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Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (Managing African Conflict)

Contract No. 623-I-00-03-00048-00 / Task Order 002

FY2005 Year-End Report A Summary of Objectives and Results

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A Summary of Objectives and Results

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1. Background

The Northern Uganda Peace Initiative (NUPI) is a USAID-funded program focused on helping to facilitate a national reconciliation process in Uganda. Established in February 2004, NUPI helps civil society and the Government of Uganda (GOU) to work together on a number of issues related to a Ugandan-led peace and reconciliation process.

While the original NUPI task order focused on preparing the GOU Presidential Peace Team for peace talks and confidence-building measures with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), NUPI shifted emphasis in mid-2004 to helping the wider reconciliation and peace process. This strategy modification, in line with the shift in U.S. policy, meant that NUPI's new focus became technical assistance to the GOU and civil society in facilitating the establishment of a national agenda for reconciliation.

In order to understand key stakeholders' priorities and to build consensus for the reconciliation process, NUPI undertook a wide series of consultations with civil society and Government during the middle months of 2004. This included over 100 organizations and leaders from northern and central Uganda, including GOU officials, cultural chiefs, religious leaders, NGOs, local civil society groups, donors, and others. The results of this process was an emerging consensus among a wide host of actors that national reconciliation in Uganda constitute a most important peace building tool, but that it would be a long process of 20 years or more. Stakeholders' views on the reconciliation process centered on 3 main areas:

1. **Intra-Acholi reconciliation**, including ex-LRA combatants returning to their communities and other intra-Acholi issues from the heart of the northern conflict;
2. **Regional, or North-North reconciliation**, because the conflict had exacerbated inter-ethnic differences between the Acholi and neighboring sub-regions such as Teso;
3. **National reconciliation**, in order to deal with underlying root causes of the conflict, including alleged animosities between the GOU and Acholi communities.

Due to the dynamics of the ongoing conflict, it was generally agreed among civil society and the GOU that the dialogues and reconciliation modalities would generally focus first on northern Uganda and intra-Acholi reconciliation. The other regional and national priorities would also receive attention; however, would come into sharper focus as the entire reconciliation process unfolds.

2. NUPI Activity Areas during FY 2005

During FY 2005, NUPI translated the recommendations from the consultation process into a four-step approach that subsequently shaped NUPI's implementation plan. Each phase led into the other, with all steps aimed at contributing to the larger goal of helping facilitate the GOU and civil society develop a locally designed and owned national reconciliation process.

The four phases included the following:

1. Finalization of consultations with civil society and the GOU;
2. Public dialogues on key issues in the reconciliation process;
3. Reconciliation program activities to implement the recommendations of stakeholders;
4. Prepared to support to the GOU-LRA dialogue process.

The first step dealt with concluding the consultation period, particularly in northern Uganda. These consultations were then utilized by NUPI to inform and shape its future programs, in order to be in line with the emerging consensus on reconciliation in Uganda. During mid-to-late 2004, NUPI took a number of steps to lay the groundwork for a national reconciliation process.

First, working relationships were established with key institutions, including *Ker Kwaro Acholi* (the institution of the Paramount Chief of Acholi and the traditional chiefs), Gulu University's Center for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Amnesty Commission, the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, the mediator Betty Bigombe, and the Community Resilience and Dialogue activity. In order to fully understand and help coordinate the activities of other conflict resolution organizations, NUPI also completed a first comprehensive database of organizations and activities related to peace-building in northern Uganda.

As a second follow-up measure to the consultations, it was agreed that a series of dialogue sessions should be held, in order to promote public participation and input to the peace and reconciliation process. In partnerships with traditional leaders, religious leaders, women's organizations, youth groups, and the GOU, NUPI organized six public dialogues on different thematic areas of reconciliation in Uganda from November 2004 to mid-2005. The Reconciliation Process was officially kick-started at the Stakeholders Conference: "Reconciliation: the Way Forward" in December 2004 by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, and 150 Acholi community leaders. Subsequent to this, dialogue sessions were held with 70 Acholi traditional leaders in January 2005, at the Youth Partnership for Peace Conference in March 2005, at the Women in Peace-building and Reconciliation Camp in April, at the Youth-Chiefs Conference in June, and at the Media in Peace-building conference in June (See www.nupi.or.ug for reference). Two main results emerged from these six dialogue sessions:

1. The dialogues were unique opportunities for women, elders, youth leaders, the media, and the GOU to come together and engage in open and honest dialogue about how the reconciliation process initially should be designed;
2. Each session helped develop and document the priorities for reconciliation according to the stakeholders on the ground. These priority areas were then used by NUPI and other organizations to plan the next program activities for the reconciliation process.

