The KONY 2012 Campaign: Commentaries/Concerns/Critiques

Over the last week, the film and campaign called “KONY 2012” went “viral” on social media, reaching over 70 million viewers. Invisible Children, the international NGO promoting KONY 2012, produced the film to achieve the objective of “raising support for the arrest” of Joseph Kony, leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army which has committed acts of gross human rights violations during decades of armed conflict in northern Uganda, including killing of civilians, rapes and the abduction of many thousands of children to become child soldiers and sex slaves.

Since its release and rapid circulation through social media channels worldwide, however, the KONY 2012 film and campaign has received increasing criticisms from commentators within Africa and in many other countries and regions.

Faculty and students of UPEACE organized a forum on Monday, March 19 where panelists initially shared their commentaries, concerns and criticisms on the goals, orientation and directions of the KONY 2012 campaign. Other participants in the Forum responded to the views of the panelists as well as raised other issues and perspectives on KONY 2012, including the role of social media in peacebuilding.

PANELISTS

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KONY 2012 CAMPAIGN
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Introduction

Currently, there is an ongoing campaign for the arrest of LRA leader Joseph Kony who operated between the years 1987 to 2007 in Uganda. Uganda is a land locked country located along the equator and lies between the East African Rift Valleys. Uganda is a country bordered by six different Countries namely Sudan in the north, Kenya in the East, Tanzania in the South, Rwanda in the South-west and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the West. It has a landmass covering an area of 241,139 square kilometers with a population of about 31.8 million people by the year 2010. Uganda has territorial water bodies that include Lake Victoria, Lake Albert, Lake Edward and Lake Kyoga. These lakes together with several other rivers constitute the headwaters of the River Nile. The Country’s economy is primarily agriculture with fertile soil in most regions of the country and a favourable climate that supports both food and cash crops production. Currently Uganda is also preparing to start oil mining in the western region.

History of the LRA Armed Conflict in Northern Uganda

Uganda was colonized by the British Government until 1962 when it got its independence but it remained divided on political, religious and tribal basis which contributed to the later year’s instability and political violence. There have been a number of armed conflicts in Uganda since then with the major one being the Lord’s Resistance Army in Northern Uganda affecting the Districts of Gulu (now divided to form Amuru District) and Kitgum (now divided to form Pader and Lamwo District) then later in Lira, part of Aura and Soroti Districts in Eastern Uganda. The armed conflict lasted for 20 years until 2006 when an Agreement for Cease Fire was signed in the Darfur Peace Talk.. The Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) armed conflict first started in 1987 by a female warrior known as Alice Auma “Lakwena” (meaning the messenger).
Alice Auma did not use guns but rather stones and water believed to have magical powers. She was later joined by her cousin Joseph Kony who was also believed to be a divine messenger. Joseph Kony continued to lead the rebellion when Alice deserted. Kony at the beginning of the armed conflict enjoyed high support from the people of Northern Uganda who gave him material and moral support with the belief that the rebellion was a just war against the government that was unfair to them. The local support to the rebellion however ended when the government forces resorted to attacking the local people for supporting the rebellion.

As the local community turned to support the government, the rebels began to violently attack them in retaliation. The government then came to the defense of its people by launching a number of military operations one of which was introduced by the then Minister of States Betty Bigombe who gave the local people bows and arrows to defend themselves against the rebel group. This idea was a great mistake. LRA considered the local people to have become military and joined forces against them. They were no longer civilians but rather combatants as well. Terrible atrocities against civilian population followed and the government forces were most of the time too late to protect the civilians.

**Effect of the Armed Conflict**

As a result of the war, many innocent civilian lives were claimed, civilians were displaced from their homes and forced to settle in displaced camps, schools and many health centers closed down. There were cases of forceful recruitment of men and women, young and adult persons into the rebellion and many cases of child soldiers. Thousands of people were brutally maimed with their lips, hands, ears and legs cut off and left disabled. Women and children were raped and defiled by both the government forces and the rebels. Civilians were tortured, arbitrarily arrested and detained. The armed conflict left a number of orphans, traumatized individuals, and several cases of grave violations of human rights.

