

PRESS KIT:

**made in copenhagen presents:**

# **Theatre of Violence**

**A new documentary film by Emil Langballe & Lukasz Konopa**



**World premiere at CPH:DOX 17.03.23, 7 pm at Grand Teatret, Copenhagen.**

**The film has been selected for the main competition DOX:AWARD.**

Ongwen's lawyer, protagonist Krispus Ayena, will be present at the premiere.

**Other screenings during CPH:DOX: tba**

**To set up interviews with directors and Mr. Ayena, please contact publicist Line Bilenberg, Bilenberg PR: +45 20710494, [line.bilenberg@gmail.com](mailto:line.bilenberg@gmail.com)**

**Trailer: tba**

**Press material incl. photos for download: <https://www.madeincopenhagen.dk/en/press>**

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## INTRODUCTION

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that no child shall take part in war. Yet UNICEF reports thousands of child soldiers in various militias, armed groups and armies around the world. In 2007, 58 countries joined forces to prevent the use of child soldiers. 10 out of the 12 countries that were using children in armed conflicts at the time committed to fighting the recruitment of child soldiers. One of those countries was Uganda.

One of the most sensational cases regarding a former child soldier, Dominic Ongwen, was finally settled in December 2022 at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Dominic Ongwen was abducted at the age of 9 by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has ravaged northern Uganda for decades. He was then forced to be a child soldier, rising through the ranks until he became a high ranking officer just under controversial leader, Joseph Kony. Ongwen is the only LRA officer on trial in The Hague, while Joseph Kony remains at large.

Ongwen was found guilty on 61 out of 70 counts of crimes against humanity, including mutilation, torture, murder, slavery, pillage, recruitment of child soldiers, rape, forced marriage and forced pregnancy, to name some of the most important ones. According to Ongwen, he was brainwashed as a child, manipulated and threatened into following orders.

In **Theatre of Violence** we follow the trial. The two directors, Emil Langballe and Lukasz Konopa, have been given the extraordinary opportunity to follow Ongwen's defence lawyer, the charismatic Krispus Ayena and his team, as well as the prosecution team.

At the same time, the film tries to find answers to this question: Where is the line between victim and executioner? The film also raises a number of universal questions: What is the source of evil? Are we born with an inherent moral compass? Do we have free will - or are we just products of our environment? And last but not least, how do we ensure that justice is done, both for the victims of civil war, but also for the accused, who in this case is a victim himself?

The two directors state: (see intentions p. 3).

*"Ongwen's defence lawyer, Krispus Ayena, is the film's protagonist, but our film should not be seen as an attempt to justify his client. Rather, we use the trial as a framework to describe the progression Ongwen had to go through, from being abducted at the age of 9 to ending up as a feared commander of the very rebel group that abducted him and killed his parents. Despite the atrocities that Krispus Ayena's client is accused of, he is determined to defend the good that remains in him and at the same time try to add nuances to the perception of the conflict in Uganda in the Western world - an important story that we believe deserves to be told."*

## SYNOPSIS

Can you be an executioner and a victim at the same time?

That is the central question for Krispus Ayena, who has been appointed defence lawyer at the International Criminal Court in The Hague in the most prestigious case of his career. At the age of 9, Ayena's client, Dominique Ongwen, became one of at least 20.000 children abducted by rebel leader Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda. Ongwen was brainwashed by Kony, who used a combination of Christianity, witchcraft and torture to turn the children into loyal LRA soldiers in the rebellion against incumbent president, Yoweri Museveni.

Ongwen quickly learned that it was a matter of kill or be killed - and he rose to the rank of commander before one day surrendering to the authorities and the following prosecution in The Hague.

Ongwen is charged with 70 different counts of crimes, including torture, rape and murder. But his defence lawyer, Ayena, wants him acquitted because he believes Ongwen is not responsible for the way his life turned out. In addition, the outcome of the trial threatens to reopen old wounds at home in Uganda seeing that Ongwen and the LRA are part of the Acholi people of northern Uganda, where Kony founded his brutal army in response to the equally brutal crackdown on the Acholi people by the incumbent president, Museveni.

For Ayena and many other Ugandans, the case is therefore deeply unfair because only one side of the conflict is being held accountable in The Hague. Personally, Ayena has a lot at stake. He must not only get justice for his client and his people - but also try to explain to the Western-based International Criminal Court what kind of country Uganda is, and what the potential consequences of the verdict might be.

