



**Testimony of Sasha Lezhnev  
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**House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International  
Organizations**

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**“Ridding Central Africa of Joseph Kony: Continuing U.S. Support”**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at this critical juncture in the fight against Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in central Africa.

From my 12 years of working on the LRA, both doing policy work with the Enough Project and running projects for hundreds of former LRA combatants with the Grassroots Reconciliation Group, I have observed that the LRA is one of the most resilient rebel groups on the planet in the face of adversity. Despite 25 years of counter-insurgency efforts mainly by Uganda, Kony’s LRA lives on, as its fighters abduct children as young as eight and move through dense jungles for thousands of miles on foot with virtually no technology in some of the most remote terrain on the planet.

Today, I am deeply concerned about the LRA’s new economic activities and its ability to regenerate itself going forward.

Strong bipartisan support in Congress for ending the LRA’s brutality has made a major dent in improving human security and preventing atrocities. Following the passage of the LRA Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act in 2010, which still today ranks as the most popular standalone bill on Africa ever to pass Congress, the Obama administration deployed approximately 100 Special Forces advisors to the African Union Regional Task Force in October 2011. This has helped lead to a 90 percent decrease in LRA killings and a 30 percent decrease in attacks,<sup>1</sup> and has significantly weakened a group that has abducted more than 66,000 children and youths and is responsible for more than 100,000 deaths over the past 28 years.<sup>2</sup> The number of displaced people as a result of LRA attacks is down from 1.8 million to 200,000 today.<sup>3</sup>

**The Problem**

However, the LRA is not yet down and out, and with a new trade in ivory, gold, and diamonds, it could make a serious comeback, as it has done in the past. Today, the LRA is increasingly poaching elephants for valuable tusks, trading the ivory for ammunition,

supplies, and food in Sudan, with the likely complicity of the Sudanese government. This is the subject of September's *National Geographic* magazine, where explorer Bryan Christy manufactured a fake tusk and tracked it from LRA-held areas in Congo through to a town in central Sudan, Ed Daein.

The LRA is also starting to trade diamonds and gold in the Central African Republic, as documented by the Enough Project, Resolve, and Invisible Children through research in the field last fall and this past summer.

Critically, the LRA has a safe haven in Sudan-controlled territory, Kafia Kingi. Joseph Kony has rarely left that area since 2011, and that is the chief area where the LRA trades ivory.

Our team at Enough just spent a month in this area tracking the ivory trade, and worked with satellite company Digital Globe and the park rangers at African Parks in Congo's Garamba National Park last year to help predict where the poaching might happen next. Here's what we found:

- Elephants in Garamba National Park in Congo—a UNESCO World Heritage site—are rapidly decreasing as a result of poaching. From 20,000 elephants in the 1980s, there are fewer than 1,800 today.<sup>4</sup> This is a worrying more global trend, with an estimated 35,000 elephants killed per year for tusks.<sup>5</sup>
- Over 130 elephants were killed last year alone in Congo's Garamba National Park, and a 2-week killing spree in March of this year left 30 elephants dead.
- The LRA is one of the key armed groups responsible for poaching elephants in this area, along with other armed poachers from South Sudan and Sudan.
- One unit of LRA fighters is in charge of poaching elephants, under direct orders from Kony.
- A second LRA unit then takes the ivory tusks to Sudan-controlled areas to trade them near the Sudan Armed Forces garrison in Dafak, Kafia Kingi. The main ivory trading town is called Songo.
- The ivory is then traded on by truck to Nyala, the capital of South Darfur in Sudan, and then likely to Khartoum, Sudan's capital, mainly for export to Asia.
- Garamba park rangers say that if the LRA and other poachers are not stopped, the entire elephant population in the area could be wiped out.