This continued for 21 painful years until 2007 when the rebel agreed to cease fire. The cease fire enabled a number of the abducted persons and rebel group members known as the “Dug-cenPaco”, (meaning “the returnees”) to return to their homes and were protected under the Amnesty Act from any Legal action from their past life as rebels except as provided by the Act or when they continued to engage in criminal acts after the date of their amnesty. Nevertheless,
the provisions of the Act did not stop the community from attacking some of these returnees to seek revenge for the loss of their loved ones, property or their physical disability as a result of the atrocities committed during the war. The returnees themselves attacked each other for various reasons such as loss of their family members, abduction, abuse while in the bush, etc.

**Role of Governmental, Non Governmental and International Organizations**

The government, inspired by the untold suffering of its people and the high demand for peace by the community, finally accepted to grant amnesty to the rebels who shall return home. It also agreed to negotiate peace with the rebel group and provided material and psychological support to the community and the returnees such, as building institutions for rehabilitations for the child soldiers (Gulu Support the Children Organization, GUSCO), among others. The government also allowed access to means of communication such as radio calls and satellites phones to the rebels so that the local communities, the rebels and government forces engaged and participated freely in radio talk shows for peace making and peacebuilding in the region. With this free communication, the interests for peace talks were communicated, amnesty was made known to the rebels and with the help of local and international organizations Joseph Kony agreed to cease fire and to talk peace with the Government.

The local NonGovernmental Organization (NGOs) and Institutions such as Acholi Religious Peace Initiative, Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO), Institute for Peace and Strategic Studies among others, and International Organization such as; International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNDP, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), International Rescue Committee (IRC), World Vision International, and War Child (Canada and Holland) among others, played vital roles in peace making and peacebuilding in the region during the war and to date by arranging peace talks, radio talk shows, community sensitization, and community based dramas aimed at educating people on the Amnesty Law, reconciliation and building a culture of peace in the community. These campaigns slowly helped re-establish peace in the region as the people began to experience the fruits of peace and reconciliation in the community.
Today, the LRA are officially known to be in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2008 after the failed Juba Peace Talk and has been sadly committing atrocities on the local people in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Peace Talk failed because the conditions agreed on before initiating the dialogue was not respected or possible to keep by the government. The rebels in exchange for cease fire and Peace Talk demanded first, the amnesty given be honest and secondly that the community and the government of Uganda do not refer the case to the International Criminal Court(ICC). The government agreed on these conditions and promised to protect the LRA leader from indictment which was rather not possible since the case was already referred to the honorable court. The government was not honest in its intentions to fulfill the conditions but led the LRA and the negotiating team to believe that it was willing to fulfill the conditions. Joseph Kony later realized there was no honesty in the agreement and refused to sign the final Peace Agreement and as a result the government resumed military attacked against the LRA in 2008.

However, since then Northern Uganda has enjoyed 5 years of uninterrupted peace without any case of armed conflict, displacement, or any instability associated with armed conflicts. The local population started to leave the displacement camps and returned to their ancestral homes in 2005 with the help and support of the government, local and international organizations.

**The Kony 2012 Campaign**

Invisible Children is a Non-Governmental Organization that started their activities by film production of the war-torn Northern Uganda in 2003 and it officially came into existence as a humanitarian organization in 2006. Invisible Children are storytellers with humanitarian, artistic, and entrepreneurship visions. Its head office is located in U.S. San Diego, CA. They also have offices in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo which run development projects in the war-affected region. Locally in Uganda it is believed to be a local organization that sponsors children, support development of children’s artistic talents and does schools reconstruction and renovations.

The Kony 2012 campaign has generally been of great surprise to the majority of the people of Northern Uganda since they were enjoying years of peace and reconciliation and above
all they heard the news from outside. The local people or Uganda as a whole was not aware that there was an international campaign for intervention in Uganda until much later. Interestingly enough, the main character in the film – Jacob is already a big man today, no longer the young boy presented in the films taken in 2003. Moreover, there are many who were very much affected by the conflict whose testimonies and attitudes today are worth sharing with the world, but were not included in the campaign.

