

'Kony 2012': The Success, and the Criticism



Reuters TV
Joseph Kony, Lord's
Resistance Army leader
and one of the world's
most wanted rebels

This is the VOA Special English Technology Report.

Have you heard of Joseph Kony? Chances are you have. An American group placed a video about him on the YouTube website in early March. Since then, people around the world have watched the video more than eighty million times.

SOUND ("KONY 2012"): "For twenty-six years Kony has been kidnapping children into his rebel group, the LRA, turning the girls into sex slaves and the boys into child soldiers."

That is the voice of Jason Russell. He is with the American-based charity Invisible Children. It created the "Kony 2012" video to bring attention to Joseph Kony and his Lord's Resistance Army. They hope the video will lead to his capture before the end of the year.

Public reaction to the film has been mixed. Many people are praising its creators for bringing attention to the issue. Just as many have criticized the work. They have questioned the video's trustworthiness and substance. Some have accused the creators of seeking financial gain. In Uganda, some people even rioted at recent showings of the film.

The video opens with the words "Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." But some say timing is one of the problems. Louisa Lombard is a graduate student in Duke University's Department of Cultural Anthropology. Ms. Lombard has studied conflict and policy in Africa. She says much of information presented in the video is old.

LOUISA LOMBARD: "People watching this video get the impression that this is a northern Ugandan problem, when in fact, the LRA has not been operating in northern Uganda for years. They moved first to South Sudan, and then on to the Democratic Republic of the Congo into the Central African Republic. Where they are now is debatable."

The Ugandan government had a similar reaction to the video. In a statement, the government thanked the international community for its interest in Joseph Kony and the LRA. But it made clear that the group had not been active in Uganda since two thousand six.

Uganda says the LRA is no longer a major threat and that the group now has less than three hundred members.

Paul Levinson is a professor of communication and media studies at Fordham University in New York. He agreed that some of the information could be seen as misleading. But he said the more important thing was to publicize Joseph Kony and the LRA.

PAUL LEVINSON: "I think this is a profoundly disturbing serious issue that needs to be brought to the attention of the world. And if it's slightly off in a fact or two that's a very very minor criticism."

Last Thursday, Jason Russell was hospitalized after San Diego police found him in his underwear, following reports that he had been screaming in the streets. The head of Invisible Children, Ben Keesy, said the filmmaker was "suffering from exhaustion, dehydration and malnutrition."

And that's the VOA Special English Technology Report, written by June Simms. I'm Steve Ember.