

>> Arrested. Tried. Convicted: What we want for Joseph Kony

For ten years we at Invisible Children have been pursuing a permanent end to LRA violence and pushing the international community to arrest and try the group's leader, Joseph Kony, in order to set a precedent for international justice.

While on this journey we have always been aware of the possibility that Kony could be killed in the course of this manhunt. When Lt. Colonel Vincent Binansio "Binani" Okumu, a senior commander in the Lord's Resistance Army, was killed in a clash with Ugandan forces last January, we decided to formally articulate our thoughts and feelings on the subject here.

In a better world, Binani would have been apprehended like his senior officer, Caesar Achellam. In May 2012, Brigadier General Caesar Achellam was tracked, surrounded, and captured in the Central African Republic. Members of his group--including two captive women and a child--were rescued and are now receiving care and rehabilitation. Once he had been transported back to Uganda, Achellam began recording messages that encouraged other members of the LRA to lay down their weapons and return home. He assured them that he was safe and they could be, too. With every combatant that surrenders, the LRA conflict is one step closer to ending.

Yet it is very possible that Kony will not take that route. According to the widely-respected [field research](#) of Ledio Cakaj, Kony is determined not to be captured alive:

"Kony's resolve to fight until the end appears strong. Former fighters claim that Kony, who refers to himself at times as King David, Solomon, or even Hitler, has said he will never be captured alive or surrender. Kony apparently fears being killed or poisoned by the Ugandan government if he decided to come out peacefully. Kony has been known to frequently mention the case of former SPLA leader John Garang who died in an air crash aboard a Ugandan army helicopter in July 2005 returning from a visit in Uganda. Kony believes he will suffer a similar fate."

Historically, pursuing the capture of an internationally indicted war criminal who is still actively perpetrating violence is a very unusual and somewhat unprecedented mission. In many ways, that is the point. We are trying to set a new precedent and a new model of criminal justice in which it's expected that perpetrators of war crimes will be arrested and sent to trial. But we are not there yet.

The tactics practiced by the countries and institutions of the world do not reflect the perspective that all humans have equal value, regardless of nationality or creed. According to this outmoded model, nations have armies that are built for war. They have armies that have the weapons and tools to invade, conquer, and kill for the sake of their national security. International processes for

apprehending and prosecuting armed indictees like Joseph Kony are virtually untested. The United Nations has had very limited success, and at ten years old the International Criminal Court has made only small strides.

The system can't change unless it is challenged. Already, this manhunt for Joseph Kony is setting a major precedent. If Joseph Kony is successfully apprehended, it will serve as proof that it is possible for an international arrest operation of this kind to succeed. Even more than that, it is proof that human interest can trump traditional definitions of self-interest and national interest. The involvement of the International Criminal Court, European Union, United Nations, African Union, United States, and four regional governments is remarkable progress in itself.

But, if his arrest is not possible and Joseph Kony is killed by those pursuing him, that will still be a very good day for the hundreds of thousands of people who are living in fear and are vulnerable to his senseless violence. For those communities in northeast DR Congo and southeast Central African Republic, the morality of this pursuit is very clear. They have done no wrong. They have no connection to the LRA's stated purpose or founding mission. They just want Kony to be stopped by whatever means necessary.

We are working toward a world where every person on the planet has equal and inherent rights. And if those rights are abused in the most extreme ways, an immediate and just defense will be triggered. Just as the vulnerable would be protected, perpetrators would be arrested and sentenced through a credible system of international criminal justice. Not only would it be an automatic response to war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, but it would also serve as a deterrent to any would-be war criminals.

Arrested. Tried. Convicted. That is what we want for Joseph Kony and the remaining top commanders.

As we reflect on Binani's death, Achellam's capture, and the pursuit of Kony, we remember the 470,000 people who are currently displaced in central Africa. We remember the 517 people who were abducted last year. We remember the people in northern Uganda, Central African Republic, DR Congo, and South Sudan who have lost family members to abduction or murder. And we look forward to the day that these areas of central and East Africa will be free of the LRA threat and free to recover and rebuild what war took from them. On that day, Invisible Children will be there, standing beside them.

Will we celebrate Kony's death? No. Will we celebrate the day he is no longer fighting? Absolutely.

Ben Keesey
CEO, Invisible Children
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