

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, P.O. Box: 3243 Tel.: (251-11) 5513 822 Fax: (251-11) 5519 321
Email: situationroom@africa-union.org

PRESS RELEASE

THE AFRICAN UNION-LED REGIONAL COOPERATION INITIATIVE FOR THE ELIMINATION OF THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY ENTERS ITS OPERATIONAL PHASE

Addis Ababa, 27 March 2012:Over the past few days, the African Union (AU), working closely with the United Nations (UN), has taken a number of steps to operationalize the AU-led Regional Cooperation Initiative for the Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army (RCI-LRA).

On 24 March 2012, in Juba, South Sudan, the AU Special Envoy for issues relating to the LRA, Francisco Madeira, and the Head of the UN Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), Abou Moussa, launched the operational phase of the AU-led RCI-LRA. The ceremony was attended by the Vice-President of South Sudan, Dr. Riek Machar Teny, other senior Government officials, representatives of the Member States involved in the RCI-LRA (Central African Republic – CAR, Democratic Republic of Congo – DRC, South Sudan and Uganda), and members of the diplomatic community and partners, including the United Nations, the European Union and the United States.

On 25 March 2012, the AU Special Envoy and the UN Special Representative travelled to Yambio, Western Equatoria State, to formally inaugurate the Headquarters of the Regional Task Force (RTF) that will coordinate the overall efforts to eliminate the LRA. The senior Commanders of the RTF have already been deployed, and a number of other officers will be deployed in the coming weeks.

The delegation subsequently flew to Nzara, where it was briefed by Commanders of the Ugandan People's Defence Forces (UPDF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) on their efforts to bring the criminal activities of the LRA to an end. The field visit was concluded by a visit to a nearby IDP camp, where South Sudanese IDPs are sheltered.

It should be noted that, on 22 and 23 February 2012, the AU and the UN convened, in Entebbe, Uganda, a meeting bringing together focal points from the two organizations working on the LRA issue, in order to finalize the comprehensive strategy for the elimination of the LRA.

NOTE TO THE EDITORS

LRA activities remain a serious threat to peace, security and stability in the region, with grave humanitarian consequences. The LRA continues to carry out atrocities against innocent civilians, in particular children and women, including abduction, murder, mutilation, burning and looting of villages, and destruction of livelihoods. This has resulted in massive displacement of people and acute humanitarian crisis.

In the Plan of Action adopted at its Special Session on the Consideration and Resolution of Conflicts in Africa held, on 31 August 2009, the Assembly of the Union called on the countries of the region to renew their efforts, including military action, to neutralize the LRA and bring to an end its atrocities and destabilizing activities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Southern Sudan and Central African Republic (CAR). As a follow up to the Plan of Action, the 15th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Union, held in Kampala, Uganda, from 25 to 27 of July 2010, requested the Commission, as soon as possible, to organise action-oriented consultations among the countries affected by the activities of the LRA and other interested parties, with a view to facilitating a coordinated regional action in the face of the threat posed by this group.

It was against this background that a regional ministerial meeting was convened by the Commission in Bangui, CAR, from 13 to 14 October 2010. The meeting, which was chaired by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, brought together all the countries affected, namely, CAR, DRC, Sudan, including the then Government of South Sudan (GoSS), and Uganda. It was also attended by the relevant regional organizations, as well as by the United Nations and other international partners. The conclusions adopted by the meeting provided for action-oriented steps in a number of areas: military and security; humanitarian, development and other related aspects; and international support and assistance. The Bangui meeting also requested the Chairperson of the Commission to appoint a Special Envoy to coordinate the overall efforts on the LRA and facilitate international engagement. It agreed on a follow up mechanism, through the regular convening of meetings at ministerial level.

From 16 March to 5 April 2011, the Commission dispatched a joint technical assessment mission (TAM), including experts of the affected countries, to assess the situation on the ground.

The second regional ministerial meeting of the affected countries was held in Addis Ababa, on 8 June 2011, to examine the report of the joint TAM. The meeting defined the strategic end state of the envisaged operation as follows: "Elimination of the LRA, leading to the creation of a secure and stable environment in the affected countries". It agreed on the various aspects of the regional cooperation initiative and on its components.

At its 295th meeting held on 22 November 2011, the AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) authorized, for an initial period of 6 months, the launching of the RCI-LRA, with the mandate to

strengthen the operational capabilities of the countries affected by the atrocities of the LRA; create an environment conducive to the stabilization of the affected areas, free of LRA atrocities; and to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to affected areas.

The PSC also requested the Chairperson of the Commission, in close consultation with the countries affected by the activities of the LRA, to take the necessary measures with a view to facilitating the establishment of the different components of the RCI-LRA, namely:

- i. the Joint Coordinating Mechanism (JCM), chaired by the AU Commissioner for Peace and Security, and comprising the Ministers of Defense of the affected countries, as an *ad hoc* structure at the strategic level to coordinate the efforts of the AU and the affected countries, with the support of the international partners;
- ii. the Regional Task Force (RTF), composed of units provided by the affected countries, and whose total strength will be of a brigade size (5,000 troops); and
- iii. the Headquarters of the RTF, including the Joint Operations Centre (JOC), composed of officers seconded by the affected countries.

The Security Council has devoted two meetings the issue of the LRA, on 21 July and 14 November 2011, respectively. At its meeting of 21 July, the Security Council adopted a press statement in which its members, *inter alia*, strongly condemned the on-going attacks carried out by the LRA; commended the important efforts that are being undertaken by the militaries of CAR, DRC, the Republic of South Sudan and Uganda, to address the threat posed by the LRA, and emphasized the importance of sustained coordinated action by these Governments; encouraged the UN Secretary-General to provide support to the AU Commission, through the planning process for the implementation of the relevant AU decisions on the LRA; and requested the UN Office for Central Africa (UNOCA), in collaboration with the UN Office to the AU (UNOAU), to engage with the AU to facilitate cooperation between the UN and the African Union on issues related to countering the threats posed by the LRA. At its meeting of 14 November, the Security Council, *inter alia*, encouraged the AU to implement its comprehensive strategy to tackle the threat posed by the LRA.

On 23 November 2011, the Chairperson of the Commission appointed Mr. Francisco Caetano José Madeira, Special Representative in charge of Counter-Terrorism Cooperation and Director of the Algiers-based African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism (ACSRT), as his Special Envoy on the LRA Issue. In this capacity, Mr. Madeira is tasked, in consultation with the affected countries, to provide overall political and strategic coordination of the operation against the LRA, as well as to assist in mobilizing assistance for the victims of the LRA atrocities, the rebuilding of shattered communities and the rehabilitation of the affected areas.

Since the adoption of the PSC communiqué of 22 November 2011, the AU and the UN have undertaken a number of joint initiatives, including a visit to CAR, South Sudan, DRC, and Uganda, from 3 to 7 January 2012, to consult with the concerned officials on how best to

implement the RCI-LRA; and the convening, in Addis Ababa, on 29 February 2012, of a stakeholders' meeting to elaborate a comprehensive regional strategy to bring an end to the LRA activities.