Inside amnesty commission scorecard

Justice Peter Onega says 13,605 former LRA combatants have been granted amnesty since 2000.

BY FRANKLIN DRAKU

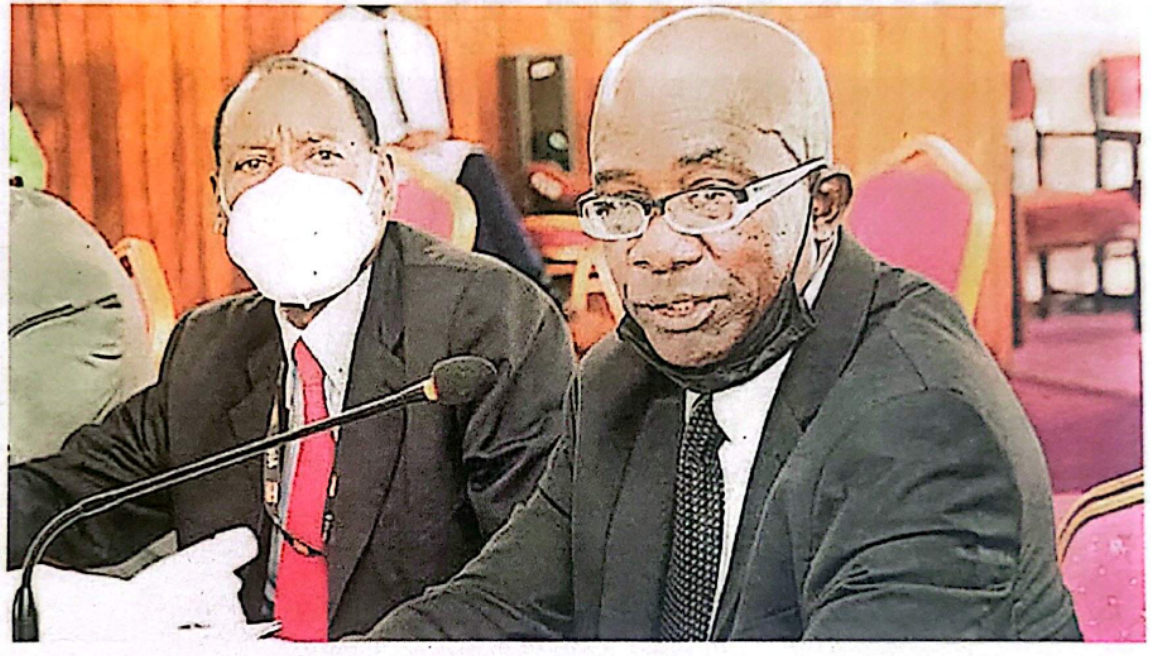
The Amnesty Commission has granted amnesty to 28,340 former rebels over the past 25 years, officials have said, as they renewed calls for those still in rebellion to lay down their arms and take advantage of the ongoing amnesty window.

Addressing journalists at the Uganda Media Centre on Tuesday, the Commission Chairperson, Justice Peter Onega, said the largest number of beneficiaries were former fighters of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), led by Joseph Kony.

Justice Onega said 13,605 former LRA combatants have been granted amnesty since 2000. The defunct West Nile Bank Front, led by Juma Oris, accounts for 6,580 former rebels, while the Uganda National Rescue Front under Ali Bamuze has had 3,250 members pardoned.

The Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) accounts for 2,764 beneficiaries, while 26 other rebel groups make up 2,140 of those granted amnesty.

Justice Onega said the government is currently engaging ADF fighters to encourage them to renounce rebellion and seek amnesty.



Amnesty Commission Chief Legal Advisor Nathan Twino and Acting Secretary Jebel Bwowe appear before the Defence Committee at Parliament in December 2021. PHOTO / FILE

"The commission is aware that a number of Ugandans in the ADF and LRA are still outside the country and we would like them to come back home. If they fear to come out, there are places or people they could approach who will deliver them to the Amnesty Commission," he said.

Uganda has grappled with multiple insurgencies over the last four decades, including the LRA, the West Nile Bank Front, the Uganda National Rescue Front factions, and the ADF, which was founded by Jamil Mukulu.

> **Stigma.** Stigmatisation is still common with some returnees, especially women and children. They find their lives different from the kind of lives they were living before, and this affects their reintegration– Justice Peter Onega

Justice Onega also revealed that former fighters linked to the Holy Spirit Movement led by Alice Lakwena are believed to be in Kenya, and efforts are underway to encourage them to return and benefit from the amnesty process.

"Apart from the ADF and LRA, which have not been fully demobilised, we also have a group that has not been much talked about, the former group of Alice Lakwena. Some of them are still outside the country, and we are trying to convince them to surrender rebellion and come home," he said.

Despite the progress made, Justice Onega acknowledged that the commission still faces a backlog in processing and reintegrating former combatants.

"We still have a backlog of 3,001 reporters (people who reported to the Amnesty Commission and are seeking amnesty) to reintegrate and 4,337 to resettle, which we need to complete," he said.

He noted that many returnees continue to face challenges, including stigma, particularly women and children.

"Stigmatisation is still common with some returnees, especially women and children. They find their lives different from the kind of lives they were living before, and this affects their reintegration," he said.

Some former combatants are also dealing with physical disabilities, illness and psychosocial trauma acquired during their time in the bush, which further complicates their return to civilian life.

Justice Onega added that high mobility among ex-combatants has made follow-up efforts difficult.

"After reintegrating them and taking them back to their villages, the commission is supposed to follow up and see how they are progressing. But some are highly mobile moving from village to village or town to town and this makes it difficult to trace them," he said.

CamScanner