government nor the quartet delegation of Mao, Oulanyah, Owiny Dollo and Ochora can make any other interest supersede the interests of those forced by the war to flee their homes to live in the IDPs camps or elsewhere.

While I am not privy to the matter of punctuality or cancellation of meetings, it is conceivable that there were good reasons for some of the incivility of the LRA delegation Mao mentioned. For example, Kony was reported to have kept his visitors waiting for hours, most likely because of security concerns or transportation problems. Would that also constitute incivility? Accusing Machar of bias by the LRA delegation is not necessarily arrogance and petty radicalism. Instead, it is perfectly within the delegation's right to express their concerns to the mediator if they see evidence of bias. It is up to the mediator to review his actions to determine whether the accusation is valid or not. The accusation of the mediator of bias has been made by both sides.

Mao's language is not different from Museveni's and his spokespersons' all too often demeaning and bellicose expressions such as "soft-landing", defeated, pressured into negotiation, fled etc. If looked at from this perspective, one sees nothing but negotiation by "intrigue" and underhanded dealings. One most likely interpretation of what is going on is that Mao is helping Museveni to undermine the LRA delegation in Juba and thereby weaken what Museveni sees as the strong point of the LRA in the negotiation process. Mao's quartet delegation should know Museveni's track record on using different people to deliver the people of the North to him. This is being pointed out to remind them so that when it happens with them, they will not say that they did not know or that they were not informed by those who knew.

Mao's criticism of the LRA Juba delegation for accusing the mediator of alleged bias seems to be directed also at Vincent Otti who has on more than several occasions accused the mediator of bias. Otti first made such an accusation when he called on South Africa to take over the role of mediation or even switch the venue to a totally different country. Failing to directly accuse Otti implies that the Juba delegate is being made into a scapegoat and Mao is pandering to Kony. Worse still, he may be playing a game of divide and rule. By criticizing the Juba delegate, he is also indirectly driving a wedge between Kony and Otti. If so, it is not helpful to the peace process. If anything, it may help split the LRA into those who want to surrender and those who are not ready to sign an agreement which may be arrived at by intrigues. Just like similar agreements were signed in the late 80's, it will not bring sustainable peace. So, if anybody is entertaining the notion that peace can be attained by undermining the Juba peace talks by dividing the LRA into factions, then he or she is not at all doing us a favor.

Mao then went into an extensive display of his new-found knowledge of psychology, which he had picked up from his mentor, Hon. Apiliga, an MP from West Nile. He claimed that he now has a better perspective and is a better peace builder. Like Museveni, Moa went on to embellish how the egos and minds of the rebels should be manipulated as a way to achieve peace. He also went on

to accuse the Museveni party (National Resistance Movement) of suffering from infantilism.

While Mao is correct in holding the NRM responsible for the lack of peace and the peace process by failing to creatively use the ego of the belligerents, he recommended an approach which is actually arrogant and therefore not conducive to promoting confidence in the process. For example, he recommended that the government should let the LRA feel that they are peace-makers. This is wrong because it is true that the LRA remains peace makers so long as they are seriously negotiating peace. After all, peace is made between enemies and not friends. It is also true that the Acholi people and people from the affected neighboring communities have been asking both the government and the LRA to negotiate a peaceful end of the war. It sounds arrogant to say that the government should "let the LRA feel". It is not a favor the government should do, but rather it is a national responsibility of the government to make peace with the LRA.

Mao then went on to give an eloquent outline of cognitive therapy presumably to the LRA and its supporters. Although this seems very reasonable, I cannot claim to be competent to evaluate the validity of Apiliga's analysis since I am not a psychologist. However, if Mao's claim that both Museveni and Kony currently manifest a sense of recovery is intended to convince the readers, it failed miserably with me. For example, what is the evidence that Museveni has changed when he personally and consistently accuses the LRA of being killers, terrorists, backward etc? Museveni has also not taken any steps to reign in his spin masters, nor has he issued any directives to his soldiers to use conciliatory language. Furthermore, he has not appealed to the Ugandan press to refrain from the use of inflammatory and demonizing language when writing about the war, the LRA or the people of the North. As it was reported last week, Museveni is doing everything to undermine the Juba peace talks by carrying on a parallel negotiation with the LRA leadership using Acholi leaders such as Mao, Ochora, Oulanyah, Owiny Dollo, and others. If that were not the case, there would not have been the kind of confrontations which prompted Mao to write this article. Even Mao himself recognized this problem when he said, "I think President Museveni has not helped the situation. The NRM's infantilism has simply entrenched the victims of upheavals in one phase." So according to Apiliga's psychological scheme, what is the evidence that Museveni is manifesting a sense of recovery? If he does, then it must be because he is the victor but not the "loser" to whom the scheme applies.

