THE TRUST FUND FOR VICTIMS
INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

ORAL TESTIMONIES BOOKLET

‘In their *own Words*’

Living with the Scars of War: Dominic Ongwen



SURVIVORS BEAR WITNESS

JUNE 2026

ORAL TESTIMONIES BOOKLET

‘In their *own Words’*

Living with the Scars of War: Dominic Ongwen

Survivors Bear Witness

Trust Fund for Victims

June 2026

IN THIS BOOKLET

Contents

About this booklet 5

Background 6

TFV in Uganda 8

Glossary 9

A note to the reader 9

Introduction 10

The Ongwen Reparations Order 11

Survivor Testimonies 12

01 Abok 15

The cowboy who escaped 16

The people who were killed in Abok camp 16

Ongwen made me suffer a lot and it has affected the generation after me 17

A very painful death robbed me 17

A war that left a big scar in my heart 18

02 Odek 20

The wounds of war 21

The ugly face of the war 22

Life after war 22

My life was wasted 23

My missing children 24

Disability after the attack 24

03 Lukodi 26

Painful life 27

I miss my mother 27

Peace at all costs 28

Twist of fate 28

Wounds in my heart 29

04 Pajule 31

Trauma and worry caused by Ongwen's atrocities 32

Destruction of my future 32

The pain caused by Ongwen in my life 33

The effect of the war on our daily life and economic well-being 33

The trauma caused by the attack on my family 34

05 Thematic Crimes Victims 36

Me as a child soldier 37

Suffering because of the war 38

Abduction 39

Trained to kill 39

Married at gunpoint 40

Stigma, the burden of war trauma on an innocent child 40

Conclusion 41

Photographs 42

Imprint 42

About this booklet

The testimonies contained in this booklet were collected by the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) through Voices That Count (VTC) between December 2024 and January 2025 across four case locations in northern Uganda: Lukodi, Abok, Odek, and Pajule/Lapul, respectively situated in the districts of Gulu, Oyam, Omoro, and Pader. They were gathered during a series of meetings with victims aimed at jointly designing the reparations programme to be implemented for and with them in response to the harm they suffered as a result of the crimes which Mr Dominic Ongwen has been convicted of by the International Criminal Court in the case *The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen*.

The testimonies presented here represent a small selection of the 1,002 accounts recorded from victims of the attacks on the Pajule, Odek, Lukodi, and Abok former IDP camps, as well as from victims of sexual and gender-based violence, formerly abducted children, and children born of captivity.

The accounts are reproduced in the victims' own words. They have been lightly edited for clarity and translated from Acholi and Luo where necessary; no changes have been made to the substance of what was shared. Each testimony is published with the informed consent of the individual concerned.

To protect their privacy and safety of those who shared their experiences, all names and identifying details have been withheld. Contributors are identified only by the location of the attack they endured.

The Trust Fund for Victims extends its deepest gratitude to the victims who entrusted the interviewers with their experiences, and to the partners whose support made the collection of these testimonies possible.

Background

The International Criminal Court (ICC), established by the Rome Statute, seeks to hold individuals accountable for the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. In doing so, it aims to help prevent these crimes and to promote peace, security and the rule of law.

The crimes defined in the Rome Statute also have an enormous impact on the well-being of individuals and communities. Accordingly, and in line with international law and international human rights law, the Rome Statute provides not only for the punishment of perpetrators, but also for reparations to be ordered in cases that result in a conviction before the Court. These two elements, individual accountability and reparations to victims, together with other features such as fair trials, the publicity of proceedings, victim participation, and the legal representation of victims, define the victim-centred reparative justice mandate of the ICC.

Reparations at the ICC are determined by the judges sitting in Chambers and may take any form – symbolic or material, individual, or collective – designed to recognise and redress harm. Reparations Orders are the product of a thorough judicial process in which victims, and many other stakeholders, may participate. In issuing these orders, the Chambers consider research, evidence and, submissions on the needs of victims, systematised into an evidence-based, public, and judicial framework for the programmes.

The Trust Fund for Victims (TFV), administered by a dedicated Programmatic Secretariat acting under the direction of an independent Board of Directors whose members are elected by the Assembly of States Parties, is the instrument through which the reparative mandate of the ICC is delivered. The TFV administers the resources of convicted persons and mobilises additional resources, putting them to use for the benefit of victims by designing and implementing reparations programmes, monitored by the Chambers. It also provides submissions to the Chambers before they issue a Reparations Order and proposes the implementation plan.

The Trust Fund for Victims has ensured that victims receive reparative value for the harm they have suffered as victims of genocide, crimes against humanity, the crime of aggression, and war crimes falling within the jurisdiction of the ICC. It delivers this through two types of programmes: reparations programmes, and other programmes for the benefit of victims, commonly known as *assistance.*

PROGRAMME TYPE 1

Reparations programmes

The TFV's reparations programmes implement reparations awards ordered by the Court against a convicted person. Such awards are funded in the first instance from the resources of the convicted person and, where these are insufficient, may be complemented from the TFV's voluntary contributions upon a decision of the Board of Directors. They aim to help survivors return to a path of healing and reintegration.

