

## **The Attack on the Omusinga's Palace in Kasese**

### **Bishop Jackson Nzerebende**

It is now over a year since Government Armed Forces attacked the Omusinga's Palace in Kasese Town on November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016, killing over one hundred people. Additional co-ordinated shootings spread all over the District killing civilians and police officers, while hundreds more were arrested and are still in prison. Houses and property worth millions were also destroyed.

Reports from the Red Cross and the Inter Religious Council of Uganda (IRCU) give a heart breaking number of 4,800 Children whose parents were either killed in the raid or arrested and taken to Nalufenya prison in Eastern Uganda. 270 wives are missing their husbands.

Unfortunately, no formal relief arrangements for the education and general welfare of these hundreds of children have ever been secured. Relatives have quietly and painfully integrated them in their own families just for survival. The wives are heavily traumatized as the majority of them have no clues as to the whereabouts of their husbands: whether they are dead or are among those in prison. They survive on hand outs from relatives and well wishers.

A few NGOs and Churches provided preliminary material and psycho-social support for just a few days and then went away!

### **Surface Peace and Calm**

Despite these needs not being attended to, relative surface peace and calm has been restored in the entire District. I call it surface peace because the hearts of people are still wounded and bleeding!! Hopelessness is still visible on the faces of the majority of the population in the Kasese and Rwenzori Region as they have many questions unanswered and real peace is still a way off from their site. Churches must be appreciated for jointly working hard with the Government and have recovered guns that were in illegal hands in certain villages. Christians and Muslims are seen united in promoting peace and tolerance in their mediation between the Government and the Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu (OBR).

Army deployment has since been scaled down, making the environment less scary for the local communities. Peasants have resumed their everyday business and (at the time of writing) we hope to have a happy Christmas 2017. Tourism is slowly picking up again and local coffee products are being loaded for onward transit to overseas markets.

### **Disturbing Recurring Armed Conflicts since 1962.**

The Internal Minister rightly observed in his official press release that conflicts in the Rwenzori region started way back in 1962, and have since simply been recurring year after year. So why have Governments not provided a lasting solution over the years? Will a military approach ever eventually shoot down the conflict? If not, why is it still the priority strategy of Government to deal with these deep-seated, persisting and growing feelings of dissatisfaction of over three million people of the Rwenzori Region?

## **Collapsed Dialogue and Appeal**

In my view, the dialogue between the Cultural Leader of OBR, His Majesty Charles Wisely Mumbere Iremangoma, and the Central Government of Uganda. A dialogue that was initiated by President Museveni but then collapsed, leading to the bloody attack, needs to be revived if lasting peace is to be achieved.

This will require consideration on the part of the Government. The continued detention of the Omusinga will not significantly help peace-building as his views and contributions will be missed. Besides, this detention will only consolidate the anger and hearts of his subjects, making the road to peace and reconciliation hard and narrow! This is the biggest setback that we community leaders are experiencing in our efforts to restore people's trust and confidence in their national Government.

This is reflected in the poor reception of national Government leaders whenever they currently visit the region. It should not continue like this. Something must be done. We pray that NGOs will find in their heart a need to continue building the lives of 4,800 hurting orphans and 270 widows/wives with missing husbands, the majority of them in remote rural areas.

We appeal to international communities to support the current efforts of the IRCU in their mediation role and the provision of psycho-social services to the victims of these conflicts and disasters in Kasese. Although these conflicts look local in nature and location, they significantly affect the operations of national Government and international trade and tourism.

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