UGANDA

GROPING TOWARDS PEACE

[AN] Negotiations between Uganda's new military government and the National Resistance Army (NRA) of former Defense Minister Yoweri Museveni resumed on Sept. 4 in Nairobi, Kenya, but political observers remained skeptical of any sudden breakthroughs.

The latest round of talks, which aim at a peace accord and possible inclusion of the NRA in a government of national unity, followed an inconclusive session in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital, on Aug. 27-28. The week-long recess, according to the Kenya News Agency, was to enable the parties to carry out further consultations.

The major obstacle to peace efforts is the NRA's refusal to accept the legitimacy of the new regime headed by Gen. Tito Okello, the man who ousted President A. Milton Obote on July 27. The NRA, which is believed to regard the new junta as an extension of the Obote regime, says it will negotiate with Okello as head of the Ugandan army, not as head of state. Okello, in turn, has attempted to distance himself from the legacy of the previous regime.

In a surprise move Aug. 25, the ruling Military Council replaced Prime Minister Paulo Muwanga with Abraham Waligo, who was finance minister in the military government. Muwanga had been vice president under Obote, and observers in Kampala, the capital, saw the move as response to NRA demands, coming as it did, so close to the Nairobi talks. Later, however, a high-ranking government official termed the change "purely administrative," and unrelated to the peace talks. The NRA, for its part, denied that it had asked for Muwanga's removal, although it criticized his appointment.

The new prime minister, like his predecessor, is a member of the nation's largest ethnic group, the Baganda. He was minister for housing under Obote.

Meanwhile, Uganda radio announced on Aug. 29 that several guerrilla groups have agreed to join the government. Defense Minister Gard Toko, who is also vice chairman of the Military Council, said the agreement followed intensive talks between the Federal Democratic Movement of Uganda (FEDEMU), the Ugandan National Rescue Front (UNRF), the Ugandan Freedom Movement (UFM) and the ruling military council. This development is likely to strengthen the government's hand in new negotiations with the NRA.

The Ugandan leader, Gen. Tito Okello. */Daily News (Tanzania)*

The Aug. 27-28 talks occurred against a backdrop of extreme uncertainty and daily revelations of past atrocities in Uganda. Despite an informal cease-fire, the NRA guerrillas under Yoweri Museveni—himself a former defense minister—were reported marching toward Kampala just before the talks began. The guerrillas have demanded the removal of former Obote officials, whose presence near the top of the new government lends credence to charges that Obote's overthrow was a mere palace coup.

The argument for fresh leadership was bolstered by a constant flow of new reports on Uganda's past horrors. The Catholic church-owned Luganda daily *Munno* reported the alleged discovery of skeletons of 2,000 people believed to be Obote's victims, and these are assumed to represent a small fraction of those killed under the former president. Although Obote's notoriety for such atrocities never matched the international infamy achieved by his predecessor, Gen. Idi Amin, his government was accused by many groups of endless human rights violations.

Perhaps to undercut Museveni's criticism, Okello sent a civilian-dominated delegation to Nairobi, including officials with strong anti-Obote credentials.

One of them was Paul Ssemogerere, long-time leader of the opposition Democratic Party (DP), now Minister of Internal Affairs. Recalling his party's criticism of Obote's "systematic violations of human rights," he said in an interview that the new government is quickly halting the activities of "agencies, some of them secret, which were licensed to establish a reign of terror against critics of the government, even rivals of individual ministers within the ruling party."

DP member Sam Kutessa, the 36-year-old justice minister, said the government will eliminate certain obnoxious laws used to detain people indefinitely without trial. The government will prosecute individuals responsible for atrocities, he said, but will not proffer "mass charges" against members of police and paramilitary forces that attacked innocent people.

"You could charge the entire police force," Kutessa said, but Uganda does not have enough prisons to hold all the guilty officials and ex-officials. Nor should an anti-Obote record be the sole precondition for posts in the new government, he insisted. "The moment you begin saying 'I fought, I fought,' you're going to end up with an administration of former warlords."

Controlling the military is one of the most difficult tasks facing the government. In Obote's final days, it had degenerated into a loose collection of warring factions, each held together by ethnic ties or personal loyalty to a particular leader.

Foreign Minister Olara Otunnu, who was Obote's ambassador to the United Nations, stressed the need for a broad-based army with "a national character from every point of view, including politically." The army, he said, must be "the army of the Ugandan people, not of any particular faction or region."

Military excesses were compounded by "corruption in public life generally," noted Otunnu. "When the soldiers saw a lack of discipline in public life, a lack of ethical behavior or accountability, they did not feel any compunction to do differently."

Even with the best of intentions, constructing a just social order would be difficult, said a church development worker who left the country the day of the coup. After two decades of violence, "people don't even trust their neighbors or their families anymore." she said, so it is hard to work together toward any common goal.

Uncertainty remains the most prominent fea-

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COVER PHOTO CREDIT: African couples being married by Pope John Paul in Nairobi. Photo by Steve Askin/ Carole Collins.