PROGRAMME TYPE 2

Other programmes for the benefit of victims

The TFV's assistance programmes operate independently of any conviction and are directed first and foremost at the most vulnerable victims, their families, and their communities – those who have suffered the gravest forms of violence. Working in collaboration with local partners, the TFV's teams deliver life-changing programmes spanning mental health care, medical interventions, and material support.

TFV in Uganda

Over seventeen years, the Trust Fund for Victims at the ICC carried out an assistance programme in Uganda that provided direct medical care, psychosocial assistance, and livelihood support to approximately 86,000 victims of the conflict in northern Uganda. The programme ended in 2025, as the TFV transitioned from victim assistance to reparations delivery following the Reparations Order issued in the case *The Prosecutor v. Dominic Ongwen* in 2024.

Among the beneficiaries of the assistance programme were survivors of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), former child soldiers, abductees, and victims of attacks in internally displaced persons' (IDP) camps, reflecting the lasting and gendered impact of the conflict. They were drawn from over 20 districts in northern Uganda, the region most severely impacted by years of armed conflict and displacement. The TFV's efforts underscore a commitment to addressing not only physical rehabilitation needs but also the deep psychological scars left by conflict, particularly among vulnerable groups such as women and children.

To implement its comprehensive rehabilitation programme, the TFV partnered with several NGOs, INGOs, faith-based organisations, and cultural establishments. Together, these organisations provided an integrated range of services, including medical and surgical care, physiotherapy, and the provision of assistive devices to improve mobility. Equally important were trauma counselling, psychosocial support, and community-based healing practices such as music, dance, and drama, which played a vital role in promoting emotional recovery and social reintegration. Livelihood and material support interventions further aimed to rebuild the economic resilience of victims, enabling them to regain self-reliance and stability. This collaborative and holistic approach not only addressed the many needs of survivors but also helped to foster long-term peace and reconciliation within affected communities.

ABBREVIATIONS

Glossary

HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RO	Reparations Order
SGBC	Sexual and Gender-Based Crimes
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
TFV	Trust Fund for Victims

CONTENT WARNING

A note to the reader

The accounts in this publication describe killing, abduction, torture, and sexual and gender-based violence. They also reflect the lasting physical, emotional and psychological consequences of these crimes, including in some cases thoughts of self-harm.

Some readers may find the content distressing. We encourage readers to engage with these testimonies with care and to take breaks as needed. These accounts are shared with the consent of the individuals concerned and are presented in the hope of fostering understanding, recognition, and dignity for those affected by these crimes.

Introduction

In northern Uganda, the thorns of war are still felt years after the guns have fallen silent. Twenty-six years of armed conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda security forces led to widespread and systematic violations and war crimes, resulting in thousands of deaths, abductions, acts of sexual violence, and brutal acts of torture. The conflict also drove millions of civilians from their homes and into displacement camps, which became frequent targets of LRA attacks. Beyond its immediate human cost, the protracted conflict had devastating and long-lasting consequences for the social, economic, and cultural life of the affected communities, many of which continue to be characterised by physical and psychosocial traumas, limited income generating opportunities, and access to education.

Dominic Ongwen, a senior commander of the LRA, was prosecuted by the ICC and found responsible for directing and executing brutal attacks against four IDP camps in northern Uganda: Pajule (October 2003), Odek (April 2004), Lukodi (May 2004), and Abok (June 2004). These attacks involved indiscriminate killing of civilians, pillaging, and the burning of homes and persecution, as well as the widespread destruction of property, including the burning down of houses and looting of property, devastating the livelihoods of entire communities. Mr Ongwen was further found criminally responsible for several sexual and gender-based crimes and other inhumane acts, including torture, rape, sexual slavery, enslavement, forced pregnancy, and outrages upon personal dignity. He was also found guilty of conscripting children under the age of 15 and forcibly employing them to actively participate in hostilities.

Following his conviction in 2022, the Court issued a Reparations Order in 2024 to address the harm suffered by victims of his crimes.

FEBRUARY 2024

The *Ongwen* Reparations Order

In February 2024, the ICC issued a Reparations Order in the case against *Dominic Ongwen.* The Court established Mr Ongwen's liability at €52,429,000 and estimated that approximately 49,772 victims may be eligible to benefit from the reparations measures ordered.

€52,429,000	49,772	€750
Liability established by the Court	Victims estimated to be eligible	Symbolic payment to each eligible victim

The reparations programme includes a range of collective measures, comprising a *symbolic monetary payment* of €750 to each eligible victim; *rehabilitation programmes*, encompassing medical, psychological, and socio-economic support; and further *community-based symbolic and satisfaction measures*, such as apology ceremonies, monuments, memorial prayers, cleansing ceremonies, and reconciliation ceremonies.

