

International Agency: No Quick Fix for Peace in DRC

International aid agency **World Vision** has asked leaders around the world to support peace talks in East Africa, and peace-building at the community level, to address the ongoing nightmare facing thousands of children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

In the wake of Friday's 31st International Day of Peace, as it awards an annual prize for peace-building, the organization is calling for renewed efforts from all governments to find a lasting solution for eastern DRC.

"Keeping the peace is only one part of the challenge in DRC," said Matthew Scott, director of peace building for World Vision International, in Gulu, Uganda, for peace commemorations. "We need to continue to support grass-roots peace-building efforts—it requires a team marathon effort to be effective, not a series of individual sprints."

Scott said leaders in the region don't have to look far for proof the approach works.

"Community leaders in Northern Uganda started working together in the 1990s to protect children, and united by a determination to reach peace, facilitated peace talks, worked to protect children from attacks, and even rehabilitated former killers," he said.

"Peace in northern Uganda was not a result of the efforts of one person. They've all done their time and so all feel a sense of responsibility to ensuring peace holds."

However, living in peace and security remains out of reach for thousands of children and families in eastern DRC.

“It is heartbreaking that as Uganda celebrates its admirable achievements in reaching and maintaining peace, across the border children continue to be terrorized by conflict,” Scott said. “More than 220,000 people have been forced to flee fighting since April. Leaders in Uganda and the region have a role to play in ensuring peace and stability for the families caught up in this.

“As we hear time and again from the people World Vision works with, the power of the word is mightier than the power of the sword. Military solutions can protect civilians from harm in the short term, but can’t build peace in the long term.”

World Vision International peace-builder James Odong, who was once caught up in the conflict in Northern Uganda, abducted and forced to face the challenges children in the region still experience, said: “Twenty years ago, we were in their position. There is hope but they must put down their guns and talk.”

Uganda’s experience shows peace is possible, and is achieved through peace talks, not more conflict, Scott said.

“Peace doesn’t happen overnight, but if it’s done right, it lasts,” he said. “We need leaders to commit to this for the long haul, and be prepared to do what it takes.”