

Denial. The army spokesperson says their investigations reveal that the allegations are unfounded.

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UPDF accused of sexual abuses in CAR

KAMPALA. The Uganda People's Defence Forces (UPDF) yesterday shrugged off allegations that its rank and file were involved in sexual assault crimes in the Central African Republic (CAR).

"We carried out investigations and we didn't find anybody culpable. If this had happened, we would not cover it up," army spokesperson, Brig Richard Karemiro told *Saturday Monitor* by telephone.

"Such allegations will always be there. And it's quite unfortunate that someone can come up with such allegations," he added even as sources in Bangui, the capital of CAR, claimed the Ugandan army, in a bid to cover its tracks, airlifted the accused back to Kampala.

The army spokesperson was reacting to questions from *Saturday Monitor* after *BBC* aired and published on its platforms stories of a one, 13-year-old Eloise, who claims she is mothering a nine-month-old child allegedly sired by a Ugandan soldier, and another 14-year-old Mirie, also from CAR, who dreads to recall the day she was allegedly raped by a UPDF soldier.

Eloise told the *BBC* that when she was 12, a Ugandan soldier, deployed to protect her town, Obo ironically attacked her.

"My mother sent me to the market to buy something," she said. "On the way, a Ugandan soldier grabbed me. He dragged me to a nearby lodge [hotel] and raped me."

On the other account, Mirie has this to say: "I was going to the field to work and on my way, I was grabbed by a Ugandan. He was violent, he attacked me and he raped me. When I think



On mission. UPDF soldiers in Central Africa Republic. PHOTO BY RISDEL KASASIRA

about this, it hurts me. I didn't expect it at all. "If I had a knife or machete I would have tried to attack him."

Uganda put its boots on the ground in CAR in 2009 after it was reported that the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels were causing instability in the densely forested western town of Obo.

In 2010, the US government sent 100 of its Special Forces soldiers to support the UPDF in intelligence gathering on LRA activities in CAR.

The Ugandan army has been the only active African force hunting down the rebels in the jungles, but in 2012, regional governments agreed to form a Regional Task Force (RTF) under the African Union to boost the fight against LRA. Forces from DR Congo, South Sudan

and CAR were supposed to deploy under the RTF.

The LRA is currently estimated at between 150-200 fighters, with less than 130 of them armed.

The LRA leader, Joseph Kony faces indictment by the Interna-

tional Criminal Court (ICC) for war crimes and crimes against humanity, which he committed during the 20-year insurgency he waged in northern Uganda killing thousands, and displacing more.

He remains at large, but while speaking to *BBC's* Hard Talk show in 2012, President Museveni said Kony and his men had been defeated and had run away more than a thousand miles away in CAR.

The latest allegations, however, are not unique to the UPDF. The *BBC* also reported that some soldiers of former CAR colonial master France have also been accused of sexually abusing boys, girls and women.

This newspaper was unable to independently verify the

Other cases

The *BBC* also said the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, last July said his office had interviewed 18 women who said they had faced sexual violence and harassment by Ugandan soldiers. Fourteen cases of alleged rape, including cases involving victims who were minors at the time, were also reported, all in and around Obo.