Survivor Testimonies

This compilation of testimonies represents only a fraction of the thousands of stories of fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, sons, and daughters who suffered unimaginable harm during the Ongwen attacks on the IDP camps of Pajule, Odek, Lukodi, and Abok as well as the victims of thematic crimes victims including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, former child soldiers, and children born of war.

These accounts were collected between December 2024 and January 2025 by Voices That Count on behalf of the TFV. More than twenty years after the guns fell silent in northern Uganda, they bear witness to the enduring consequences of the crimes committed. They reveal, in the victims' own words, the fear, trauma, shame, and suffering they have endured, as well as the physical and psychosocial scars that continue to shape their lives today.

Many victims are now elderly, in poor health, and living in precarious socio-economic conditions with limited means of sustaining themselves and their families. Younger generations have also been profoundly affected. Educational and vocational opportunities were interrupted or lost altogether, leaving many struggling to build stable livelihoods. Some have resorted to harmful coping mechanisms to manage depression, poverty, and the lack of income generating opportunities. Against this backdrop, anticipation of the long-awaited reparations programme remains high and palpable accross the affected communities.

A common thread running through many of these personal stories is the sense of loss: the loss of life and loved ones, opportunities and livelihoods, family and family support, and community, social, and cultural cohesion after years of war and displacement. Many also describe a loss of innocence amongst the many children and young people who experienced deadly violence and abduction at a tender age. Beyond the physical and psychological traumas that nearly all victims experience, there is the additional factor of widespread discrimination and social stigma that many survivors (formerly abducted men and women) face daily in their communities.

This stigma exacerbates a situation of social exclusion, improvisation, and even more significant barriers to their access to economic and educational opportunities. The fear expressed by many victims today is for the well-being of the most vulnerable, and whether they will live to see reparations. Starting over has been difficult for most and, for the most vulnerable, all but impossible without social support and rehabilitation measures. The timing of the reparations programme therefore remains pressing, as the need for the measures is even greater today for the most vulnerable victims. In the absence of a national reparations programme yet to be established for victims of mass violations, the Ongwen reparations programme remains the only hope for many survivors of these attacks.



PHOTOGRAPH

Victims participating in an experience sharing forum in Gulu (May 2025). Photo Credit: TFV

01 / 05

Abok

Former IDP camp · Oyam District · Attacked June 2004

5 testimonies

MALE SURVIVOR

The cowboy who escaped

I was abducted for one solid week when I was 11 years old; my parents were all killed by the rebels during their first attack before civilians were moved to the camp. I was not tortured, except that I was made to carry heavy loads, and walk long distances. I witnessed many devilish acts in the bush; for example, how women were sexually assaulted, how people were murdered (mostly old men) and how people were humiliated. The primary reason for abducting me was to be trained as a soldier. I escaped after one week because the government soldiers were following the rebels; that is how I survived. I am now a total orphan with no parents. I am so traumatised by what I saw in the bush. I no longer eat meat because of what I experienced. I am uneducated, and I am so poor because my parents' property was destroyed and stolen when they were killed. My life is hard.

MALE SURVIVOR

The people who were killed in Abok camp

It was in the evening when I heard gunshots, and people shouting, *Run! Run! The rebels have attacked!* Houses got burned. The government soldiers tried to protect the community but were defeated. The rebels carried away babies, throwing them into fires. I hid in a pit latrine. I witnessed members of my family and the community being captured, and to this day most of them have not returned home. Today I experience frequent nightmares of the deaths I witnessed; the abducted people come to my mind, telling me that they are still alive and need to be rescued from the rebels. I feel guilty for not helping them.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Ongwen made me suffer a lot and it has affected the generation after me

In 2004 in the evening, I began hearing gunshots and houses started burning. People ran in different directions, looking for somewhere to hide. People fell to the ground and were injured, others died from their injuries, and others were killed on the spot. My daughter died in a burning house, and I lost everything that was in the house. I lost my livestock. At that moment, I wanted to die. I wanted to commit suicide because I did not know where to start from, with a new life of emptiness and poverty. After the incident, NGOs brought foodstuffs and utensils for us. When we returned to our home, where we live now, there was no food to eat and nothing at all to survive. I have become sick with stress and suffering. I am weak due to old age and sickness, so I cannot dig in the garden. My husband died while we were in the camp. The home depends on me now, yet I have no source of income to provide for the grandchildren in my care. We sleep hungry. On days when I fail to get food, I cannot take them to school. Everything just seems so hard. Many people have been coming here to register us, telling us that they will give us support, but nothing happens. This worsens the situation and causes us more stress

---

FEMALE SURVIVOR

A very painful death robbed me

We were attacked by the rebels from the camp in 2004. I was 40 years old at that time, and I had 6 children. We ran some meters away from the camp because the attack lasted a few hours, until the government soldiers intervened. In the morning, when we returned from the bush, I learned that one of my children was missing. I went to look around and found that she had been burned in the house. I am so traumatised that I cannot forget about my 5-year-old daughter who died a very painful death. I am so poor to this day, and I have not been able to recover all that was burnt during the incident: my goats, bicycle, radio, linens, and so on. My children are all uneducated because I became so poor that I could not afford to pay their school fees. The cows and oxen that I used for farming were stolen, and I cannot farm much or harvest for sale with just my hands. I farm only for home consumption.