The Kony 2012 campaign videos however portray the image that Uganda is still at war and Joseph Kony is still operating in the region. The campaign tells a true story that happened however between the years 1987 to 2006, where houses were burned by the rebels, men and women, children and adult were abducted, civilians were maimed and murdered in cold blood, civilians left their homes to live in camps, children lived in fear of abduction, sexual abuse and slaveries, many civilians became “night commuters” sleeping on verandas, hospitals and other safe places in fear of armed attacks at night. The film presents the history of Northern Uganda. It speaks of the armed conflict and sufferings that ended by 2007 with the ceasefire and later escape of LRA to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2008. It speaks of the past not the present.

The video Kony 2012 does not bring out the peacemaking, peacebuilding and reconciliation process in Northern Uganda. The campaign does not disclose the fact that families have left camps and have returned to their homes. That rural schools and health facilities have also moved back to their former locations and have increasingly improved with all primary children having access to free education sponsored by the government. It also undermines the efforts of other local and international organizations in the peace process. Above all, the film does not portray the true interest of the local community of Northern Uganda, which is peace and justice through dialogue. It instead advocates for military solution for peace which will increase the possibility for the suffering of the civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The deployment of more troops in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo may facilitate the arrest of Kony, however on the other hand it is not a strategy which will protect the civilian population without harm and the abducted children from dangers of retaliation from the LRA leaders and crossfire as the offenders are being perused. Desperate criminals always end up committing graver offences when cornered. Additionally, military intervention may only
facilitate increase in crimes committed by the rebels and peace keepers as well. In the record of peace keeping, the peace keepers have left unpleasant and unprofessional records in many conflict zones. For instance, women in the Democratic Republic of Congo have been raped and sexually abused by peace keepers who have been separated from their families for months without sexual fulfillments. The demand of performing duties in conflict zones for extended periods also separate husbands and or wives from their spouses as well as children, hence increasing global rate of divorce and suffering of children. These potentially negative consequences can be prevented if energies and resources can be diverted to promoting long-term peace through dialogue between the various Great lake States and the various rebel groups, not only LRA instead of the militarized campaign advocated by Kony 2012.

**Conclusion**

Taking a leaf from Central America, it is on record that the five States of Central America; Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador, had serious internal and external conflicts and they tried military remedies for peace before they finally resorted to the Esquipulas Peace Processes in the 1980s. Central American States were accusing each other of giving refuge and support for the neighboring States rebel groups. The first attempt of the Peace Process failed but the States never gave up. They later reorganized themselves, built trust among themselves and resumed the Esquipulas (II) Peace Process which finally brought a lasting peace among the Central American States. Though there are still some internal conflicts within the States and border conflicts among the States, the Esquipulas Peace Agreement is still credited for the stability enjoyed between the States and developments in the region. The Great Lakes Region can take a leaf from the role-model set by the Central American countries and initiate a peace dialogue with honest intentions to bring a holistic and sustainable resolution of the violence afflicting its societies and peoples. Military intervention and court trials cannot in my view permanently solve these problems.
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Over the past 10 days, since the Kony 2012 film and campaign went viral, I have reviewed over a hundred or more articles, reports and blog commentaries. They included viewpoints in favour of the campaign as well as those expressing criticisms and raising many questions.

The brief response video produced by Invisible Children last week (March 12th) did not also change my overall assessment of the value and intention of this campaign. This response primarily sought only to defend the groups’ financial records, reaffirmed the rightness of the campaign, and avoided responding to other substantive criticisms. Most importantly, the additional response of Invisible Children stressed that Kony 2012 was carefully thought out and deeply “strategic”.

In my view, this claim “deeply thoughtful” and “strategic” approach will not bring sustainable peace and well-being to the people most affected by the LRA in northern Uganda and neighbouring countries, but rather serves primarily the narrow interest and agenda of one particular NGO and powerful nations and international/local elites. Essentially, it represents a pornography of violence, whereby the empathy of viewers is exploited to feel the suffering and pain of the LRA victims through a film and social media to raise funds and enhance the influence of an NGO. Moreover, as pointed out by many commentators, including other members of this UPEACE Forum panel, why did the producers of Kony 2012 fail to inform viewers that the LRA is no longer active in northern Uganda since 2006? Furthermore, as later analyzed, viewers are emotionally pulled towards a “solution” that justifies expanded militarization in the Ugandan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Central African Republic region.

