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This is part of a longer account, written at the time, of a brief visit I made last June to Gulu in Northern Uganda. At the time of that visit there were signs of an end to the rebellion that had since mid 1986 disrupted society and economy in Gulu and Kitgum, the two Acholi districts in the North, although sadly not in the Iteso districts of Kumi and Soroti to the east. Thus what I found in Gulu on my brief visit must necessarily be situated against the background of that conflict. My concern at the time however was not to investigate the causes of war but rather to understand better the consequences for the ordinary Ugandan.

By way of explanation the purpose of the journey was to visit a World Vision (Uganda) food relief project in Gulu, to which Australia had contributed emergency relief assistance.* I had learned of the project and of Australia's contribution some months before and given my long concern with Australian aid to Africa was very pleased when it became possible while I was in Uganda to see it for myself.

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We went by road (which with the exception of a seven mile stretch is pretty good) and the journey itself was exhilarating as well as revealing. We left very early in the morning, as the first shafts of sunlight were piercing the mists that wreath Kampala's hills at that hour; stopped for breakfast at the New Bulemezi Inn in Wobulenzi and then headed north through the green, untidy Buganda countryside. Luwero district seemed to be thriving again. Its recovery from the turmoil of five years of internal war was symbolised for me by the brilliant, indeed joyous display of yellow and red cannas that now line the main road through Luwero township itself: sentinels of a very different kind from the military road blocks we encountered on my last visit in 1984. The change of atmosphere from five years ago was obvious and reassuring. Beyond Luwero there was not a lot of traffic going north: the Masindi bus, the Operation Lifeline Sudan lorries, but virtually no private cars. For much of the time we had the road to ourselves. It was a journey I had not done for several years but remembered well. We passed the Nakasongola turn off; skirted the Game Reserve in Bunyoro (where today there is no game); passed the Masindi turn off; stopped for petrol at Kigumba (where business seemed also to be thriving, perhaps because of the convoys that pass through) and on to the Karuma Falls, over the bridge and into the rolling, open country of Acholi and the North. Two weeks previously there had been a serious attack on a bus on the road south of Gulu and we had expected to join a convoy at Karuma. In the event we were waved on, past all the waiting food relief lorries and we spend through to Gulu with no difficulty at all. Very little traffic, very few people around, our only encounter was with a group of young men who turned out to be a recently recruited militia group who seemed scarcely able to carry, let alone manage, their guns.

There was nothing particularly joyous about what greeted us in Gulu, where at that time there were an estimated 100,000 displaced persons (some would say more) who had fled the fighting in the countryside for the comparative safety of the town. The first had arrived in mid-August 1986, since when the movement in and out of the town had reflected the ebb and flow of the conflict and its changing location. The major increase had however been in the second half of 1988. Both sides, the NRA and the rebel fighters, were responsible for the

* I am very grateful both to the staff of World Vision (Uganda) who made this visit possible, and also to the World Vision (Australia) office in Melbourne who originally put me in touch with them.

dislocation of rural life that led to the exodus. The enormous influx at the end of the year was however the result of the National Resistance Army (NRA)'s decision to conduct a search and destroy offensive to flush out the last of the rebels who had refused to respond to the earlier government amnesties and the agreement signed last June with the major insurgent group. The strategy seemed to have succeeded, since after January there appeared to be only pockets of poorly armed bandit bands left; able to raid (on occasion into the centre of Gulu town), to harass traffic, but not seriously to challenge the NRA. The price paid for this victory however had been high in terms of the dislocation of Acholi society and economy, as the build up to 120,000 displaced persons in Gulu itself by January testified.

Gulu town was thus strained far beyond its capacity. Refugees with relatives in town took shelter with them; others went to the churches or to the mosque. The great majority however were accommodated in fifteen locations around the town and the peri-urban areas, turning Gulu into "one vast camp". The Holy Rosary Church for example had given over their tailoring school, a quadrangle of buildings around a dusty compound, to house several hundred people. The former Caribbean night club, a large barn-like hall long since abandoned as a place of entertainment, had become home to several hundred more, some of whom had (they said) been there since 1986. The walls were blackened by the smoke of charcoal cooking fires, the staleness of the air was evidence of the overcrowding. Conditions generally were appalling but perhaps the worst were at the railway station, unused for the past two years and over grown with long grass, where about three thousand people were camped in derelict railway wagons. There were many stories of survival techniques; earlier arrivals especially had managed to find casual jobs, to obtain the means to purchase food. Every space around the town was cultivated, with maize and sweet potato predominating. While security permitted, people had returned to abandoned homesteads to search out food, or foraged in the countryside. The fact that World Vision had felt the need to start a supplementary feeding programme for under five year olds last year suggests however that there was a limit to the extent to which such techniques could meet everyone's needs. Moreover gradually the reserves of food in and around Gulu were being used up. Gulu is a fertile district with high levels in food production in peaceful years. But the consequences of three years of rebel disturbances, looting and cattle raiding, and military action culminating in the NRA's end of year offensive had been a critical dislocation in agriculture, and a severe reduction in livestock. The countryside could not support the swollen population of the town. The Ministry of Relief and Social Rehabilitation which had been operating in Gulu since March 1986, had been struggling for months to offer some food relief but their supplies were totally inadequate. Thus by the beginning of 1989 the danger of a major food crisis was recognised.