MALE SURVIVOR

A war that left a big scar in my heart

In 2004, the rebels attacked us in Abok camp. I was 13 years old. My father, my mother, and two of my uncles were abducted, but my seven siblings and I narrowly survived. My mother was tortured, badly beaten and rescued by the government soldiers two days later. She returned with deep wounds, while my father and one of his brothers were beaten and tortured until they died. My other uncle returned with injuries. We were all in the same house during the attack. After the incident, we found we were left with nothing. Our beloved father had been killed in a barbaric manner. Houses were destroyed; cattle were stolen; goats, simsim, and sorghum were all burnt. We are now so poor. We have only one meal a day, because the incident affected us badly that we have failed to get back to where we were before the war. None of us continued with education up to now, so we are all farmers. Our father's death affected us so much that led me to an early marriage. I am now 33 years old with four children. I cannot afford their basic needs, imagine! My mother suffered a mental breakdown and her eyesight was affected, hence she became disabled.



PHOTOGRAPH

Victim attending a surgical camp for victims in need of medical assistance at Anaka Hospital (2022). Photo Credit: TFV.

02 / 05

Odek

Former IDP camp · Omoro District · Attacked April 2004

6 testimonies

MALE SURVIVOR

The wounds of war

I went to the well to fetch water, and on my way back, I met the rebels. They let me pass. They did nothing; they did not even say a word. At around 5 p.m., they surrounded the camp and began firing bullets. Several people died, and many got wounded. My two children and I went to hide in the bush. As we ran, I was shot in the back but by the grace of God, I survived. It was a terrible experience because that night it rained very heavily. We returned in the morning only to find several bodies lying on the ground. I lost four siblings, and two of my other brothers were shot in their legs. They were taken to Lacor Hospital for treatment. Because of the serious injuries they sustained, their legs had to be amputated. Unfortunately, they both died. I went to the hospital in Gulu where the bullet was removed. The bullet wound has had a serious effect on my life. There came a time when I started smelling blood and eventually lost my sense of smell. I was referred to Mulago National Referral Hospital in Kampala, but I could not get there because I did not have the money to facilitate my journey and treatment. Various health conditions have continued to manifest in my life. It was recently discovered that I have a broken bone in my chest. This has left me very weak. I cannot work because of the pain. I am living a life of sorrow because after the war, I have buried 11 of my children, one after another. The pain is unbearable.

MALE SURVIVOR

The ugly face of the war

I witnessed my brother being killed in cold blood during the attack. He was shot and fell to the ground lifeless. Tears rolled down my face. I could not help the situation. I had to run for my life. I hid in the bush until the next day. With the help of the government soldiers, we buried him in the morning. We could not accord him a decent burial because it had to be done hurriedly and in a panic. During that time, we lived in confinement because of the insecurity caused by the rebels. Our house was burnt down, and everything in it was destroyed. Our animals were also looted. This caused a very big setback for me and my family. It became hard to get food and other necessities. It was equally hard to go to the garden to cultivate; yet, without cultivating, we would not be able to get the food we need to sustain ourselves. I became very unproductive. This situation negatively affected my present life. The poverty I experience can be traced to the war. The inability to educate my children has also hit me hard: had my children received an education, they would be better off and able to take care of me. I am now weak, and life is so hard to the extent that I cannot even afford decent clothes for myself, and I have no one to turn to for assistance. It is only now that I truly understand that the face of war is indeed ugly.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Life after war

As a result of the attack, I lost my education, and I have no hope of returning to school, because I am now older and have many responsibilities, like taking care of my family. As a result of the heavy military training I underwent with the rebels, I have severe muscle pain; my hearing is poor and my eyesight is failing, because of what I endured in captivity and the activities carried out during the war, like shooting, bombing and burning. My mental health is very poor. I suffer fear, tension, depression, and flashbacks. These are affecting me so much to the extent that I have developed other illnesses like high blood pressure and diabetes. After returning from the bush, I cannot work in the army, so I am jobless. As a former soldier, I face high levels of discrimination from society.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