I would like to make a few further points that link the local, national and regional situation involving the LRA and the agendas of national/international elites and the global
context of militarization and geo-strategic interests of powerful nations, especially the United States.

First, the constant argument of the campaign that the situation of child soldiers in northern Uganda and neighbouring countries is “invisible” needs to be challenged. The human rights violations suffered by children recruited as combatants and forced into supporting roles or as sex slaves have been highly visible globally for some 20 years now.

For example, in 1996, the UN Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict, Graca Machel, prepared a well-known report Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, which included the recruitment of child soldiers was followed up by a 10 year review (UNICEF, 2006). Many inter-governmental and international and local NGOs have implemented programs in DDR (disarmament, demobilization, reintegration) for ex-child combatants. These include psychosocial trauma healing, encouraging communities to overcome distrust, anger and prejudices to welcome back and reconcile with the child combatants and educational and training programs to facilitate transition to civilian life. In 1998, the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers emerged to advocate DDR programs for child ex-combatants worldwide.

In northern Uganda, many local NGOs and church-based organizations have played dedicated roles, often with inadequate resources, in helping ex-child combatants as well as adults who have suffered from LRA atrocities, and also from the actions of the Ugandan Peoples Defence Forces actions. In Uganda and the DRCongo, many international NGOs (e.g., Caritas, OXFAM, World Vision, Save the Children) with intergovernmental, bilateral and citizens’ funding and partnership, have also implemented DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) programs for ex-child combatants. Why did the Kony 2012 film and campaign not acknowledge and show solidarity for such local and international efforts?

One prominent local group already mentioned by other panelists is the Acholi Religious Leaders for Peace Initiative (ARLPI), which has won a number of international peace prizes for their inspirational efforts to bring peace to the region. In 2004, ARLPI led by Archbishop Odama and Anglican Bishop went on a speaking tour of USA, Canada and Europe to publicize...
the tragic conflict in northern Uganda. Later, in Jan 2006, Archbishop Odama addressed the UN Security Council with this moving appeal:

"I have come here to bring to the ears of people who can do something for the crying of children, the cries of their beloved mothers and of their families... There are some who describe this war as forgotten; for many others it is the planet's least known conflict... What should I say to the people of northern Uganda when I return from New York... That the members of the Security Council will continue to remain silent while children are kidnapped and killed and men and women continue to suffer violent attacks every day?"

Archbishop Odama’s speech at the U.N. was influential in raising the level of humanitarian aid to northern Uganda to help those who have suffered from LRA atrocities. Surely an NGO like Invisible Children with a primary interest in the impact of the LRA would be familiar with the peacebuilding efforts of the ACRLPI and other Ugandan NGOs and CSOs? Why were viewers of Kony 2012 not be alerted to such local Ugandan efforts to help ex-child soldiers and other victims of the LRA, and in turn encouraged to support these programs?

A further point to highlight is the recommendation of Kony 2012 to “solve” the LRA problem ultimately by “arresting” Joseph Kony. This inevitably means expanding external military intervention in Uganda, the DRC and CAR. Now such militarized intervention in the region is not new. But what the Kony 2012 film failed to acknowledge is that the outcomes of such militarized intervention has caused even more suffering and human rights violations of ordinary civilians. This was seen in 2002, under Operation Iron Fist, when Ugandan troops went into Sudan and together with the Sudanese military, sought to pursue Kony and LRA. The operation was not successful and more civilians were killed, displaced or abducted as child soldiers by the LRA. Again, in 2008, Operation Lighting Thunder involving the UPDF with limited joint DRC and Sudanese military participation and the support of some US military officers, failed to capture Kony. In retaliation, the LRA killed over 1000 civilians and abducted more children. Over 200,000 civilians were also displaced by the fighting.
Not only does it fail to reveal such failures of military campaigns against the LRA, the Kony 2012 film and campaign advocates expanding military intervention after President Obama has already sent 100 US military personnel in Oct 2011, under the U.S. Congress’s LRA & Northern Uganda Recovery Act. Clearly, there seems little concern by the Kony 2012 campaign leaders about how many more civilians will be hurt or killed in the ensuing crossfires and how even more abductions will occur. As the UN Special Rapporteur for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, also cautioned, efforts to capture Joseph Kony will invariably endanger the child soldiers who are a part of the LRA (Roopanarine, 2012).