## SHORT PITCH

At the age of 9, Dominic Ongwen is abducted by the Ugandan LRA, who train him to be a child soldier and place him in a commanding role. Years later, he now faces the International Criminal Court (ICC), but should he be judged for his actions, or is he himself a victim?

## DIRECTORS INTENTIONS

*By Emil Langballe og Lukasz Konopa*

*"Theatre of Violence" is a film about collective trauma and how to move on from it. Are Western ideals of justice the only way forward? We are telling the stories of individuals, who have experienced the atrocities of war. Some of them are perpetrators, some of them victims, but often they are both. In the course of making this film, we learnt that in the context of civil war these strict categories become blurred and fluid - victims and perpetrators often exchange roles, which, according to many Acholis, makes it necessary to think beyond punishment and focus on forgiveness and rehabilitation. From our characters' individual stories emerges a bigger picture of a society where unsolved problems cast long shadows on every aspect of contemporary life and make future coexistence uncertain. Could the trial of Dominic Ongwen really bring justice to the people of Northern Uganda, or will it ruin the fragile peace and rip open old wounds? In our film,*

*'Theatre of Violence', we are trying to raise such questions and make the audience reflect on the way the international justice system is designed.*

*The protagonist of our film, Krispus Ayena, is representing Ongwen in court, but our intention is not to exculpate his client or claim that he has been wrongly accused. We are reconstructing the process Ongwen was subjected to, which, eventually, made him one of the highest ranked commanders of the same rebel army that abducted him and killed his parents. We are exploring universal questions that his trial implies: What is the source of evil? Do we have free will? Are we products of our environment and upbringing? And finally, how do we achieve justice both for the victims and for the accused, who is a victim himself? There were tens of thousands of other children who, like Ongwen, were taken from their parents, brainwashed and forced to do cruel things. They were left in the bush and for years nobody came to their rescue. They were deprived of a childhood, their lives forever changed, and their personalities were shaped into killers instead of citizens.*

*Filming in Northern Uganda with the Acholi people has also given us a unique opportunity to look at our own culture with a new transparency and to reflect on post colonial structures within the western world. Do we have a blind spot in our Western societies allowing us to uphold an illusion of innocence and self-righteousness, while ignoring the real sources of violence in which we have played a significant part? The trial of Dominic Ongwen is an interesting case study. Ongwen was abducted at a young age and heavily indoctrinated, but he is the only individual from the entire Ugandan civil war that has been tried for war crimes and crimes against humanity at the ICC, while his abductor Joseph Kony remains free. While watching our film, we hope the following questions will linger with our audience: Is it fair to make him the "poster boy" of the entire Ugandan conflict? And by only prosecuting Ongwen, do we legitimize the governance of autocratic presidents like Museveni, who has been ruling Uganda with an iron fist for more than 37 years, and whose army has also been accused of committing atrocities and crimes against humanity?*

*The trial of Dominic Ongwen could establish jurisprudence in the international community and its outcome might have consequences wherever rebel groups use kids and turn them into recruits as is the case in countries from Nigeria to Syria - and even in Europe. Thousands of young men and women, who joined radical groups such as ISIS, are now returning home. Should we punish them or try to reintegrate despite their actions? Our protagonist Krispus Ayena made a decision. Despite the atrocities committed by his client, he is standing in defence of what good still remains in him, and we feel the need to tell his story for the world to know, in the hope that history will not repeat itself.*

## **ABOUT THE TEAM**

**Director, Lukasz Konopa** has a Master Degree in Documentary Film Directing from the UK's National Film and Television School (NFTS) and an MA in sociology from the University of Warsaw, Poland.

His documentaries have been featured at festivals, such as Hot Docs, Camerimage, Visions du Reel and SXSW. His film *'After'* won the CILECT Best Documentary film award, which is chosen by the association of the world's major film and television schools. He regularly films in Europe, the Middle East, and the US.

Currently splitting his time between Tel Aviv, where he works as a cinematographer on documentaries produced by one of Israel's top production companies, Heymann Brothers Films;

and Denmark where he has just completed his first feature length documentary with Made in Copenhagen.

**Director. Emil Langballe** graduated from UK's National Film and Television School in 2013. His graduation film 'Beach Boy' was honoured at such film festivals as Karlovy Vary, Thessaloniki, Tampere and Hot Docs.