As a third phase during FY 2005, NUPI subsequently developed six program activities to further the reconciliation process. Each activity area built on the recommendations made by stakeholders during the dialogue phase, and each program was designed to contribute to building up and sustaining reconciliation as a national issue through a specific thematic focus.

The six thematic activity areas include:

1. Assistance to Acholi cultural leaders in promoting traditional reconciliation;
2. Helping the GOU and civil society develop an infrastructure of reconciliation, including establishing Reconciliation Steering Groups at local and central levels;
3. Grassroots Reconciliation;
4. Women in Peace-Building;
5. Media and Information Management in Peace-Building;
6. Action-oriented reconciliation research in partnership with Gulu University.

Each thematic program, together with the results achieved in FY 2005, is described below.

As a fourth phase simultaneous to the others, NUPI engaged in assistance to the peace process between the GOU and the LRA. NUPI provided technical assistance to the peace process, mainly in the form of an advisory role to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Activities in this area included the provision of technical advice and logistical assistance to the GOU Peace Team during the December 2004 peace talks; the writing of strategy papers for the GOU on public inclusion in the reconciliation process and a Lessons Learned Report from past peace initiatives; and assisting the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in establishing Sector Working Groups on Security, Conflict Resolution and Disaster Management. In addition, preparations were made for training the GOU Peace Team, led by the Minister of Internal Affairs Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, in conflict resolution skills. However, the team has not yet requested for this training. The main result in this area was an improved ability on the part of the GOU to engage in the dialogue process, including increased knowledge from previous initiatives and other peace processes, as well as increased partnerships with Ugandan civil society groups through the OPM Sector Working Groups.

3. Thematic Focus Areas and Key Results

3.1 Assistance to Acholi traditional leaders in promoting reconciliation

Throughout the consultative process during the first half of 2005, participants in conferences and workshops, villagers, and representatives of the IDP camp populations pointed to the importance of traditional leaders playing a prominent role in shaping the peace and reconciliation process. The position of the Government also supports inclusion of traditional and cultural leaders through their reconciliation rituals such as *Mato Oput* and other key ceremonies. NUPI has therefore developed a partnership with the traditional leaders in Acholi, to work through three main programs. First, a key finding of the Chiefs-Youth conference in June 2005 was that Acholi Youth is not well aware of traditional Acholi cultural reconciliation.

Therefore, NUPI and the Acholi cultural institution *Ker Kwaro Acholi* partnered in FY 2005 on two programs. First, a leadership training program was conducted in August 2005 to improve the outreach ability, unity, report writing skills, and organizational management of the institution of the Paramount Chief. This training session was conducted as a preparation for the larger collaboration with the traditional leaders – the undertaking of a cultural reconciliation education tour, with chiefs traveling to their communities across the sub-region to promote a greater understanding of the traditional reconciliation processes.