My life was wasted

I came back from school that day, and when I reached home, I found the place empty. There was no one there. I decided to walk to the centre to find my people. On the way, I encountered a group of nine rebels. They stopped me and began questioning me. One of the rebels asked the rest to move ahead, and we remained only the two of us. He asked me to go along with them and help them in the struggle. I replied, saying that I would not be able to because I had a chest problem. I was forced to join them, and we made our way to where they had camped. I stayed there for one month. Life was so hard in the rebel camp. I was forced into sex. I became pregnant. However, with some luck, I escaped and returned home. I gave birth to a baby girl. Three months after delivery, my mother sent me on an errand to the centre. On my way, I met the rebels; I was abducted again. I tried to explain to them that I had left a newborn baby at home and that I was sick, but they could not understand me. I was taken again and when we reached the rebel camp, I saw my aunt, who had also been abducted. We were there for a couple of weeks. The government helicopter came, and for fear of being attacked, we all scattered, everyone running for their lives. I escaped again and returned home. I have gone through an experience that I would never wish for anybody. I still live with so much stress. My daughter has never set eyes on her father. The torture I witnessed people go through, and the sexual assault I experienced, traumatises me and has made me lose feelings for a man. I feel sad all the time, and at certain times when I get overwhelmed by my thoughts, I mentally break down. I ask myself, what will I do for my daughter who is living without a father? What will I do to help her? I have nothing. I am struggling to educate her so that she may have a better future, and probably, this will help to erase the traumatic memories of the past.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

My missing children

The atrocities in Odek IDP camp left an everlasting pain inside my heart. It was a very dark evening when I was abducted, but I was set free after one day. My five children, however, were also abducted (four boys, one girl) and since then they have never returned home. I only wish that one day I could see them alive or their remains. My house got burnt with all the food and household belongings. I also developed high blood pressure because of depression and trauma. My land was grabbed away by the children of my co-wife, and now I have little space to dig, hence affecting my livelihood. I am a farmer in small scale agriculture to earn a living. What hurts me most is when I think of my missing children; it really upsets me. I lost my cows and my money in the incident. The incident left me empty-handed with no resources to generate income, and this has led to food insecurity in my household.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Disability after the attack

I was still young; I was told that a bullet struck me. The bullet remained in my leg for over twelve years and developed into a cancerous wound that led to the amputation of my leg. I have also developed difficulties with hearing, speech problems, as well as nodding syndrome. The doctors say this is a result of the sound of the bombs. I have a problem with my brain, too. The auntie who takes care of me is unwell. She was also abducted, and she came back with a child. She was tortured in captivity, and she has developed a physical weakness. I did not study; I am poor. My biological parents died after the war. At present, I cannot meet my basic needs. People discriminate against me because I am a disabled woman, and I cannot get married as I have a mental disability. I badly need a semi-permanent house to be built for me, and financial support given to my caretaker so that she can start an income-generating activity to help her take care of me.



PHOTOGRAPH

Beneficiary of TFV's assistance program, Village Savings and Loan Association in Gulu (2018). Photo Credit: TFV

03 / 05

Lukodi

Former IDP camp · Gulu District · Attacked 19 May 2004

5 testimonies

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Painful life

The attack on Lukodi camp on 19 May 2004, started at 5 p.m. and lasted until 10 p.m. I was 12 years old at that time. The attack led to the loss of our animals that we relied on as a source of income for the family. The killing of elders and other people drove my mother mad, and she remains so to this day. All household items inside the house were burnt; people entered our land, and the land wrangles cannot allow us to stay there peacefully. Currently, we do not study because raising the fees for the children in the family is so difficult, as we do not have any source of income for the family. I went through several operations of the leg and thigh; these have made me too weak to provide for the family. Most painful for me is that I produced a child whose father I don't even know, because it was the result of sexual slavery while I was in the bush with the rebels. Being alive these days is by God's plan and mercy.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

I miss my mother

On the day of the attacks on the camp of Lukodi on 19 May 2004, I was around seven years old when my mother was shot to death by the rebels, our house was burnt, animals taken, and my elderly sister abducted. We do not know whether she is still alive or dead up to now (I miss her wherever she is). At present, we live with no clear source of income for the family, and paying school fees and medical expenses for the family has become so difficult for my dad. Dad hardly finds anything for us to eat. He keeps saying that had my mother lived and had our sources of income not been taken during the attack, we would be ahead in life. But I keep telling him that God knows why, and that one day we will be well again.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Peace at all costs

I personally witnessed the attack and sadly saw people being killed. I could not stand it. Young girls and boys were abducted and taken; some of these were relatives and friends. Our animals, our goats, our chickens, and our household items were destroyed, or taken. We were left with nothing. We were able to take care of our needs without begging for help before the attack, but that changed after the attack. I escaped with my husband and six children and went to live a helpless life in the camp in Gulu. Camp life was so demeaning, with no privacy at all. I shared a very small room with all my children. I could not have any intimacy with my husband in the presence of my children. When the war ended, we returned home and began an entirely new life. The attack has never left my mind, and I have lived in fear ever since. My prayer is that such acts will never happen again. We should be left to live in peace, even amid daily suffering. We would rather live without medical care or money as we are now but have peace. I am now advanced in age, and I do not have the energy. I am sickly, and without proper treatment. I know that one day I shall die, but I pray for a better future for my children and grandchildren.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Twist of fate