Most importantly, why does Invisible Children and its Kony 2012 campaign not listen to the consistent appeal of ARLPI and other Ugandan peace advocates that sustainable resolution of the LRA conflict should be through dialogue, peacetalks, mediation, reconciliation and reintegration, including the serious problem of land ownership conflicts? (Apuuli, K.P., 2012; Jacques, 2011; Mamdani, 2012). Indeed, the peacetalks that began at Juba and were nearly completed with the extensive mediation efforts of ARLPI and other Ugandan peacebuilders, demonstrated that dialogue and indigenous values of reconciliation are indispensable for a sustainable resolution of the long-standing conflict. In contrast, militarized strategies only escalated the cycle and spiral of violence, death and human rights violations.

Finally, an increasing number of commentators within Africa and internationally have argued that the Kony 2012’s push for increased militarization to “end” Kony and the LRA needs to be understood in the wider geo-strategic context of US political and economic policies in Africa. The launching by the U.S. Government of its African Command (AFRICOM) in 2007 is seen as a significant signal of the USA’s growing concern over its influence in Africa, especially to counter China’s expanding economic and political power in a very resource-rich continent (Branch, 2012; Pilger, 2011; Rozoff, 2009). AFRICOM has been cultivating ties with many militaries and Governments in Africa via aid, joint training exercise and the training of African military officers, including the Ugandan Peoples Defence Force, which received over $40 million in military aid recently. The contingent of 100 U.S. soldiers sent by the Obama Administration last October 2011, seem likely to grow in numbers with the current new Congressional resolution lodged in March 2012 urging increased “robust” U.S involvement in the region. Last but not least, among those critical of Kony 2012, the recent discovery of huge
oil deposits in the Lake Albert region of Uganda, as well as the well-known vast mineral resources in the DRCongo, point to a major strategic economic motivation for greater political influence that will be strengthened in part by an enhanced military presence.

In sum, the production and distribution of the Kony 2012 film and campaign via social media is deeply flawed on several grounds: arousing emotions and empathy to raise funds and support its vision/goals without educating viewers on the long-term and holistic realities, as well as the root causes of the LRA conflict; failing to acknowledge and promote international solidarity for the significant and courageous efforts of Ugandan civil society leaders, communities and organizations to overcome and heal from the conflict; devaluing the strategy of nonviolent action, dialogue and reconciliation to sustainably resolve the conflict and encouraging increased militarized intervention in the region without acknowledging that it will serve more the geo-strategic interests of international and local elites than meet the needs of African peoples in the region for peace, justice and reconciliation. It is meaningful to conclude with the words of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLP), who, in their March 13th response to Invisible Children (IC)’s Kony 2012 film and campaign, recommended that:

“i. IC should push for revival of the peace talks that stalled in Juba. Even the US strategy to support the Disarmament of the Lord's Resistance Army released on 24th November 2010 noted, 'There is no purely military solution to the LRA threat and Impact' (page 9). IC should learn more about the conflict and to talk to people affected - including those who might not share their confidence in a military "solution".

ii. Such campaigns should be launched in the affected region with full information of current trends of the conflicts. IC should help to get their voice and those of their brothers and sisters in S.Sudan, DRC and CAR heard – by way of newsletters and statements to the attention of the international community.

iii. Invisible Children is more pronounced in the region for its programme of renovating depilated schools and giving scholarships for war affected children. As an NGO Invisible Children should play a neutral role in a military conflict. Like Resolve (Resolve Uganda), IC were instrument for recent US deployment by agitating the LRA disarmament bill of 2010.
iv. Since IC has been so successful in raising funds in the name of the victims of the LRA violence, it would be good to share such resources with partner organizations struggling to respond to the insecurity and the consequences for their communities.”

