

Central African churches aid victims of warlord Joseph Kony

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(ENInews)--In the Central African Republic, churches are aiding victims of the violence associated with Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony and his rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

"Since we are humanitarian and social [organizations] as churches, we are paying great attention to the suffering and needs of these people," the Rev. Andre Golike, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Central African Republic told ENInews in a telephone interview on June 7.

Kony was thrust into the limelight by the film Kony 2012, made by a U.S. nonprofit called Invisible Children Inc., which said it sought to make him "famous" to influence his capture. The film has been viewed more than 90 million times on www.youtube.com.

On June 7, the U.S. House of Representatives' foreign affairs committee unanimously passed a resolution expressing support for U.S. efforts to assist African forces in the hunt for Kony. "The LRA continues its reign of terror in central Africa - abducting, killing and mutilating. It is long past time that Joseph Kony and his commanders be stopped once and for all," said Rep. Ed Royce, a California Republican and co-author of the bipartisan resolution.

Small teams of U.S. troops are assisting African forces in the hunt for Kony. The resolution backed that mission. "This is a mission led by Africans for Africans. But some small, targeted U.S. assistance can go a long way ... A large spotlight has been cast on [Kony's] evil. He will be found. He will get justice," said Royce.

Golike said the church is helping refugees become self-sufficient. "We found out that seeds and tools were an urgent need for them. We have been giving them these items so that they can grow their own food," he said.

Nearly 440,000 people have been displaced across the borders of the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan since 2008, according to the U.N.

Kony's campaign of terror is centered on a bizarre form of Christianity. He fled his native northern Uganda into the dense Congo forest in 2005.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reported on June 6 that the LRA has abducted at least 591 children between July 2009 and February 2012, turning boys into fighters or supporters and girls into sex slaves.

"Girls who spent a substantial period of time associated with the group reported to have been subject to sexual slavery and exploitation, including by being forcibly "married" to combatants. Some children were forced to use violence, including killing their friends or other children in the armed group," said Moon in a report to the U.N. Security Council.

Some have been fleeing into the care of Roman Catholic bishop Juan Jose Aguirre of the diocese of Bangassou, who has been providing shelter, food and medicines for the former child soldiers.

"Those who manage to escape, they are traumatized, terrified and with no self-esteem. Many of the girls are also pregnant (after being subjected to sexual abuse)," said Aguirre, who supported the film Kony 2012.

Kony was indicted in 2005 by the International Criminal Court in The Hague in the Netherlands for crimes against humanity.