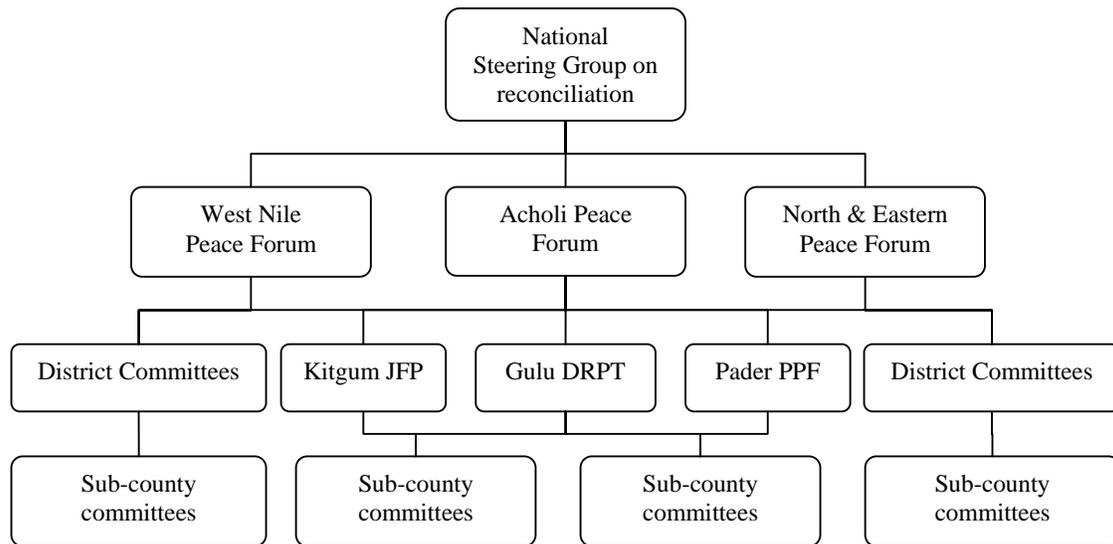
Starting in September 2005, the cultural reconciliation “Chiefs’ Tour” has been a four-month program, facilitating approximately 50 Acholi traditional chiefs to meet and discuss reconciliation with their home communities. The first segment of the program took place from September – November 2005, in which over 60 IDP camps were visited across the Acholi sub-region. The Chiefs used the visits to send a unified message about the need for peace and reconciliation to the people living in camps. The message was also passed to the rest of northern Uganda through radio spots. Each visit started with cultural dances, dramas and rituals followed by Chiefs’ presentations on traditional reconciliation methodologies. Each visit was concluded with dialogue sessions and questions from the community.

The Chiefs’ Tour constituted a unique opportunity for the Chiefs to send a message to combatants remaining with the LRA that the Acholi community is ready to forgive and reconcile with those who come “out of the bush”. Persons returning from the LRA during the implementation of the Chiefs’ Tour explained that their return was initiated by the message of forgiveness from the Chiefs. One such ‘hands on’ result of the Chiefs’ Tour happened in Mucwini IDP camp at the time when Paramount Chief Acana II accompanied the Chiefs.

The main results from the Chiefs’ Tour were improved communication between the traditional Acholi leaders and the Acholi communities in the IDP camps, particularly on the issue of the dynamics of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Before the tours, access and interaction by the cultural leaders in the camps had been limited and incomplete. The visits to the camps, however, prompted a very wide appeal among the local populations, who gathered in thousands to listen and give their inputs to the Chiefs. Approximately 2-3,000 people stayed in nearly each camp after the official meetings to interact and learn from the Chiefs, highlighting their significant interest in both learning more from the leaders and having the Chiefs conduct more traditional reconciliation ceremonies for the ex-LRA combatants.

3.2 *Helping the GOU and civil society develop the infrastructure for reconciliation*

As a follow-up to the Stakeholders Conference in December 2004, NUPI was tasked by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) to help develop a national infrastructure for the reconciliation process. This was recommended as the establishment of Peace and Reconciliation Teams in the three Acholi districts: Gulu, Kitgum, Pader, as well as a joint body for the sub-region, the Acholi Peace Forum (APF), and a National Steering Group on reconciliation. The suggested structure was discussed with local partners, upon which the following model was designed, in agreement with the MIA:



During FY 2005, NUPI helped develop this infrastructure by revitalizing district peace teams which were already in existence, but had little *de facto* presence on the ground. NUPI helped each of the teams – the Gulu District Reconciliation and Peace Team (DRPT), the Pader Peace Forum (PPF), Kitgum Joint Forum for Peace (JFP) and the regional Acholi Peace

Forum (APF) – to develop executive Steering Groups of 7 members each, to develop Terms of Reference and Work Plans for the coming year, and to establish permanent offices, equipping them with computers and furniture. Members of all teams, comprising over 70 local government councilors and others in total, also received NUPI training in team-building, conflict management, and reconciliation methodologies and practices.

