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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **New Study Finds Ugandans Favor Peace with Justice** Victims' Views Key to Resolving Conflict

KAMPALA, July 25, 2005—Today, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) and the Human Rights Center (HRC) at the University of California, Berkeley, released a report urging the national and local authorities of Uganda and the international community to work together to develop an integrated and comprehensive strategy for peace and justice in Northern Uganda.

The report, entitled *Forgotten Voices: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda*, is based on detailed interviews, conducted in April and May 2005, with more than 2,500 Ugandans on their personal experiences of the conflict and their opinions on how peace and justice should be achieved.

Recently, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced plans to issue indictments against Ugandan rebel leaders. In the heated international debate surrounding the ICC's first intervention, the voices of Ugandans have gone largely unheard. This report presents, for the first time, a comprehensive survey of the people most affected by the conflict in Uganda—residents of the northern districts of Gulu, Kitgum, Lira, and Soroti, many of whom are routinely terrorized by rebel attacks. *Forgotten Voices* is the first study of its kind to be conducted in the midst of an ongoing conflict.

Among the report's findings are some of the highest levels of exposure to traumatic events—including killings, abductions, mutilations, and sexual violations—ever reported. Forty percent of the survey respondents had been abducted by the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), 45% had witnessed the killing of a family member, and 23% had been physically mutilated at some point during the conflict.

“The people of Northern Uganda have suffered terribly over the past two decades,” said Marieke Wierda, Senior Associate in charge of the ICTJ's Uganda program and a co-author of the report. “*Forgotten Voices* finally gives them the opportunity to introduce

their own views and opinions into the debate on how to achieve peace and justice. It is vital that their concerns be heard and acted upon.”

Survey respondents expressed strong support for transitional justice mechanisms, including a truth commission and reparations. Over 80% of respondents said that they wanted to speak publicly about the abuses they had suffered. When asked what should happen to leaders of the LRA, 66% were in favor of punishing them, while 25% suggested measures such as forgiveness, confessions to the community, and compensation. Of those who had heard of the ICC, now investigating war crimes in Northern Uganda, a majority believed that the court would contribute both to peace (91%) and justice (89%).

“Our survey suggests that the people of Northern Uganda want both peace and justice,” said Eric Stover, Director of the Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley and a co-author of the report. “While most survey respondents are desperate for the violence to end, a significant number are opposed to letting the key perpetrators walk away unpunished.”

*Forgotten Voices* urges that immediate action be taken in the following areas:

- The international community should promote cooperation between local, national, and international stakeholders to develop an integrated and comprehensive strategy for peace and justice in Northern Uganda;
- The Ugandan government should reform its amnesty process to better meet the expectations of victims;
- Local leaders should develop mechanisms to better integrate the views of their constituents into peace and justice policies; and
- The ICC should implement an outreach strategy to make Ugandans more aware of the court’s mandate and operations.

*Forgotten Voices: A Population-Based Survey on Attitudes about Peace and Justice in Northern Uganda* is available for download from the ICTJ’s web site at [www.ictj.org](http://www.ictj.org) and the HRC’s web site at [www.hrcenter.org](http://www.hrcenter.org). For interviews with the authors and researchers or for further information, please contact Suzana Grego (above).

## **Background**

For the last 19 years, the people of Northern Uganda have suffered terribly as a result of the war between the LRA and government forces. LRA fighters have killed and mutilated countless numbers of civilians, abducted as many as 30,000 children (and many more adults) to serve as soldiers and sex slaves, and displaced up to 1.6 million civilians, who now live in vulnerable and squalid refugee camps.

The Ugandan government has used military action and mediation to try to end the conflict, without success. In December 2003, President Museveni referred the situation in Northern Uganda to the International Criminal Court, which is expected to soon issue

indictments against several top LRA leaders. Following talks between the rebels and government officials held in late spring, some observers believe that conditions have never been a better for achieving peace in Northern Uganda.

### **About the ICTJ**

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) assists countries pursuing accountability for past mass atrocity or human rights abuse. The Center works in societies emerging from repressive rule or armed conflict, as well as in established democracies where historical injustices or systemic abuse remain unresolved.

In order to promote justice, peace, and reconciliation, government officials and nongovernmental advocates are likely to consider a variety of transitional justice approaches including both judicial and nonjudicial responses to human rights crimes. The ICTJ assists in the development of integrated, comprehensive, and localized approaches to transitional justice comprising five key elements: prosecuting perpetrators, documenting and acknowledging violations through nonjudicial means such as truth commissions, reforming abusive institutions, providing reparations to victims, and facilitating reconciliation processes.

The Center is committed to building local capacity and generally strengthening the emerging field of transitional justice, and works closely with organizations and experts around the world to do so. By working in the field through local languages, the ICTJ provides comparative information, legal and policy analysis, documentation, and strategic research to justice and truth-seeking institutions, nongovernmental organizations, governments and others.

### **About The HRC**

Founded in 1994 with the assistance of The Sandler Family Supporting Foundation, U.C. Berkeley's Human Rights Center is a unique interdisciplinary research and teaching enterprise that reaches across academic disciplines to conduct research in emerging issues in international human rights and humanitarian law. The Center complements and supports the work of nongovernmental human rights organizations by drawing upon the creativity and expertise of scholars from diverse university programs and departments including anthropology, demography, education, ethnic studies, geography, journalism, law, political science, and public health.

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