

Victims in Lukodi Commemorate the 12th Anniversary of the Lukodi Massacre as the ICC Reveals that the Trial of Dominic Ongwen May Commence on 5th December 2016

On 19th May 2016, residents of Lukodi village commemorated the 12th anniversary of the Lukodi Massacre. The prayers are held annually to remember the victims who lost their lives almost twelve years ago when LRA rebels raided Lukodi village.

Unlike previous celebrations, this one was different because Dominic Ongwen, the ex-LRA commander alleged to have led the attack against Lukodi is currently in the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC). During these celebrations, the ICC representative present at the function also revealed that the trial of Dominic Ongwen may commence on 05 December 2016.

Another factor that made this particular anniversary of the Lukodi massacre significant was that for the first time ever, the ceremony was graced by Rwot David Onen Acana II, the Acholi Paramount Chief. Also in attendance were representatives of the ICC from the office of the prosecutor and the victims' participation and reparations section (VPRS). Victims' legal representatives; Francisco Cox, Joseph Akwenyu Manoba and Jane Anywar Adong were also present. Members of civil society in northern Uganda, the media, traditional and religious leaders, and community members of Lukodi were also present at the function.

Representatives of the Foundation for Justice and Development Initiatives (FJDI) attended the ceremony and interacted with two survivors of the massacre. We asked them whether twelve years down the road there had been healing and recovery for survivors of the massacre. They said:

How can I recover without reparations? I lost my father, mother and two of my children during the massacre. It was not by choice that we were residents of Lukodi; we were born here and the massacre found us here. We therefore strongly demand for compensation (Male Survivor).

A woman can only recover from the death of her newly born baby after she gives birth to another one. We can only recover when compensation is made for our relatives, property and the dignity we lost (Female Survivor).

The ceremony commenced at 12:00pm with prayers led by Bishop Nelson Onono Onweng, the retired Bishop of Gulu Diocese. Thereafter, local leaders, CSO representatives, religious and traditional leaders were given an opportunity to make a few remarks.

Speaking on behalf of the ICC Prosecutor, Mr. Paul Bradfield revealed that the

prosecution team was considering 5 December 2016 as the possible date on which the trial of Dominic is set to commence. He also noted that the commemoration day was not only significant for remembering those who lost their lives, but also for ensuring that those who committed the crimes should be held accountable. He also noted that the ICC prosecutor 'remains determined and committed to see that justice is done for people in Lukodi'. The ICC Prosecutor also asked victims to be patient given that the trial would take time.

Mr. Francisco Cox, one of the victims' legal representatives reassured the people that they would do all in their means to 'take victims voices to The Hague' and remind the ICC of the need to move out of the comfort zone and respond to reparations needs on northern Uganda.

Asked if they felt the ICC would deliver justice for victims in Lukodi, the two massacre survivors had this to say:

If the trial does not bring about justice and we are not compensated the Government of Uganda must explain the circumstances under which we lost many of our relatives on that day (Male Survivor).

The Court (ICC) is unpredictable but we believe Ongwen cannot win the case with all the evidence against him. We are hopeful that the ICC will bring justice for the people of Lukodi (Female Survivor).

CSO representatives were also given an opportunity to speak. Mr. Francis Nono from the Refugee Law Project noted the importance of documentation as a means of gathering evidence and also pursuing justice for victims of conflict. Mr. Oryem Nyeko from the Justice and Reconciliation Project noted the importance of memorial days, and called upon all stakeholders to continue having memorial days in whatever way possible. The representative from African Youth Initiative Network (AYINET) noted the importance of health rehabilitation for victims, and a representative from the Foundation for Justice and Development Initiatives (FJDI) noted the need to continuously advocate for reparations from the Government of Uganda which bears the primary responsibility for implementing a reparations program.

Rwot David Onen Acana II, the Acholi Paramount Chief and the Chief Guest of the day expressed support for the ongoing trial at the ICC. In a particularly moving narrative, he told the people about how Dominic Ongwen had saved their lives during the Juba Peace talks. According to Rwot Acana, the incident occurred when religious and traditional leaders had gone to meet with the LRA, and there was a plot to kill them all and blame it on the Government of Uganda. He said that Dominic Ongwen had been one of the LRA commanders who pleaded with Joseph Kony not to kill the religious and traditional leaders. The Paramount Chief said that because of this incident he would ideally have advocated for Dominic Ongwen to be pardoned. However given the fact that Ongwen had committed crimes, he needed to be held accountable for his crimes.

The Paramount Chief also noted that conflict had taken its toll, leading to the erosion of morals and increase in crime in Acholi. He lamented the fact that people had rejected formerly abducted persons and children born in captivity, denying them access to land. He decried the land conflicts which were taking place in the aftermath of the conflict saying: *“The land of Acholi has soaked up the blood of innocent people, so issues related to land should not be handled in a joking way.”*

The Paramount Chief called upon all people to support the trial at the ICC. He noted that while some people would be happy with the outcome of the trial and others would not be happy with it, at the end of the day justice would have prevailed from the trial.

The comments of the Paramount Chief carry a lot of weight given that he is the traditional Acholi leader. It also completely dispels the widely held belief that many people in Acholi do not support the ICC. His comments come at a crucial time when the ICC is preparing to commence the trial of Dominic Ongwen. It is therefore a big boost for the ICC.

With the trial of Dominic Onwgen set to commence on 5 December 2016 as revealed by the ICC representatives, victims in Lukodi are optimistic that the outcome will result in reparations for them. Asked what the people want for reparations, the two massacre survivors had this to say;

Our Children are suffering. We want the following reparations: sponsorship/ scholarships for our children to go to school, good health facilities and vocational institutions. Reparations should not be left for the ICC alone. The Government of Uganda is the first responsible body to compensate us. If there is no money for reparations then the Government of Uganda should give us livestock so that we replace the ones we lost during the conflict.

We want the Government of Uganda to compensate us in monetary terms and the money should be paid directly to every member of Lukodi because the Government failed to protect us.

The above comments are strong indicators that victims in northern Uganda are banking on the ICC to deliver justice for them.

About FJDI: [FJDI](http://fjdi.org) works with children, youth, women and communities to promote justice, development and economic recovery in northern Uganda. **Contact:** info@fjdi.org **Web:** www.fjdi.org

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