I was not at the Lukodi IDP camp on that fateful day, but two of my children were there living with my mother. I was told in the night that the entire camp had been burned down and almost everyone, killed. I could not help but rush there early the next morning. I found that my uncle and cousin were killed in the attack. I fainted in shock upon seeing the dead body of my uncle. I only gained consciousness after one day. My children and my biological parents were alive, but they had lost almost everything they had, like household items, livestock, and the house. All of their wealth had been lost. My parents are now very weak and unable to fend for themselves; so, I have to find food for them. We survive hand-to-mouth, on petty jobs. We live in despair, without decent housing or food. We cannot afford medical expenses and school fees; life is far too hard.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Wounds in my heart

I was told about the rebel attack by my uncle. At the time of the attack, I was three years old. I heard that my mother was raped by the rebels, our cows were taken, and my sister was abducted, though she returned after one year. My grandmother was shot in the mouth, which has left her unable to speak to this day, and my brother was killed. Ongwen's Sinia Brigade attack has left wounds in my heart because it forced me to drop out of school for lack of money to pay my school fees. My father also divorced my mother because she had been raped by the rebels; this has destroyed our family. My mother and I faced a lot of stigma after the rape. When I dropped out of school, I got traumatised because my future had been spoiled. I began isolating myself from the public because I was sad all the time. I became pregnant at an early age because I could not continue with such a difficult life journey. I now earn my income for my survival from selling vegetables in the market, and sometimes I do tailoring to earn a living.



PHOTOGRAPH

Beneficiary of TFV's physical rehabilitation programme in Amuru District, northern Uganda. (2023) Photo Credit: TFV.

04 / 05

Pajule

Former IDP camp · Pader District · Attacked 10 October 2003

5 testimonies

MALE SURVIVOR

Trauma and worry caused by Ongwen's atrocities

The attack launched by Ongwen on 10 October 2003 was the worst in our memory, a nightmare that will never fade. Many lives were lost, and many people were abducted, including myself. They forced me to carry 50kg of sugar. It was too heavy, and I could not move quickly enough. One of the rebels came up from behind me and struck my shoulder with a metal object, breaking my collarbone. I grew weak and could no longer move because of the pain. They wanted to kill me, but with helicopters attacking from above, they were in a hurry; they decided to leave me behind, and that is how I survived. Struggling with great pain, I eventually made it home, only to discover that my younger sister had also been abducted. She spent five years in the bush, returning in 2008 with a baby. Sadly, she was infected with HIV during her captivity. My parents are now dead, and all the family responsibilities have fallen on me. I have eight children of my own, and I also care for my sick sister and her daughter. Without a job and a stable source of income, I struggle to provide for everyone. The weight of these challenges is overwhelming, and my heart is filled with worry.

MALE SURVIVOR

Destruction of my future

I remember 10 October 2003; the rebels attacked our camp in Pajule. I was not abducted, as I was young, but I witnessed how my elder brother was axed to death in the house when soldiers stormed our house. Some of my other siblings were abducted; they have never returned home. My parents were also killed in the attack. I was left alone. Young as I was, it became very hard for me to cope with life without my closest family members, and I could not acquire formal education. Whenever I reflect on knowing that my parents and siblings were murdered during the attack, I feel so much grief and pain in my heart, that at times I feel life is meaningless.

MALE SURVIVOR

The pain caused by Ongwen in my life

In 2003, LRA soldiers attacked Pajule IDP camp at night, and I was among many of those who were abducted during the night attack. I was forced to carry heavy luggage on my head and back. I was brutally beaten by the soldiers using the gun butt. I also sustained a gunshot on my right leg, which hurts up to this day. This incident has left me physically weak because of the pain and torture inflicted on me. The most painful moment that I witnessed on that day, was seeing my uncle being chopped to death with a *panga*. I have become emotionally weak too, especially when I recall how my uncle was chopped to death; it breaks me terribly!