Along with ivory, Kony has also issued orders to loot diamonds and gold. These resources give the LRA the ability to regroup and rearm. Looting and then trading these items allows the LRA the opportunity to acquire food, ammunition and other needed supplies. Over the past few months, LRA defectors have come out with fresh ammunition. You can trade one tusk for up to 25 boxes of bullets, and there are over 700 bullets in a box. It only takes one bullet to kill an elephant.

This is critically important because the LRA already has weapons both with its fighters and more guns buried in caches – acquired from Sudan and from looting over the past 20 years. So, all it needs now are bullets, supplies, and Joseph Kony. Kony is still in

command and is central to the group. With him in charge and with new ammunition from the ivory trade, the LRA can abduct new fighters. Although overall LRA attacks and killings are down significantly since the U.S. advisors and African Union mission began in 2011, abduction numbers are up this year, nearly double what they were in 2014, according to the LRA Crisis Tracker.

The LRA also has the space to operate in the hinterlands of northeastern Congo, eastern Central African Republic, and Sudan-controlled territory in an area that U.S. military officers have called the “broccoli forest” because it’s very difficult to see who is moving in the dense forests through the tops of the old growth trees.

## **The Solution**

Now is the time to double down on the U.S. counter-LRA mission and help end the LRA’s horrific reign of atrocities against civilians once and for all. This can be done with a low-cost investment in a few key areas.

1. First, the Obama administration should reauthorize the U.S. advisors beyond October with the primary goal of bringing Joseph Kony to justice. The U.S. assistance mission should also provide additional airlift capacity to the African Union forces and increase its efforts to get LRA fighters to defect from the group.

To that end, I urge you to sign on to H.Res. 394, a bipartisan resolution introduced by Reps. Jim McGovern and Joe Pitts, which supports the U.S. mission and calls for an expansion of reintegration and anti-poaching programs.

2. Second, the United States needs to take the leading role in addressing Sudan’s complicity in aiding the LRA. Two weeks ago, the African Union visited Khartoum to press it on the LRA, and Sudan officials again denied that they were sheltering the LRA, despite a wealth of evidence. I attach that evidence as part of the record, with your permission. The United States should deploy advisors close to the areas controlled by Sudan in Kafia Kingi so it can gather precise intelligence on Kony’s whereabouts.
3. Third, the United States should help shut down the blood ivory trade. To boost efforts on the ground, Congress should increase assistance to the Fish and Wildlife Service for anti-poaching work in central Africa, which has experience in the region, and the U.S. advisors on the counter-LRA mission should work more closely with the park rangers and help interdict the trade from Congo to Sudan. More broadly, the Obama administration’s draft rules to help ban the ivory trade are an excellent step in the right direction, but they should only include a small *de minimus* provision for ivory sales, similar to the State of New York’s ivory laws.

I commend the many members of the Subcommittee for signing on to the Global Anti-Poaching Act, H.R. 2494, introduced by Chairman Ed Royce and Ranking

Member Eliot Engel, and urge other members of this Subcommittee to do the same.

4. Finally, in the FY16 appropriations process Congress should continue to robustly support the counter-LRA operations.

In sum, the U.S. government deserves tremendous credit for sapping Kony's LRA of most of its strength and helping allow 1.6 million people to return to their homes. However, the LRA has a history of regrouping, and I am deeply concerned that its trade in ivory and other commodities could allow it to do so again. Now is not the time to pull back, but instead to finish the job and bring Kony to justice.

