

PERSONAL TESTIMONY

by Sean Mercadante

The Forgotten Front

CHILDREN IN UGANDA WALK MILES EACH NIGHT TO AVOID CAPTURE BY A TERRORIST GROUP. MISSIONARIES FROM CALVARY CHAPEL HAVE APPEALED TO CONGRESS FOR ASSISTANCE AND ARE GETTING RESULTS.

At a refugee camp in Soroti, Uganda, a Ugandan boy told his story. The rebels came in the middle of the night. Everyone awoke to the sound of gunfire and people running and screaming, both in terror and pain. He and his family were captured and forced to carry the goods stolen from their home. No one dared to stop as they pushed through the pain, knowing that anyone who slowed was shot. Many died that night. Most of them had heard the stories of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)—the cutting of limbs and mutilation of the living. Sometimes people were used to carry supplies and then released; everyone hoped this would be their fate.

But this night would be one of torture and suffering. The rebels raped the young girls and the wives of those captured. They decided to murder the adults—but to have the children do the killing. This young boy was ordered to kill his own mother and father. Other boys like him were ordered to do the same. The children were given machetes and told to hack their parents to death—refusal meant instant death.

Wes Bentley and Far Reaching Ministries have been operating an outreach facility along the border of Uganda and Sudan for nine years. During that time, the LRA has systematically terrorized this troubled region. LRA purports to be a Christian organization, but is funded by Islamic terrorist sources.

LRA “recruits” new members from among the children. Wes said, “About 1,000 children are being abducted every month, forced to kill their own parents. In eight and a half years of war, I have seen much, but even I have not seen this. To look into the eyes of a child who was forced to murder his own



Ugandan boys wait for assistance.

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In Kitgum, Uganda, people cannot sleep in their own homes. In July 2002, forty-eight people were hacked to death, and babies were smashed against trees. Since then, the setting sun brings about an exodus as people leave their homes to travel into Kitgum for safety. The threat of abduction is so prevalent that as many as 45,000 children walk ten miles or more each night to seek shelter in one of a few “safe” cities. The international community has been asked to assist.

The area is also dangerous for those trying to minister to these children. In the last six years, seven Far Reaching Ministry staff members have been killed, eight have been wounded, and one is missing in action. The

Ugandan army is hesitant to engage the LRA, and the U.S. aid agencies will not operate in the region.

Wes Bentley and his pastor, Ray Bentley (no relation) of Maranatha Chapel, journeyed to Washington, D.C., to ask members of the U.S. Senate for help in ending the threat posed by the LRA. They were joined by the Honorable Edith Ssempera, Uganda’s ambassador to the U.S. and a Christian, and Kerry Marks Hasenbalg, the executive director of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

Another senator, also a Christian, prayed with the group and arranged meetings with other senators. In Washington, access to influential people is of paramount importance and hard to gain. A group of senators from both parties is working to establish a Senate Africa Caucus, which would direct attention and relief to the region. One senator said that the U.S. “must do everything possible to get rid of these guys, especially LRA leader, Joseph Kony, because the LRA is a cancer.”

Several senators now understand the urgency of this situation. One member asked, “What can we do today that would make things better than yesterday?” Ambassador Ssempera replied that Uganda has asked the U.S. government to provide the Ugandan army with helicopters, communication and night-vision equipment, and training to battle the LRA. Officials are working on help for the Ugandan government.

Upon his return to Southern California, Ray Bentley informed his congregation of the children’s plight and their need for protection. Maranatha Chapel responded by raising funds to build a fortified refuge as a safe haven for the children to sleep. ☞