FEMALE SURVIVOR

The effect of the war on our daily life and economic well-being

On 10 October 2003, the rebels attacked our camp. I was in the house with my mother and my eldest sister, who had just given birth three days earlier. I was 15 years old at the time. They abducted me, leaving my mother and sister behind. They beat my mother as she pleaded with them not to take me. They ordered me to carry a 30kg sack of maize that was in the house. We walked for many days until we crossed into South Sudan, where they had their largest barracks. Later, they forced me to live with a man as his wife. I conceived and gave birth to a baby boy in 2004. In 2006, the barracks were attacked by the government army. It was the worst attack, but it gave me the chance to escape and surrender to the government soldiers. They brought us to Gulu barracks and later handed us over to World Vision, who took us to Pader Town, where we stayed for six months before being brought back home. When I returned, everyone at home thought I was dead. They broke down in tears when they saw me and my son. Starting life again was very challenging. I stayed with my mother for a time, but later, I decided to marry a man with whom I had two more children. However, I could not bear the abuse and insults from his relatives, who compared me to the rebels. I eventually left the marriage and returned to my mother's home. Now, I care for my mother, who is 75 years old, and my three children. We rely on farming for our daily survival, as we have no other source of income. Sadly, none of my children are in school.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

The trauma caused by the attack on my family

On 10 October 2003, the rebels attacked Pajule IDP camp. During the attack, one of my sons was abducted and never returned. I had no news of him to this day. My daughter was also abducted. She spent a year in the bush and returned very sick and weak, having contracted HIV. Before the attack, she had been married with three children. When she came back, her husband had moved on and married another woman, although they had three children together, he decided to abandon them all. Sadly, my daughter passed away in 2014. Now, I am taking care of the three children she left behind. My husband was beaten on the head with a metal object during the attack, which severely affected his mental health. His mind no longer functions properly, and he is not mentally stable. I am 72 years old, and my husband is 80 years old. We are now old and have not been able to give our grandchildren an education, because we could not afford the fees; this weighs heavily on my heart. I constantly worry about the children's future, as we do not have many more years left to provide for them.



PHOTOGRAPH

Beneficiary following an amputation due to an unaddressed injury after 15 years, in Amuru District, northern Uganda. Photo Credit: TFV.

05 / 05

Thematic Crimes Victims

Survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, former child soldiers and children born of war

6 testimonies

MALE SURVIVOR, ABOK

Me as a child soldier

I was abducted on 10 September 2002 and came back in 2004. I was among the rebels who killed people in the market at Abok; I threw young children into water and killed pregnant women. I was also forced to raid different camps. I was terribly beaten to the point of death and developed wounds on my head and back. I was in the Gilva group of soldiers (the Gilva Brigade). There I was forced to kill different people in Rachkoko to obtain foodstuff, such as cows, goats, and maize; that is when I conceived the idea of escaping from soldiers to look for my family. I tried to escape, but later I was recaptured. I was then forced to rape different women, both old and young. I came into contact with Ongwen himself, who directed us to attack a division where there were government soldiers. I managed to escape and reached Adwari. Later, World Vision provided me with a year of rehabilitation and driving lessons, which I did not complete. Now I am faced with discrimination within the community due to the things I did. For this reason, I have not been able to find a woman to marry as they all fear me and claim that I am still a rebel with a heart only for killing. I have nightmares about the people I killed, and I became depressed when I think of my lost parents.

MALE SURVIVOR, ODEK

Suffering because of the war

My suffering is largely caused by the war that ravaged the subregion, and especially Odek. My three children and I were abducted and forced into the rebellion. Fortunately, two of them returned, and the other, I don't know about his whereabouts. I joined the fighting, something I was deeply unwilling to do. For the three years I spent in the bush, I was trained to kill, loot and destroy the properties of civilians. My heart was not at peace doing this, and as such, most times I would decline doing what I was directed to do. To them, they viewed my behavior as insubordination, and so I was tortured. I was hit badly on my mouth and chest. I lost my teeth and my chest was injured. Because of the torture inflicted on me, I was determined to hatch an escape plan. When I was sent to the field to uproot the cassava for us to cook, I decided to escape and went to report to the Local Council 1 chairperson's office. We were handed over to soldiers who took us to Upper Luzira prison on charges of collaborating with the rebels. I stayed in prison an additional further three years, and fortunately, I was later granted an amnesty certificate. In 2007, I returned home only to find that all my animals and birds had been taken, my home was completely destroyed, and the house burned. It was very difficult for me to cope with life. I suffered stigma when my people in the community started referring to me as a rebel, something that did not sit well with me. I felt traumatised. Because of the beating I experienced in the bush, I developed chest problems and I feel the pain to this day. I have constant headaches. This has complicated my life: I cannot dig, I cannot walk well, and with my old age, life is so difficult.

FEMALE SURVIVOR, ODEK

Abduction

The year I always wish to forget in my life is the year 2004, because it reminds me of a sorrowful time in my life. I witnessed the killing of civilians; various forms of violence; women being sexually assaulted; civilians being physically and emotionally tortured; properties destroyed; livestock destroyed; and so many tragic circumstances. I was abducted and forced to carry foodstuffs. I spent six months in captivity, but fortunately, I was released because my legs were injured and swollen, which did not allow me to walk. When I returned home, I could not go to school because I had no one to pay school fees. This forced me to get married at an early age. Psychologically, my mind has not yet settled since the incident, because I keep remembering the bad memories of the past. For instance, how people were killed, their flesh cooked in pots and people were forced to eat it. I also experience demonic spirits attacking me from the people I was forced to kill. What helps me most is rendering my problems to God through prayer so that I can heal. For the time being, I do farming to earn a living.