While the teams were only now being rejuvenated, they already began to show improved capacity. The teams traveled with NUPI to those IDP camps which were judged to be most heavily affected by the conflict, in order to engage the communities in dialogue about reconciliation as an element of peace building. These communities, including Joseph Kony's home area in Odek and Vincent Otti's home area in Atiak, where significant massacres had occurred, showed willing engagement in the reconciliation process and good rapport with the teams. The peace teams subsequently initiated the process to form operational peace teams in these and other sub-counties, in order to further the infrastructure for reconciliation at the local level. Furthermore, the Gulu DRPT began to engage with NUPI in radio programming aimed at both communicating messages of forgiveness to the LRA combatants in the bush and engaging community members with their cultural/traditional leaders on reconciliation. This work is described in more detail under the "Media in peace-building" section below. The Peace and Reconciliation Teams remain the driving force behind this initiative with NUPI in a consultative/assistance function.

Work also commenced in FY 2005 on helping establish working Reconciliation Steering Groups in neighboring sub-regions, including Lango, Teso, and West Nile. Including these areas in the reconciliation process has been a key recommendation that came out of all conferences and consultations. Research in these neighboring areas has revealed a marked level of bitterness against the Acholi community for the LRA atrocities committed in these sub-regions. However, there is currently no body in place for communication, coordination of peace efforts, or community sensitization on reconciliation in these areas. In order to strengthen this regional level of reconciliation, NUPI opened an office in Adjumani (West Nile), and traveled on multiple occasions to the Lango and Teso sub-regions. NUPI interacted with numerous peace-building actors and community leaders from these areas, who overall expressed a keen desire to set up peace and reconciliation teams. The set up of these groups at district level is expected to take place in FY 2006.

NUPI's assistance to the Acholi Peace Forum culminated in the first ever APF General Assembly, which saw the unique participation of local councillors and civil society leaders from the neighboring districts of Adjumani, Yumbe, Moyo, Arua, Nebbi, Soroti and Katakwi. The one-day Assembly, presided over by Permanent Secretary of Internal Affairs on behalf of the Minister, Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, drew significant reaction, comments, advice from the participants. The main recommendations were to strengthen the peace forums and build their capacity to forge the way forward in enhancing the national reconciliation process.

Simultaneously, NUPI continued consulting with the MIA on the establishment of the National Steering Group with a view of raising national awareness of the reconciliation agenda. The MIA has expressed its desire to establish this group; however, due to extensive political events since August 2005 (ex-president Obote's burial, the start of election cycles, the return of opposition presidential candidate Besigye, etc.) the exact timing of the formation of the central-level Steering Group remains uncertain.

There is, however, significant political capital to build on in regard to reconciliation, following President Museveni's October speech at Parliament in which he mentioned "the need for continuing to search for a national consensus and reconciliation". He commented that, "There may be need therefore, to look at additional interaction that may help us to close this sad chapter of our country: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Reconciliation National Conference, etc."

3.3 *Grassroots reconciliation*

The Grassroots Reconciliation Program was developed as a result of an observed and expressed need for the integration of returnees into IDP camps in northern Uganda. The purpose of the program is to improve reconciliation between ex-combatants from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and their communities of return. The need for this type of program was expressed by community representatives through NUPI meetings, including the Reconciliation Stakeholders Conference in Gulu in December 2004. The aim of the program is to continue to work and follow-up with returnees once they have left reception centers and are living within their communities. Through a variety of hands-on projects, and returnees working side-by-side with community members, the two populations are being assisted in understanding and reconciling their differences.

The Grassroots Reconciliation Program was designed through a bottom-up approach, in partnership with a Joint Planning Committee including cultural and religious leaders, returnees, reception center officials, camp leaders, and peace team representatives. Camp leaders from twenty camps across northern Uganda – from Gulu, Kitgum, and Pader districts – also had inputs into the project options and design. 11 camps were chosen overall to participate in the Grassroots Program, due to logistical and staff constraints. By the end of FY 2005, there were nine camps in Gulu District implementing projects such as joint brick-making and the creation of psycho-social counseling centers.

Each of these nine camps is implementing their projects according to their own vision and design. The projects are designed as sustainable, so that the reconciliation projects will continue using local resources. Most of the projects are designed with multi-faceted activities, whereby the camps endeavor to undertake a project, and then use the benefits from the project to undertake more activities related to reconciliation. In fact, if the projects become profitable (such as a joint brick-making scheme of returnees and community members), the camps are mandated to use at least 25% of the profits towards reconciliation activities.

