

Is Uganda Bleeding To Death?

[AN] Some sixty civilians were reportedly killed last week in the Mengo District, roughly forty miles north of the Ugandan capital, Kampala, and press dispatches say that most of them died at the hands of government soldiers who were searching for guerrilla forces in the area.

Events like those in Mengo have become commonplace in Uganda today, as the death toll mounts weekly, showing little sign of abating. A distressed President Milton Obote has repeatedly condemned international press coverage that exaggerates the extent of troubles in what he says are merely and handful of insecure areas. Obote has also redoubled efforts to keep a tighter grip on the problem areas, but given the lack of discipline among government forces, some security measures seem to feed the cycle of violence.

Some 600 specially-selected members of Obote's party are now completing a training course to prepare them for a watchdog role in the Ugandan army. And in early December the president set up a new 13-member security committee that includes religious leaders, two members of the opposition Democratic Party (DP) and three government officials. Its task is formidable.

Of primary concern to the government security apparatus are the anti-Obote political groups, including the DP. The DP continues to participate in the government in its minority role, but some party adherents have joined other groups in backing guerrilla action to oust Obote, who they claim gained power by fraud in the December 1980 election.

As of early this month five of the DP's 45 members of parliament were in prison awaiting treason trials, and, according to party leaders, up to 12,000 other supporters have been detained as well. President Obote denies the existence of large numbers of political prisoners or of a crackdown on DP members in particular.

In late June, leaders of four armed groups met in secret in Kenya where two of them, the Popular Resistance Army (PRA) led by Yoweri Museveni and the Uganda Freedom Fighters (UFF) headed by former President Yusufu Lule, united as the National Resistance Movement (NRM). Museveni is to lead the combined guerrilla forces, while Lule retains leadership of the political council.

Amin Links Denied
Two other groups chose to be "cooperative" rather than participate in the merger. One, the Uganda Freedom Movement (UFM), is led by Andrew Kayira, who was a minister in Lule's 1979 government. The other, the Uganda National Rescue Front, is headed by Brigadier Moses Ali, once finance minister under Idi Amin. Ali denies any current Amin connection and dismisses Amin's occasional claims that he still has forces loyal to him inside the country. Nonetheless, the inclusion of Ali in the anti-Obote unity attempts appears to be an unprecedented step toward reconciliation with former Amin partisans.

Red Cross sources say the government has no control north of Arua, the northwestern district in which Ali operates, along with Felix Onama and former Amin commander, Brigadier Emilio Mondo. A stalemate between guerrillas and government forces in the area has held since June, but this month the BBC reports there are plans afoot for the Ugandan army to simply burn off wide

acres in the locale to destroy brush cover and flush out the rebels.

The UFM and NRM are active primarily in the south and west, mainly within thirty to fifty miles of Kampala. This encompasses areas populated largely by the Baganda ethnic group, within which Obote has never been popular. Since late August there have been intermittent attacks on police stations, military posts and other targets, with landmines used in some cases. In one August blast a key rail bridge was blown up.

According to T.R. Lansner, reporter for the *Guardian* of London, the UFM has focused on urban sabotage and assassinations, while the Lule and Museveni's NRM is working to establish a political base in the countryside.

The five districts (out of 33) that Obote describes as insecure — Mukono, Luwero, Mpigi, Kampala and Arua — are all areas where anti-Obote groups are active. Karamoja, another section that has experienced great violence in the midst of famine, is considered by the government as a quite different situation. There they say the problem is one of cattle rustling and banditry by people who have heavily armed themselves with weapons stashed in the area by Amin's cadre in earlier years.

Lawlessness In The Military
On the whole, it is the national army itself that

is blamed for most of the blood shed and victimization of civilians.

The eight to twenty thousand Ugandan troops are notoriously under-trained, under-fed, frequently unpaid, and undisciplined — although surprisingly well-armed. Authorities lack any accurate figures on how many soldiers there are in each battalion, and the chain of command is very shaky, especially in remote areas.

In districts where troops man roadblocks for security checks, travelers may be relieved of every bit of money they are carrying as part of a routine search. Many who have tried to keep money hidden from the soldiers have, according to news reports, simply been killed.

Gradually, the smaller, better-trained and disciplined police force is being sent to replace troops at roadblocks, but the government has been unable to move the soldiers back into the barracks and out of the countryside. And fighting between factions within the army or between the police and the army has added to the terror and victimization of local villagers.

In September, for instance, the Wandegaya police station was attacked by soldiers arriving in three jeeps and armed with rocket-propelled grenades and small arms. According to Kenya's *Weekly Review*, the army men were retaliating for police efforts to stop soldiers from looting in

an incident that resulted in four soldiers shot.

Whatever the initial spark, civilians seem to be the major victims. Local residents charged that many innocent people were bayoneted to death by soldiers during the house-to-house searches in Mengo last week, and three villages remain deserted because of the fear of further reprisals.

Even normally safe places have suffered. Near Arua, the Ombachi mission served as a Red Cross station and sheltered some 7,000 frightened civilians fleeing both the army and the guerrillas when on June 24, government soldiers burst in and massacred 56, mostly women and children.

Frustrated by the apparent lack of progress on this front in the first nine months of Obote's rule, Ugandan religious leaders demanded a personal meeting with the president in October and accused him of indifference, declaring, "The Uganda you lead is bleeding to death." In a four-hour session, Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Muslim representatives made suggestions on ways to bring order and peace out of the chaos, and three of their nominees were appointed to the security committee.

The climate of violent confrontation has sent more than 120,000 Ugandans across the border into refugee camps once again since June. It is also a major roadblock to the hard-sought economic



WASHINGTON—President and Mrs. Reagan honored the five Kennedy Center award winners at a White House reception and later attended a performance at the Kennedy Center. Shown (l-r) are Helen Hayes, Count Basie, Cary Grant and the Reagans. UPI Photo

recovery that Obote hopes can restore Uganda's faith in its government.

Reconstruction Efforts Threatened

Obote's administration has taken significant steps to revitalize the economy, but, according to *Africa Now*, the word has gone out, "particularly in Buganda and Busoga," that to help in the economic efforts is to help Obote and therefore "tantamount to tribal treason."

Nonetheless, Uganda's economic planners forge ahead. Foreign aid and exports through November had

provided only \$830 million of the estimated \$1.7 billion needed for foreign exchange commitments this year, and consequently economic reconstruction efforts have had to be scaled down. High oil prices and a five-year low for coffee prices have made the situation desperate despite more than a tripling of coffee exports in the past year. Central Bank reserves are frequently not enough for even one day's imports. Indeed, 55% of Uganda's export earnings this year went, according to the ministry of finance, to pay interest on existing debts. To help alleviate this

problem in late November, Uganda's principal creditor nations met in Paris and agreed to reschedule the country's major external debts, allowing payment over the next ten years of obligations originally due between July 1, 1981 and June 30, 1982. The U.S., France, Great Britain, West Germany, Italy and Japan participated in the talks. Earlier both West Germany and Britain announced intent to cancel a part of the outstanding debts owed them.

Indicative of the government's resolve to protect its credit record, Ugandan officials hired the British merchant

bank Morgan Grenfell to verify the debt, make recommendations for rescheduling, and prepare economic information for prospective donors. An aid-pledging conference is planned for April 1982 in Kampala.

Also in November an International Monetary Fund team visited Uganda to confirm that the government still qualified for the second installment of a \$130 million loan. The first half, delivered in June, largely went to pay oil debts.

The Ugandan government raised prices paid to producers of coffee, cotton, tea and tobacco (Continued on Page 15)

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