MALE SURVIVOR

Trained to kill

As an orphan during the war, I was taken to work as a soldier. Life with the rebels, killing was a daily occurrence. I was personally made to shoot my own parents. As a result, I suffer from trauma. Every time I remember how I was made to kill my parents, I become hostile and confused because I cannot believe I did this. After killing, I feel bitterness and so much anger within me. I'm very depressed and lonely. I don't like socialising with people; I want to be alone. As a result of this, I have become dependent on drugs and alcohol, only because after taking them, I feel confidence. Because of my anger issues, I beat my wife and children even when they have not done anything.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Married at gunpoint

My story of the Lukodi attack is a deeply saddening one as I went through what I would call hell on earth. My father and brother were murdered in the attack. Very many people were killed, abducted, property destroyed and looted. I was abducted, too. I was tortured repeatedly on the way to the bush and raped by over four men. They trained me and forced me to serve in the Sinia Brigade. I participated in many other operations within Uganda. I was later given to a man as his wife. He made me pregnant, and I gave birth to a baby girl. After six months, he was killed in a bomb attack by government soldiers, who struck our hideout with a helicopter gunship. Left with no caretaker in the bush, I escaped with my child and returned home. On my way home, government soldiers found me and handed me over to a rehabilitation centre. I was later reunited with my family, after receiving an amnesty card. I am living at my uncle's place with my child; he was also once abducted to be a child soldier. He understands my situation better and encourages me to work hard and secure the future of my child. I struggle to pay her school fees. The spirits of the people I killed torment me in my sleep; they keep appearing and strangling me in my dreams. I need divine intervention or some sort of traditional cleansing ritual, so that I can live in peace.

FEMALE SURVIVOR

Stigma, the burden of war trauma on an innocent child

The attack on the Pajule camp on 10 October 2003, was the most devastating experience of my life, one that will take a long time to fade from my memory. I was 16 years old when I was abducted and spent four years in captivity. I was forcibly given to a man as his wife and made to bear the child of someone who hurt me every night. When I finally escaped and returned home to the camp in 2007, people looked at my son and saw him not as my son, but as the child of a rebel. He could not understand why no one wanted to play with him, why the other parents pulled their children away from him. This rejection troubled him deeply, and one day, he asked me why people treated him differently. I had no choice but to tell him the truth. Hearing this hurt him so much that he wanted to run away from home. Now, to defend himself, he has become very aggressive towards anyone who insults him. This worries me, for I fear that one day, he might seriously hurt someone in a fight and end up in prison.

Conclusion

The testimonies presented here are only a handful of the hundreds of personal accounts collected by the Trust Fund for Victims in the course of designing its reparations programme. The stories seek to illustrate the nature, degree, and scope of the devastating consequences of the Ongwen attacks suffered by thousands of innocent civilians, the impact of which is still being felt today by the victim communities. These accounts reflect the present-day suffering of the survivors and underline the urgent need for reparation measures. Although the measures can never fully redress the irreparable harm or replace what was lost, they are intended to acknowledge the suffering, restore dignity to the victims, and provide symbolic and much-needed social and economic rehabilitation measure for the collective harm endured.

At the time of writing, the Trust Fund for Victims, charged with implementing the Reparations Order, is in the process of raising funds to fulfil it. In parallel, a participatory mechanism has been established in the respective case locations to ensure meaningful victim participation in the implementation of the Reparations Order throughout the life of the programme. The mechanism will serve as an important channel of communication between the TFV and the victim communities, providing updates on the implementation process; consulting victims on the design and delivery of reparation measures; and monitoring the process more broadly to ensure a context-relevant and victim-responsive programme.

CREDITS

Photographs

All photographs in this publication are © Trust Fund for Victims unless otherwise credited, and are reproduced with permission. They were taken during Trust Fund for Victims programme activities in northern Uganda between 2008-2026. The individuals shown consented to being photographed for the Trust Fund's communications. **Except where expressly stated, the persons depicted are not connected to the testimonies alongside which the images appear, and no link should be inferred between any photograph and any account in this booklet.** No photograph may be reproduced or used in any form without the prior written permission of the Trust Fund for Victims.

IMPRINT

Published by the Trust Fund for Victims, International Criminal Court, The Hague, 2026

© Trust Fund for Victims 2026. All rights reserved.

trustfundforvictims@icc-cpi.int · www.trustfundforvictims.org

Trust Fund for Victims

International Criminal Court · The Hague

www.trustfundforvictims.org