

The Monitor (Uganda) 'Rebels Spread HIV'

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Eighty percent of the girls who returned at rescue centres in Gulu from the captivity of the Lords Resistance Army, have tested HIV positive, Ms Stella Odongo, the national coordinator of the Uganda Children's Rights has disclosed.

She was yesterday addressing the press at the Uganda Women's Network head offices in Kamokya.

"80 percent of the girls who returned from the LRA captivity have tested HIV positive at the World Vision Centre and the Gulu Support the Children Organisation centre (GUSCO)," she said.

Odongo said she could not reveal more details considering confidentiality of the matter.

The LRA, on 24 June, abducted over 100 girls from Lwala SS in Kaberamaido.

The coordinator of UWONET Ms Jacqueline Mwesige said the UPDF must avert the abductions.

"We are especially concerned about the abducted girls. We know that they are often sexually enslaved as wives of commanders and subjected to rape and unwanted pregnancies," Mwesige said.

She said 50 percent of the girls who return from captivity, have also been found with other sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia.

Mwesige wondered why the war is escalating in the north and north east of the country despite an increase in the defence expenditure.

"When the war spread, the government told us that the LRA was flushed out of Gulu and what we were witnessing were the kicks of a dying horse. However our question is when will the horse die and does the horse [LRA] have to die with many innocent civilians?" she wondered.

She said that UWONET is against the proposed lifting of the two-term limit for leaders.

"We have observed that the war in the north is political. So we have presented our memorandum to the Constitutional Review Commission denouncing the third term," she said.

Mwesige said the Civil Society Organisations for peace in Northern Uganda (CSOPNU) put the cost of the 17-year-old conflict at US \$1.3 billion She said as a result, a generation of conflict-affected youngsters will grow up emotionally, physically and economically blighted.