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References


**Post-script**

On April 5th, Invisible Children released a new 20 min film called *Kony 2012: Part II Beyond Famous*. (Youtube link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_Ue6REkeTA). As the UPEACE Forum and the views of two panelists were written before this follow-up film was circulated on social media, this post-script highlights a number of further critical reflections.

First, *Kony 2012: Part II Beyond Famous* did not take the opportunity to apologize for misleading viewers in the first film about the current realities of northern Uganda. It does now inform viewers that the LRA is no longer in Uganda and also briefly mentions the violent consequences of the failed 2008 military operation. The language of R2P is also used to justify the campaign to “stop” Kony and the LRA, but no mention is made of the refusal of the ICC to indict Ugandan leaders for war crimes in the DR Congo despite the 2005 ruling of the
International Court of Justice in favour of the DRC’s case against Uganda for its military intervention in the DRC over 1996-2001. Moreover, Kony 2012 Part II remains highly skeptical about a peace process based on mediation and negotiation which in its view has continually failed, and primarily blames the LRA for this failure. It affirms the bipartisan resolutions which have been introduced in the U.S. Congress to stop Kony and the LRA, and also applauds the recent March 23rd African Union plan to send 5000 AU troops to “capture” or “neutralize” Kony. Also, Kony 2012 Part II now talks of a "comprehensive" approach that includes “civilian protection”, “peaceful surrender”, and “rehabilitation and reconstruction” but vitally also the necessity of arresting the top LRA leadership without which the LRA conflict will, in Invisible Children’s view, not end.

However, this Part II film still does not explain why some of these realities were not included in the first film. If they were surely already known to Invisible Children leaders, why wait until a second film is produced? The analysis of why the peace process failed is also problematic, as it fails to consider the role of the Ugandan Government and external actors such as the USA and Kony 2012 Part II, even with its reference to a “comprehensive” strategy, still gives a de facto emphasis on militarized action rather than a resumption of dialogue, peace talks and reconciliation. In this regard, the Part II film does include a one sentence quote from Bishop Nelson Onono-Onweng, an Acholi church leader prominent in the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI) , where the Bishop says that "the effort of joint military force trying to look for Kony, to me I think that is the best way forward”. To date, however, the official website of the ARLPI does not indicate that the group has changed its assertive position on promoting a negotiated peace process. As clearly put in its response on the U.S. Congress, LRA & Northern Uganda Recovery Act, “as the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, we firmly believe that peace talks are the most likely solution leading to sustainable regional peace in the LRA affected regions of Eastern Africa.” This preference for the peace process rather than a militarized campaign was reiterated in the recent March 13th 2012 open letter response of ARLPI to Kony 2012 (Part I), which included Bishop Onono-Onweng as an endorser.

Furthermore, the Part II film chose not to directly include voices that have emerged with critical commentaries on the first film. All interviewees, including from Uganda and DRC and the ICC
Prosecutor Jose Luis Moreno-Ocampo, were in favour of *Invisible Children’s* approach and the Kony 2012 campaign. While it has included some information or ideas missing in Part I, *Invisible Children’s* responses to these global criticisms have been rather selective. In the end, “solving” the LRA problem still accentuates and revolves around the central role and “ideology” of *Invisible Children*. Still absent is a willingness to recognize and to engage in solidarity with a wide range of dedicated local and other international NGOs and CSOs in helping the peoples of Uganda and neighbouring countries to empower themselves in building sustainable peace, reconciliation and justice.

The last part of the film then goes on to mobilize support globally for the Kony 2102 April 20th “Cover the Night” event, using slogans such as "our liberty is bound together", and making a "better world" and linking the event to voluntary community service actions (e.g., clean ups). These may be “catchy” slogans, but hopefully all those who have been convinced by Kony 2012 Part I and Part II to join the Stop Kony campaign, including Hollywood, music and sports celebrities and the ICC Prosecutor, will look more closely and critically at the root causes of the conflicts and the wider context of peacebuilding in the African region and pause to ask: *are all the enthusiasm, energies and resources that have been generated really going to help resolve the conflicts toward sustainable peace and enhance the well-being of peoples in the region, or rather are those energies and commitment being channeled and unwittingly contributing to an ongoing cycle of militarization, structural violence and pursuit of geo-strategic interests?*