

Ugandan faith leaders critique viral Internet video on Kony

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(ENInews)--A film detailing atrocities committed by the Northern Uganda rebel leader Joseph Kony has become an Internet sensation, but faith leaders in the region said they fear the production will cause further trauma to the population who are recovering from a 23-year brutal war.

The 30-minute film, titled "Kony 2012," was released on 5 March by Invisible Children, a charity based in San Diego, California. It has put fresh global attention on atrocities committed by the Ugandan rebel group called the Lord's Resistance Army, but also attracted praise and criticism from faith leaders, the conflict's victims and the public.

"While it publicizes the problem, we see it as being outdated. It should have been released in 2003 ... but now that it is drawing a new attention to the problem, we would like the international community to find ways of stopping Kony. He is still there," Anglican Bishop Johnson Gakumba of Northern Uganda diocese told ENInews in a telephone interview on 14 March from the town of Gulu.

"Our proposal is dialogue, since we believe the military option will not help," added Gakumba, also the chairperson of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiatives (ARLPI), an interfaith peace and transformation group which has been responding to the conflict since 1997.

Within a week of its unveiling on the Internet, the film has been viewed 78 million times (and counting) on Youtube with more than three million people sharing it on Facebook.

"Our concern is that it reminds us of war when the people were starting to recover. The reminder is likely to traumatize those who were affected. We are

concerned it sends a different message of war and appeals to a military option to end the conflict. Our view is peace negotiations are the best option," said Sheikh Musa Khalil, the Kadhi of the Muslim region of northern Uganda in an interview.

The film tells the story of the rebel leader's brutal tactics through the eyes of a former child soldier named Jacob. It then calls on viewers to help "make Joseph Kony famous" so that he can be stopped.

But the ARLPI said its members watched it hoping to find peaceful solutions to the conflict, only to find sensational messages. "It lacks the current facts of the LRA activities. It misrepresents the current situation on the ground and is full of over simplified justifications," said the statement.

In Uganda, Kony is viewed as the signature face of horror and terror. "Why then was his file being reopened when he seemed to be at his weakest?" queried John Abimanyi in a 12 March Monitor Newspaper review.

The film, whose purpose is to promote charity to stop the fugitive, has received support from global celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey and raised US\$5 million, according to reports.

In the city of Bangassou in the Central Africa Republic where the LRA is said to have moved from northern Uganda, Roman Catholic Bishop Juan Jos Aguirre said the film had the merit to bring the war to the world's attention. "I have counted every tear of these people and I encourage them not to lose hope," Aguirre was quoted in news reports as saying.