

GLOBAL  CONFLICTS

CHILD SOLDIERS



SERIOUS GAMES
INTERACTIVE

Topics Overview

Topics Overview

GC: Child Soldiers - Topics Overview

Using this Topics Overview

This booklet provides an introduction to Uganda as it is featured in Global Conflicts: Child Soldiers and to the central topics in the game. The aim of the topics overview is to offer background information relevant to the game topics in order to ensure more productive classroom discussions and provide a comprehensive picture of the challenges that many people in Uganda face in their everyday life.

Early history

Before the 19th Century, the part of Africa, which later became Uganda was ruled by various dynasties fighting for control of the territory. These dynasties rose and fell over the years, but many of the traditional area names have lasted to the present day: Buganda, Bunyoro and Ankole.

At the start of the 19th century, Arab merchants arrived in the area, selling firearms and cloth to the Buganda dynasty in exchange for ivory and slaves. They were followed by British explorers who, in 1894, made the country a British protectorate. Uganda stayed under various degrees of British rule for the next 70 years, but in 1962 the country was granted independence, and the first elections were held that same year. The first prime minister was Milton Obote.

Part of the present conflict in Uganda springs from the ethnic division between northern and southern Ugandans. The former British rule favoured the Buganda dynasty located in the southern part of Uganda, while the northern region was neglected. This policy was carried on after Uganda claimed independence and is still experienced by the northern Ugandans today. They feel that their part of the country does not get sufficient attention when it comes to social and financial development.

Coups & Idi Amin

From the mid 1960's to 1971, Uganda saw numerous coups and counter-coups. This placed the country in a constant state of instability as one leader replaced the other. It wasn't until 1971, when the notorious dictator Idi Amin (1925-2003) seized power with the help of the army, that government became stable. For the next decade, Amin imposed his iron rule on the already suffering country. A rule that led to the death of an estimated 300,000 Ugandans.

Amin began his military career in the British Colonial Army, rising through the ranks in the army until his influence was big enough to take the country by force.

In 1978, Amin ordered an attack on the Tanzanian province of Kagera, which led to his eventual demise. Amin was overthrown in 1979 by the joint effort of the Tanzanian army and Ugandan exiles. Amin escaped the rebel forces and fled the country, never to return to Uganda again. He died in Saudi Arabia in 2003.

Yoweri Museveni

Before the current president, Yoweri Museveni, came into power, Uganda saw another seven years of constantly changing leaders. At the time, Museveni was leading an insurgency as head of the NRA (National Resistance Army). In 1986, Museveni's forces succeeded in claiming the capital Kampala. Museveni then became president and has remained so ever since.

In the beginning of his rule, Museveni was hailed as a modern leader and a new hope for Uganda. In later years, his reputation has been somewhat tainted by concerns about oppression against political opponents, signs of corruption and electoral fraud.

The biggest problem in northern Uganda today is the war against the LRA. During the last twenty years of civil war, there has been several attempts to reach some kind of peace but so far without success.

The Lord's Resistance Army

The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was formed in 1987 and is led by Joseph Kony, who believes himself to be a prophet. The army is controlled by a mixture of religious beliefs and superstitions springing from as diverse sources as Christianity, Islam, witchcraft and mysticism. The main goal of the army is to bring down the Ugandan government and president Museveni and institute a rule based on the Ten Commandments from the Old Testament.

The LRA operates in northern Uganda and parts of Sudan and Congo, and has often eluded the Ugandan army by slipping across the borders into other countries in the area. The accusations against the LRA, from both the Ugandan government and international community, are numerous, and include crimes such as murder, rape, mutilations, kidnapping, and sexual slavery. The continued LRA attacks on villages in northern Uganda have created an urgent need for IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps in the country. In these camps, the government try to protect the population from the LRA. However, there are many reports of LRA attacking camps without the government forces being able to prevent it. There are even accounts of government soldiers assaulting or raping the people in the camps. At present around 1.7 million people are living in IDP camps in northern Uganda.

LRA are notorious for using kidnapped children as soldiers, and most of their attacks are aimed at the local Acholi people rather than at the government forces. Kony himself belongs to the Acholi, an ethnic group of northern Uganda. By attacking this particular group, the LRA tries to discredit the government while simultaneously punishing and scaring the population into submission.

Because of these kidnappings, many children in the small villages in Uganda walk long miles each night to get to the larger cities. Here they stay until the next morning, and

then walk back to their village. This way they try to avoid being kidnapped by roaming LRA groups who have been known to kidnap children from their homes at night. The children that do get kidnapped are forced to kill their friends and families. These murders are a way of brutalising the children and preventing them from returning to their villages. Over the course of the conflict, more than 20,000 children have been forced to become child soldiers by the LRA. Since these children constitute the core of the LRA forces, many see a military solution as a massacre of children who can be regarded as involuntary victims as much as perpetrators.

The International Criminal Court

Founded in 2002, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is located in The Hague, Netherlands. The purpose of the court is to prosecute crimes against humanity including genocide and war crimes. This is the first permanent criminal court of its kind.

The ICC can only exercise jurisdiction when national courts are unwilling or unable to investigate or prosecute such crimes, and it can only prosecute crimes committed after its founding date.

In 2005, a warrant for the arrest of Joseph Kony and his officers was issued by the ICC. The ultimate goal is to bring these men to trial for their crimes. Of the five LRA leaders, at least two are reported to have been killed, one of them apparently by Kony himself. Kony is still at large somewhere in the area.

Fact Sheet: Uganda

- * 20,000 children have been soldiers in LRA
- * About 1.7 million people are living in IDP camps
- * The civil war in Uganda has lasted for more than two decades
- * The average age of the inhabitants in Uganda is 15 years
- * Uganda spans 236,000 km²
- * The population is around 30.9 million people
- * Yoweri Museveni has been president of the country since 1986)
- * AIDS has been, and still is, a major health problem in Uganda

Child Soldiers in international perspective

Throughout history, children have been used as combatants in armed conflicts. A rough estimate claims that at least 250,000 children are presently employed as soldiers in various parts of the world. These conflicts are mainly located in Africa, but also Asia and South America are burdened by this kind of child abuse.

Many children join in these armed conflicts voluntarily, while others are forced or threatened to join. But either way, such children might often find themselves in situations that seem to leave no other alternative. Maybe their parents have been killed or imprisoned by the government. Maybe the family cannot support them, and they must find other ways to survive.

By taking part in these conflicts, child soldiers not only risk their life – they are also deprived of a normal upbringing and childhood. The psychological consequences are severe and will haunt the children for the rest of their lives. It takes a lot of help from society and governments to get these children reintegrated into society after they have been exposed to the horrors of war.

Serious Games Interactive
Griffenfeldtsgade 7A, 4 floor | 2200 Copenhagen N | Denmark
E-mail: info@seriousgames.dk | Web: seriousgames.dk
Phone: +45 4699 1550

© 2009 Serious Games Interactive ApS, All Rights Reserved