

## **Atiak Massacre Memorial Service**

**20 April 2015**

### **Message from Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative, delivered by Archbishop John Baptist Odama**

We send you warm greetings of Peace and Love of God/Allah. For over twenty years, Northern Uganda and the Acholi sub-region were greatly devastated by the conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army rebels and the Government of Uganda; as we re-echo the memory of what happened to our loved ones, it is important that we also reflect deeper on the impact it has created in our life.

The lessons we have learnt is that war is not good because it goes against the spirit of our true meaning of life in the family, community and the nation; war does not support but destroys families, communities and our nation; we cannot build a nation, a community or family if war exists. If we want a lasting and sustainable peace and development for our nation, we must all:

1. Reject all forms of violence (land, domestic and other community violence), because when violence meets with violence it creates a spiral of violence.
2. When in conflict we must opt for dialogue as a peaceful means of resolving our conflicts.
3. We must desist from hatred because it is against God's/Allah's command '*thy shall not bear Hatred on one another;*' *Leviticus 19:17-18; John 2:9-11 and 3:15.*
4. We must desist from tribalism and ethnicity, because this will only divide us and destroy the spirit of unity and patriotism for '*united we stand divided we fall.*'
5. Our community, especially men and youth, must desist from hopeless drunkenness that leads to quarrels and fights; and desist from other forms of drug abuse such as taking marijuana that leads them to commit crime. Alcoholism destroys families, communities and the nation; instead they should turn their energies to farming and any other beneficial economic venture that sustains their lives.

As we move on with life, we must promote peace, harmony, love, unity and respect for one another, for the sanctity of human life, hard work and, above all, the fear of God / Allah. God / Allah can help us refrain from violence and, instead, work to improve our socio-economic, political and religious life and development. Today, as we commemorate the lives of our dear ones lost during the massacre, we continue to pay our condolences to our over 147 innocent brothers and sisters who were recently mercilessly killed in Kenya, Garisa University; may their soul and the soul of all killed in the Atiak Massacre and all those who died across the world rest in eternal peace, Amen.

In conclusion, we urge all stakeholders to unite as one and work towards preventing what happened here to repeat itself. We say all these for God /Allah and for our beloved country, Uganda.