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U.S. Congress to Discuss Call to Resume LRA Peace Talks

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NEWS

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Washington, D.C.

United States Congressman Donald Payne (Democrat-New Jersey) has announced the introduction of a House of Representatives resolution urging the Ugandan government and rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) back to the negotiating table.

Payne's announcement on Thursday came just one day after a ceasefire agreement between the two sides expired. Payne is co-sponsoring the resolution with Congressman Hank Johnson (Democrat-Georgia).

"We are going to introduce a resolution to call on the Ugandan government and LRA to resume talks so that the political solution can come about," said Payne, who chairs the U.S. House of Representatives Sub-committee on Africa.

"Unless there is a resumption of a time period, it can be assured that they will go back to hostilities... I think we need to really concentrate, try to get the talks back on line, and try to get cooperation from the governments in the region."

Payne also announced that Republican Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas and Democratic Senator Russell Feingold of Wisconsin are introducing a similar measure in the Senate. [The Brownback-Feingold resolution passed the Senate on Friday.](#)

Payne made the statement at a meeting on Capitol Hill, organized by the Enough initiative and the United States Institute of Peace, on the prospects for peace in northern Uganda. Experts argued at the meeting that the United States needs to take a more active role in resolving the 20-year old conflict.

"I think this is the easiest war in Africa to resolve," said John Prendergast, a senior adviser at the International Crisis Group. "We don't need billions of dollars, we don't need U.S. troops, we just need the U.S. to take some diplomatic leadership to end one of the most horrific wars in the world."

Michael Poffenberger, executive director of Resolve Uganda, a grassroots movement for peace in northern Uganda, echoed Prendergast's call for U.S. leadership. "There has been no thoughtful leadership from State Department officials in the region to strengthen the viability of the negotiations process," Poffenberger said.

Poffenberger, whose organization lobbies the U.S. public and policymakers, criticized President George W. Bush for not making a phone call to Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni about the peace talks.

Poffenberger also found U.S. apathy toward the peace talks discouraging. "In our meetings, it is entirely unsatisfying to be told that the U.S. is doing everything that it can, it is all about private diplomacy, and their public diplomacy has all been on other issues," he said.

Betty Bigombe, a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace, argued that with robust diplomacy and strong support from the international community, there is still hope that the peace process which began in Juba in southern Sudan in 2006 could succeed.

Bigombe and Prendergast have just returned from a trip to northern Uganda, where they visited camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). "When I introduced him [Prendergast] as an American," Bigombe said, "the question that he kept getting all the time was what are the Americans doing about this war. If Americans wanted this war to end, it would have ended."

Bigombe also reported that important leaders of the Acholi, the main ethnic group in northern Uganda, are meeting soon to brainstorm ideas to restart talks.

All speakers agreed the northern Uganda peace process has reached a critical juncture. Gayle Smith, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, described the peace process as "literally teetering on an edge".

The event was the second in a series of meetings focusing on Africa's hotspots sponsored by Enough. The initiative, subtitled "The project to abolish genocide and mass atrocities," was co-founded this year by Smith and Prendergast. It hopes to combine analysis, advocacy, and activism to end wars and crimes against humanity in northern Uganda, in Darfur and in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Link:

[Senate Passes Resolution Calling for Recommitment to the Peace Talks](#)

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