

WikiLeaks: Kony 2012 creators spied for Uganda

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An armed fighter of the Lord's Resistance Army (AFP Photo / Stuart Price)

The Invisible Children NGO, most famous for its Kony 2012 online video, helped the Ugandan government arrest a former child soldier and backed an operation that killed more civilians than militants, cables published by Wikileaks reveal.

A memo written by a public affairs officer at the US embassy in Uganda documents Invisible Children's collaboration with Ugandan intelligence services. It notes that the US-based NGO tipped the Ugandan government on the whereabouts of Patrick Komakech, a former child soldier for the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), who was wanted by security officials for extorting money from the government officials, NGO's and local tribal leaders. Ugandan security organizations jumped the tip and immediately arrested Komakech.

As a result of the tip, the Ugandan military claimed it obtained the names of other suspects from Komakech. The military then conducted a sweep and arrested a number of people, many of whom declared their innocence, the Ugandan media reported. Human rights groups say torture of arrested suspects by Ugandan security forces is routine.

Invisible Children also actively supported Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT), a joint attack by Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the then-autonomous South Sudan against the LRA. The operation, which was also received US intelligence and logistical backing, killed more civilians than LRA militants.

In a confidential memo dating back to 2009, US ambassador to Uganda Steven Browning noted that the US-based NGO planned pro-OLT events under the theme "Kony Must Be Stopped. Rescue Our Children".

Browning says local Invisible Children activists led the events. These events included visiting Washington to meet with lawmakers and conducting awareness campaigns in the US, the UK, Australia, Canada and Mexico.

But Norbert Mao, a Ugandan opposition politician who, Browning claimed, "honchoed" the 2009 events, disputes the veracity of the ambassador's assessment.

"I did not support OLT," Mao told The Black Star News "It was an operation to rain bombs in the areas where Kony was believed to be participating and would lead to indiscriminate killing of those the operation was intended to rescue. But even so, I believe there is no purely military solution to the LRA issue. Even after the release of Kony 2012 I stated clearly

that the doors to peaceful solutions must never be closed”.

Kony 2012 has been viewed over 100 million times and Invisible Children is now planning to release a sequel to the video. It has been criticized for oversimplified the issue, in which religious fundamentalism and century-long intertribal conflicts intertwine. It has also been accused of providing financial aid for the Ugandan government and Sudan People’s Liberation Army, both of which have regularly been charged with human rights violations. Invisible Children denied this claim, however. It has also been blamed for being heavy on advocacy and weak on aid, with most of the money spent for staff salaries, travel and transport and film production.

The release of the video followed a decision by US President Barack Obama to deploy 100 US soldiers to the region to help “remove” Joseph Kony from the picture.

The conflict between the Ugandan government, led by Yoweri Museveni, and the Lord Resistance Army, led by Joseph Kony, has lasted for over two decades.

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