On the other side, while it sounds that "Kony currently manifests a sense of recovery", objectively he sounds insulting to the survivors/victims of the war by denying responsibility for some of the atrocities (abduction of children, killing of people and looting of property) for which they have previously accepted responsibility and for which they have been charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC). It is particularly galling to hear Kony deny his responsibility when the victims/survivors of the war are willing to forgive him and his LRA soldiers for the sake of peace. In this regard, they are calling for

the use of mato oput as a mechanism of reconciliation. However, under the mato oput method, reconciliation requires the admission of wrong doings. Otherwise, one cannot ask for forgiveness and reconciliation without having done something wrong.

Following Mao's "confidence building" and "facilitation" trips to Garamba, Kony's recent claim that Museveni is a "good man" and that people who have been criticizing him were and are wrong just because Museveni has been allowing people to go to the bush to meet with him and for facilitating and paying his satellite telephone bills are just as unconvincing as trying to call day night and night day. Secondly, it is a big insult to the people of northern Uganda who have consistently voted against President Museveni at the polls, in spite of LRA brutality against them. People are now asking, what was the 20 years of war all about. If the war was a mistake, first and foremost, he needs to apologize to the victims of the war and ask for forgiveness. Secondly, he should simply surrender to UPDF or he and the other top commanders should turn themselves in to the ICC where they are wanted for committing crimes against humanity. That way, they can spare the victims of the war the agony of listening to Kony's denial of his responsibility for some of the atrocities committed during the war. and praising the very man with whom they have collectively caused untold suffering and genocide in northern Uganda.

In his conclusion, Mao said, *"Let us traverse the ruins of southwestern Uganda, the mass graves of Luweero, the death fields of northern and eastern Uganda, the rail wagons in Mukura and other scenes of national agony and contemplate a new future based on tolerance!"*

While Mao's challenge above is noble, it gives us no insights on how to develop tolerance. After all the numerous trips people have made to Garamba to meet with Kony were intended to build confidence in the peace process. If Mao's report of the exchanges of criticisms between his quartet delegation and part of the LRA Juba delegation is a measure of the outcome the Garamba confidence building effort, then it has not succeeded. If anything, it has created a poisonous atmosphere of suspicion. Just as Mao was eloquent in suggesting remedies to the problems, I would also like to suggest a remedy to the current poisonous atmosphere.

1. All parties involved must understand that the ultimate goal of the peace process is to bring a sustainable peace in the region. As such, the Juba negotiation cannot be reduced to negotiating primarily a secure or guarantee or and a better life just for the LRA combatants and as a strategy to avoid legal problems for both the LRA and the Museveni regime.
2. All parties must understand that the Juba talk was overwhelmingly welcomed by the people all over the world. Therefore, the process must not be allowed to fail for some petty or personal reasons.
3. The peace process is being conducted under guidelines, including how to change the guidelines, agreed upon by the mediator and the two warring sides. Therefore, the peace process must be allowed to

proceed as designed. Everyone concerned including the government, the mediator, the LRA top leadership should refrain from doing anything which would convey the idea of undercutting the Juba peace process.

- 4. *While individuals have attempted to broker a way forwards, it has not succeeded so far. If anything, such individual efforts have created more poisonous environments. I suggest that a possible way out is to create a third seat at the negotiation and that third chair should belong to the community of victims/survivors of the war and not for individuals who arrogate to themselves the exclusive right of speaking for the victims, yet they are pushing their own or their sponsor's agenda.***
5. A successful creation of such a third party participation will require first and foremost the good will and the commitment of all the principle stakeholders, namely the LRA, GoU, the mediator and the community of survivors/victims of the war and the sponsors of the peace talks. I am convinced that such good will and commitment are there in the communities of survivors/victims of the war both in the Diaspora and at home from which respectable individuals or members of organizations can be selected to serve on the third party delegation.
6. A third party participation will most likely break the current stalemate in Juba and will improve the likelihood of success of a sustainable comprehensive peace agreement that may be reached. Short of this, in the short-run, the Juba talks will only create a platform for an endless spinning of the wheel and the public relation's yarn. In the long run, it will create a fertile ground for a more complex violent conflict in the future.