It is important to emphasize that the Grassroots Reconciliation Program is action-oriented. Some of the camps have decided to undertake projects of brick-making. These are not simply profit-making business projects. Far from it, the brick-making projects are very carefully designed so that returnees and other community members work together towards a common objective over a long-term period. There are specific provisions put in place, designed by the camps themselves, to ensure better interaction and the use of constructive language and attitudes towards returnees. Moreover, any profits from the project are designed to fuel future reconciliation activities. This action-oriented nature of the projects is seen as an innovative approach to reconciliation. Rather than a one-time event such as a workshop or sensitization session, the Grassroots Program actively works together with camp populations on a continuous basis, so that the communities may continuously work together to heal conflict wounds and strengthen relationships.

3.4 *Women in peace building*

In order to assist women in effectively participating in the peace and reconciliation process in northern Uganda, NUPI created the Women and Youth in Peace-building Program. The objective of this program is to provide an entry point for women to give their input and contribute to the national reconciliation agenda. From April 12-15, 2005 NUPI held a Women's Peace Camp to gather ideas from women across northern Uganda and recommendations for a way forward. The participants included child mothers, school children, returnees, ex-combatants, officials, and other women peace builders. The recommendations coming out of this camp included the creation of a Concerned Mother's Group (CMG) in the various districts of northern Uganda. The CMGs will provide space for women to share and document their experiences and discuss their contributions and potential activities towards peace in northern Uganda.

The Women and Youth in Peace-building Program is created as a grassroots project, guided and informed by women in the IDP camps. The vision is created and implemented from within the camps, assisted and supported by district and local officials as well as NUPI staff. By uniting women from within the IDP camps and encouraging them to create a coordinated and consistent strategy, there can be a possibility for peace that was never present before. Above all, the Women and Youth in Peace-building Program is a way for women to network, identify gaps in the field, and work towards a more peaceful northern Uganda.

During FY 2005, ten camps were reached by the Women and Youth in Peace-building Program including five in Gulu District and five in Kitgum District. Executive Committees have been elected in each district, comprising of the Women's Camp Leader for each camp and additional camp representatives. The Executive Committee is in charge of dispersing information and mobilizing women for events within the camp. The Executive Committee is also in charge of consulting the larger constituency within the camp, and presenting activity plans and timelines. This includes peace building activities that will bring together the two districts Gulu and Kitgum. The activities will be chosen in combination, or isolation, depending on the vision and need within the camps. The following is a list of potential activities that each community will implement either within or between camps:

- Radio programs
- Exchange visits between camps
- Sensitization programs
- Cultural activities, like traditional singing, dancing, and drama
- Sports activities, like football and netball
- Religious activities
- Programs with the youth and returnees

NUPI is planning to work with the CMGs during FY 2006 to develop and implement these activities.

3.5 *Media and information management in peace building*

As a fifth thematic component, NUPI has engaged in a Media and Information Management program. Keeping the public informed and garnering their input to the peace and reconciliation process are critical factors in making the process more effective, as well as managing information. Two decades of conflict in Acholi land have resulted in a devastating

lack of communication, information and local leadership. Camp populations rarely receive credible information and general interaction between camps or villages hardly exists. Moreover, media reporting on the conflict has often been noted to be sensationalized, exaggerated, or not inclusive of enough sources.

The NUPI Media and Information Management Program has therefore been developed to counter these negative trends. As a first step, in June 2005 NUPI invited more than 130 government officials, civil society leaders, and numerous representatives from media organizations across Uganda for a conference in Kampala addressing the media's role in peace building. Key recommendations from the conference highlighted the need for journalists to travel to northern Uganda to learn more about the situation on the ground, as well as engaging journalists in greater training on conflict-sensitive reporting.

Following up on these recommendations, 30 journalists working across the conflict zone participated in a NUPI-organized training course in conflict-sensitive reporting in September 2005. During the training, journalists were equipped with greater skills on how journalism practice can serve to escalate or de-escalate violent conflicts. Moreover, journalists explored the use of careful language in reporting on the conflict, in order not to exacerbate the conflict, after which they issued a "Gulu Declaration / Resolution on Conflict Sensitive Reporting" to be the basis on which the network of journalists and other stakeholders will responsibly and sensitively report on the conflict. Furthermore, selected journalists participated in the Chiefs Tour and the program supporting the Women in Peace Building activities.

