



## **ICC TRIAL AGAINST DOMINIC ONGWEN UNDERSCORES THE NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE VICTIMS' SUFFERING**

**6 December 2016** – The trial of Dominic Ongwen, a former commander of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which starts today in The Hague, presents the best prospect yet for victims of the brutal two-decade conflict in northern Uganda to have the terrible harm that they suffered acknowledged at last. Over 4,000 victims are participating in the case, which is a testament to the interest the case has generated in Uganda. But even so, the International Criminal Court (ICC) proceedings will only go so far; more remains to be done to provide justice and reparations to all victims of the conflict in Uganda.

Crimes against the civilian population of northern Uganda were committed on a wide scale during the lengthy conflict between the Government of Uganda and the LRA, including killings, torture, rape, forced marriage and sexual slavery. Many of the victims were left permanently disfigured and continue to suffer from the consequences of serious bodily injuries, mental health issues, and loss of livestock and other properties they relied on for their survival. Many children abducted by the armed group were never heard from again and families continue to wait in anguish to know the whereabouts of their loved ones.

The trial against Ongwen at the International Criminal Court (ICC) lays bare the intensity of suffering of victims in northern Uganda and their acute thirst for justice and redress. This is evidenced by the high number of victims who will participate in this trial. But many more were left out. The Court Registry's Victim Participation and Reparation Section – in charge of processing victims' requests to participate and specifically directed by the Chamber in this case to assist victims with the application process – indicated that it was unable to assist all those who wanted to apply within the short timeframe set by the Chamber.

The trial also highlights the need for more to be done to acknowledge and redress the harm suffered by all victims of the LRA conflict. Only victims of Ongwen's crimes – if he is convicted – will be entitled to reparation before the ICC and even then it is unlikely that Ongwen's assets or any added resources from the ICC's Trust Fund for Victims will be enough to repair the scale of the harm suffered.

At the same time, no reparations policy has been developed, adopted or implemented in Uganda to date. There are no government programmes to assist victims with their socio-economic recovery, medical and psychosocial care and parental responsibilities, including those women and girls who become pregnant after being raped during the war. The Government of Uganda has undertaken several measures to address the consequences of the war, but these are mainly development and reconstruction projects, and it has yet to offer an apology to the victims.

**“It is clear that the needs of the victims of the conflict in northern Uganda have not been properly addressed yet, despite the devastating effect that the crimes continue to have on survivors. This trial should act as a catalyst also for Uganda to take forward discussions that have stalled around the establishment of a comprehensive reparation policy,”** said Carla Ferstman, REDRESS’ Director.

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**REDRESS** is an international human rights organisation which seeks justice and reparation for survivors of torture and related international crimes. It accomplishes its mandate through litigation, research-based advocacy and capacity building, designed to strengthen the conditions necessary to end impunity for torture and afford survivors redress.