

PRESS RELEASE

"YEARS AFTER IT ENDED, ONGWEN'S CONVICTION IN FRONT OF THE ICC OPENS THE DOOR TO THE FIRST EVER REPARATIONS FOR VICTIMS OF THE ARMED CONFLICT IN NORTHERN UGANDA"

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With yesterday's judgment of the [International Criminal Court](#) (ICC), Dominic Ongwen has become the first Ugandan to be tried and convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The judgement and conviction of Dominic Ongwen is a major step in the right direction towards accountability for wide spread atrocities committed in the context of the conflict which has raged between the Lord Resistance Army and the government forces until the early 2000s.

There were 4065 victims who participated in the trial. The Presiding Judge of the ICC Trial Chamber IX, Judge Bertram Schmitt, powerfully listed their names as a recognition of the harm they suffered, before convicting Dominic Ongwen for 61 counts, including many charges of sexual and gender-based violence. The question however, is how this will translate for these victims, and more generally all the victims of the armed conflict in Northern Acholi. Many of them have clearly stated that beyond a conviction, reparation is key (<https://www.asf.be/blog/2017/07/12/a-beggar-has-no-choice/>) to enable them to heal from the harm and suffering they have endured during the conflict and still endure today.

Uganda has staged many armed conflicts since 1962, the longest and most brutal being the one between the LRA and the Government of Uganda. Yet, there has never been a reparations program developed and implemented by the government, in spite of [international standards](#) which recognise the right of victims of serious human rights and humanitarian law principle to reparation.

A conviction in front of the ICC opens a right for victims of the accused's crimes to reparation. The Ongwen case will therefore be the first real opportunity for victims in Uganda to access a formal reparations scheme. Still, only the victims from the communities of Pajule, Odek, Abok and Lukodi will be entitled to such measures, as the charges for which Ongwen has been convicted are limited to these geographical areas. This means that others thousands of victims of the LRA's abductions, killings and mutilations, who still have not seen justice for the harms they have suffered, will be left aside in the absence of concrete domestic initiatives. The government of Uganda has **officially released the National Transitional Justice Policy in September, 2019** (<https://www.asf.be/blog/2019/10/14/the-long-walk-uganda->

[adopts-a-transitional-justice-policy/](#)). Although reparations are one of the key areas of the policy, the policy has been formulated in a very vague manner on this topic, and is silent on among others the question of court-ordered reparations for victims of past atrocities. This has to be considered with more clarity in the Transitional Justice Act, and additionally it is also important the trial of Thomas Kwoyelo, that has been going on since 2011 before the International Crimes Division of the High Court of Uganda to be fast tracked.

It is hoped that Ongwen's conviction in front of the ICC will not only bring the so-long awaited justice and reparations for victims who suffered his crimes, but also acts as a catalyser for the National Transitional Justice Policy to be finally translated into acts, starting with reparations for all victims of the numerous armed conflicts in Uganda.