In order to increase information flows on the ground in northern Uganda, a radio partnership was established during FY 2005 between NUPI and the Gulu DRPT. A main source of information is local radio, broadcasting to listeners in most of the conflict zone, including members of the LRA. NUPI is therefore working with the district peace teams to engage in radio programming on reconciliation during FY 2006. This has entailed weekly radio talk shows which involve the peace teams and traditional Acholi leaders, and a radio magazine which interviews people in the IDP camps about the reconciliation process. The radio programs commenced during November 2005.

NUPI is also working with the production company "Eyez on Africa" on a documentary film project entitled "Acholi Culture – a Culture of Reconciliation". The documentary will be filmed in Gulu, Lira, Katakwi, Kampala, Masindi, and Mbarara. These districts are selected in order to reflect the cultural diversities and historic perspectives that shape peoples' perceptions of the conflict. The objective of the project is to contribute to the national process of reconciliation through addressing the negative perceptions of the Acholi people. Documentation and promotion of more positive perceptions of national identity through the novel approach of film may contribute in a long term manner to the national reconciliation agenda. Filming began in October 2005, and the documentary will be aired on national television in Uganda in February 2006.

In terms of distribution of general information, NUPI has developed a briefer about its activities, which has been distributed widely to interested parties in FY 2005. Furthermore, NUPI developed a website during FY 2005 for greater flow of information about the reconciliation process. The site was launched in November 2005 and includes reports from all NUPI dialogue sessions, as well as its thematic areas. It is located at <http://www.nupi.or.ug>

3.6 *Action-oriented reconciliation research*

As a sixth and final thematic area, NUPI collaborated with the Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies (CCMPS) at Gulu University on 2 research projects during FY 2005. These were action-oriented studies which included research on “Women and Peace-building in northern Uganda” and “Conflict, the State, and Reconciliation: Shared Authority Structures in northern Uganda”. NUPI traveled with Gulu University researchers in Kitgum and Gulu districts for a period of three weeks in May-June 2005, in order to undertake the research. Interviews were conducted in 8 IDP camps and in the two towns, in order to gather information for the two studies.

The first research project, on Women and Peace-building, was published at the end of FY 2005, and has helped inform and guide the NUPI Women in Peace-building Program. The study sought to establish how traditional gender roles in Acholi society, which limit women to certain tasks and render them “unwanted” by their male counterparts, can be transformed into a more open and inclusive system that can enhance women’s involvement in all human domain including conflict and peace building. Key findings from the report have been useful for NUPI programming, including the need for women at the grassroots level to be sensitized on their rights, privileges and potentials, and the requirement for men, especially the elderly, to be educated on the importance of women in Acholi society.

The second project, on Shared Authority Structures relating to Reconciliation in northern Uganda, was used internally by NUPI as an important input to its programs, particularly in the Grassroots Program. The study focused on ascertaining Acholi people’s perceptions on which authority structures – whether they include the central government, local government, traditional elders, the military, religious leaders, or others – were most respected in terms of reconciliation and other areas. One main finding from the study was that the traditional and religious leaders were by far the most highly sought after when it comes to healing and reconciliation. NUPI has therefore put more effort behind involving these two groups of leaders in the reconciliation process. The Chiefs’ Tour and the Grassroots Program have sought to implement this recommendation in greater depth.

4. Way Forward

At the time of writing, the deteriorating security situation in northern Uganda was resulting in very restricted movement by all actors, including NUPI staff. To some extent these restrictions are having a negative influence on the progress of field activities. However, all efforts are dedicated towards the consolidation of achievements, while staff members and counterparts simultaneously are looking for ways and opportunities to continue NUPI programs without jeopardizing security.

During the remainder of the current contract period (until February 4, 2006), NUPI will complete the film project, advance the Grassroots and Women in peace-building programs and organize a regional meeting for representatives of Peace and Reconciliation Teams from across northern Uganda. Additionally, NUPI in partnership with Gulu University is establishing an Information Center in Gulu. This partnership will also venture into evaluating past NUPI performance with a view of offering key baseline information. Finally, NUPI, together with partners such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, *Ker Kwaro Acholi*, civil society groups, Universities, etc. are considering activities to be undertaken following the current contract period.