The story of how that food crisis was averted must be left for another occasion, except to acknowledge the World Vision (Uganda)'s positive contribution, along with the ICRC and a handful of other agencies. Behind the immediate crisis situation however was the larger social and human dislocation the signs of which were not difficult to detect. Three encounters stood out. First we visited Pece Stadium where World Vision was distributing food relief to people from Bobi (not all that far from Gulu town). From a distance in the bright sunlight you might have been persuaded it was a picnic, with three hundred people or so sitting under the trees. But close up, I will never forget the look of deep apprehension in the eyes of the elderly woman putting out her hands to receive her ration. Second was the sight of the family who had walked from Koch (20 miles away) five days earlier to escape rebel bandit activity, sitting in one of the abandoned railway wagons at the station. They had, quite literally, nothing and their situation highlighted the rapidity with which decline into destitution can occur. Their apathy, despair, helplessness, seemed to epitomise the consequences of war for these ordinary villagers caught in the middle, and I

remembered the proverb about the elephants fighting! They reminded me all too vividly of one small group of old people I saw back in 1984, in the course of my visit through some of the camps in Luwero. They too had fled their homes to avoid fighting. They also had nothing. They too had simply been waiting, sitting under a tree. The family from Koch Goma were more vocal, especially at the inadequacy of the food ration they had been given by Relief and Social Rehabilitation. But their plight was the same. Third, at the Caribbean Night Club camp we had a long discussion with people from Attyak, about going home. At one level it was all very confusing. Some said they couldn't go home because there would be no grass to rebuild their homes (it would not be high enough to cut until September). Others pointed out that children were in school, some people had jobs, which suggested they had been among the early arrivals. But underneath it all the fear of conflict and insecurity was all too clear. Yes Attyak was now peaceful. No, they admitted, they were not yet sure. It highlighted the enormous difficulties in the way of reconstruction.

Against this the enormous resourcefulness of people also stood out. I had a fourth encounter that was a good deal more positive and for that reason alone deserved to be recorded. I met two very remarkable women, very different from each other but each in her own way seeking to respond to the needs of the large numbers of Acholi orphans that the conflict has produced. Mama Maream, a woman in her fifties I should think, walking with a crutch because she broke a leg last year, was doing her best to put some order into the lives of young orphans at the Holy Rosary camp. Mrs. O'dingkaru, wife of a former civil servant now returned from exile, had taken a number of children into her home, and the school she had set up; turning the government house and garden in which she was now living into something very like an Acholi homestead, (and growing maize on the golf course which was beyond her fence, which delighted me!).

Mrs. O'dingkaru told me of the Peace Demonstration the Gulu women had organised last April. A thousand women, young and old, singing Acholi funeral songs, had marched from Pece Stadium through the town to the DA's Office to present three resolutions for peace to the D.A. and the Resident Minister (Mrs. Betty Bigombe). The solemnity of the occasion was not in doubt, nor the fact that they were calling on both sides, NRA and rebels, to give up the conflict that threatened to become a running sore in the Uganda body politic as well as Acholi society if it did not cease. It was the story of the peace march above all that seemed to epitomise not just the impact of war on ordinary Ugandans but the hope for the restoration of peace.

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THREE REPORTS ON AIDS IN AFRICA

[I am grateful to the Editor of the National Aids Bulletin, published by the Aids Council of South Australia, on behalf of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations, for permission to reproduce the three reports which appear below. They were all published in the issue, Volume 3, Number 8, September 1989. The Bulletin itself may be obtained from AFAO, GPO Box 229, Canberra ACT 2601.]

AIDS in Africa

[Adapted from the introduction to 'Integrated AIDS Management: A conference of field workers', Nairobi, May 1988.]

Is the African pattern to be repeated in other countries? From what is understood of the disease, it could be and that is more than enough reason for the international community to be alerted not just to the special dimension of AIDS in Africa, but to the potentially special dimensions of AIDS in comparison to the nature of other diseases in the rest of the world.

Figures may speak to some people, but in the end, people speak to people. It is probably the case, unfortunately, that the world as a whole will not be alerted to the challenge on AIDS until it is felt personally by most families and individuals, because someone they know is ill or dead, as is happening now in many parts of Central and Eastern Africa.

The international community is obligated to observe and to facilitate the African response, which can in all probability provide answers for the rest of the world, through demonstrating skills in comprehensive and culturally appropriate management which integrates people. Africa contains the pattern on which the "global village" can be established.

One man, a retired civil servant, presented 18 months ago with diarrhoea and weight loss over a period of eight months. He was found to be seropositive. He mentioned at the time he was informed he was HIV+ that his son was also in the hospital. His son was aged 12, had generalised lymphadenopathy, and had a history of blood transfusion five years previously. The blood had been provided by his father. The man's two wives were contacted and agreed to having blood taken for testing for HIV. Both results tested positive. The man and one wife have since died. The son has been intermittently unwell.

AIDS is a family disease, particularly in Africa - not just in terms of infection of mother and father and children, but it is a family disease in terms of stress in the psychological, economic and social realms. It is no longer relevant to talk just of high risk behaviours or high risk groups. If one is alive in the average Central or East African community then one is at risk, when one speaks in the context of 1, 2, 5, and 10 percent prevalence rates and greater amongst the sexually active population and amongst children under five years of age. Every disease affects the family as a whole, and it can be expected that AIDS will manifest itself likewise but accentuated in its family impact in Africa by the nature of "extended family" in that continent, and by the unique pattern of penetration of the AIDS virus in families and communities. Not only prostitutes, those with STD, young men looking for a good time, but fathers, mothers, grandfathers, school goers, church goers, and children.