Thank you, Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Bass for continuing to pay attention to this critical human security problem. I look forward to your questions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Enough Project took figures for documented monthly attacks and killings by the Lord's Resistance Army from the LRA Crisis Tracker, which has recorded data from December 2007 to the present. Enough calculated the average figures for LRA attacks and killings from both before (December 2007 to November 2011) and after the U.S. advisors deployed (December 2011 to June 2015). We found a total of 1,219 LRA attacks (an average of 25.4 per month) before U.S. advisors deployed and a total of 767 attacks (an average of 17.84 per month) after the deployment. We found a total of 2,979 documented killings (an average of 62.06 per month) before deployment and a total of 151 documented killings (an average of 3.51 per month) after deployment. Our calculations for the difference in average monthly attack rates before and after deployment:  $25.4 - 17.84 / 25.4 = 0.297$ , or a 30 percent decrease. Our calculations for the difference in average monthly killing rates before and after deployment:  $62.06 - 3.51 / 62.06 = 0.943$ , or a 94 percent decrease. When we removed LRA attack and killings figures from December 2008 and January 2009 from our calculations—to control for violence rates associated with a significant counter-LRA operation—our re-calculated rates indicated monthly average attack rates were 25.5 and the average monthly killing rates were 44.7—the latter a significant decrease from the unadjusted figure of 62.06. Recalculating with these figures, we again found attacks fell by 30 percent and average monthly killing rates fell by 92 percent. Our adjusted calculations for attacks:  $25.5 - 17.84 / 25.5 = 0.300$ , or a 30 percent decrease. Our adjusted calculations for killings:  $3.51 - 44.7 / 44.7 = 0.921$ , or a 92 percent decrease. Spreadsheets with calculations are on file with the Enough Project and available upon request. Data available from LRA Crisis Tracker at <http://lracrisistracker.com/> (last accessed July 2015). For news reporting indicating that the U.S. advisors authorized by President Obama in October 2011 deployed in October and November 2011 see Jake Tapper and Luis Martinez, "Obama Sends 100 US Troops to Uganda to Help Combat Lord's Resistance Army," ABC News, October 14, 2011, available at <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/10/obama-sends-100-us-troops-to-uganda-to-combat-lords-resistance-army/>. For reports surrounding the December 2008 counter-LRA operation see Jeffrey Gettleman and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Aided a Failed Plan to Rout Ugandan Rebels," *The New York Times*, February 6, 2009, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/07/world/africa/07congo.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/07/world/africa/07congo.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&); Grace Matsiko, Paul Amoru, and Risdal Kasasira, "UPDF attacks Kony," *Daily Monitor*, December 15, 2008, available at <http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/Education/-/688336/761130/-/10grnno/-/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Evidence from a 2006 study by the Survey for War Affected Youth (SWAY) estimates that at least 66,000 youths between the ages of 14 and 30 were abducted. A U.N. report estimates that the LRA is responsible for more than 100,000 deaths. Jeannie Annan, Christopher Blattman, and Roger Horton, "The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda: Findings from the Survey for War Affected Youth," p. 55

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(Survey of War Affected Youth, September 2006) available at <http://www.chrisblattman.com/documents/policy/sway/SWAY.Phase1.FinalReport.pdf>; U.N. Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa and on the Lord’s Resistance Army-affected areas,” S/2013/297, para. 68, May 20, 2013, available at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/297](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2013/297).

<sup>3</sup> UN OCHA, “LRA Regional Update: Central African Republic, DR Congo and South Sudan (April - June 2015),” available at [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LRA\\_Regional\\_Update\\_Q2-2015-20150722.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/LRA_Regional_Update_Q2-2015-20150722.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Enough Project, Digital Globe, and African Parks, “Poachers without Borders: New Satellite Imaging and Predictive Mapping to Empower Park Rangers and Combat Ivory Traffickers in Garamba National Park,” January 28, 2015, available at [http://www.enoughproject.org/files/PoachersWithoutBorders\\_28Jan2015.pdf](http://www.enoughproject.org/files/PoachersWithoutBorders_28Jan2015.pdf)

Ed Mazza, “Elephant Massacre Uncovered In Democratic Republic of Congo; 30 Animals Killed In 15 Days,” *Huffington Post* (March 26, 2015), available at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/26/elephant-massacre-congo\\_n\\_6945266.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/03/26/elephant-massacre-congo_n_6945266.html)

<sup>5</sup> According to the Wildlife Conservation Society. For more information, see <http://www.wcs.org/elephants/>