'The Wait' (2016) premiered at IDFA. His latest films 'Q's Barbershop' (2019) and 'A Married Couple' (2019) both premiered in competition at CPH:DOX.

**Producer, Helle Faber** is the founder of the award winning Danish production company **made in copenhagen**. Since 2010 the company has been one of the leading Danish documentary companies specializing on International feature documentaries. Among them are Enemies of Happiness (Sundance Grand Jury Prize Winner 2007 a.o.), Putin's Kiss (Sundance Award winner 2012 a.o.), Motley's Law (Viewfinder Award, DOCNYC 2015 a.o.), Warriors From The North (Winner at Hotdocs 2015 a.o.), The Stranger 2017, (Viewfinder Award, DOCNYC 2017 a.o.), The Chocolate War (2022) Theatre of Violence (2023).

**For more details visit:** [www.madeincopenhagen.dk](http://www.madeincopenhagen.dk)

## **BACKGROUND:**

### **Dominic Ongwen**

Dominic was born around 1979 as the fourth son of two school teachers living in a small village in Gulu District. He was 9 years old when he was abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army on his way to school. He was carried by other captives all the way up to the LRA's main military bases because he was 'too little to walk'. Both of his parents were killed around the same time.

Once abducted, he was tortured and forced to participate in violent rituals during which other captives were killed. These experiences lead to his subsequent indoctrination as an LRA child soldier. He eventually rose within the ranks, becoming a major at the age of 18 and brigadier of the Sinia Brigade, one of the four LRA brigades, by his late twenties.

At the end of 2014, Ongwen escaped detention by Joseph Kony for having disobeyed his orders and having refused to answer his radio messages. After a few weeks in the wilderness he gave himself up to American troops in the Central African Republic on 6th of January 2015: dirty, with a Bible in his hand and eleven scars from wound shots. Since there was an arrest warrant for him issued by the International Criminal Court, he was transported to the Hague to face a trial.

Prosecutors charged him with 70 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity - more than any other defendant in the ICC's history. The charges included murder, torture, robbery, kidnapping of children and adults to turn them into soldiers, crimes against human dignity, and rape and enslavement of young women and girls. The list of charges is so long that it took the court clerk more than 26 minutes to read them out at the beginning of the trial. Dominic Ongwen's case, however, is a unique one. He is the only former child soldier who has ever been facing trial in an international court.

Dominic Ongwen is currently held at the ICC detention centre in The Hague.

Sources:

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- <https://narratively.com/the-extraordinary-trial-of-the-child-soldier-who-became-a-brutal-rebel-commander/>
- *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* by Sverker Finnström
- *Child to Soldier. Stories from Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army* by Opiyo Oloya

## DEFENCE TEAM

Krispus Ayena was Ongwen's lead counsel until 1 June 2022. Well dressed, with a charming smile, this former Ugandan MP loves to get involved in disputes and arguments wherever he goes. He flourishes in public situations and he is not afraid to speak his mind. He comes from the region where the LRA abducted many, even members of his own family; that's why his decision to defend Ongwen is divisive and controversial - he is constantly forced to defend himself and explain his role in this case. He struggles to convince the public that he is not acting against his own family and community. He was even slandered by his political opponents and labelled 'Kony's lawyer'. But Ayena believes religiously in his professional duty to ensure that everybody has a fair trial. As he likes to say, he would even defend Lucifer if he asks him to.

Tom Obhof is Ayena's right hand. A bearded American from the Midwest, smoking tons of cigarettes, who knows the case inside out. Other members of the team include Gordon Kiffude and Abigail Bridgman (Uganda), Beth Lyons (USA) and Chief Charles Taku (Cameroon/USA), who eventually replaced Ayenas as the Ongwen's lead counsel in 2022.

## PROSECUTION TEAM

The Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) is an independent organ of the Court. It is responsible for examining situations under the jurisdiction of the Court where genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and aggression appear to have been committed, and carrying out investigations and prosecutions against the individuals who are allegedly most responsible for those crimes.

Fatou Bensouda was the Chief ICC Prosecutor from 2012 to 2021. She comes from Gambia where she served in numerous government positions, such as Attorney General and eventually - Minister of Justice. During her term she put an emphasis on prosecuting sexual and gender based crimes.

Ben Gumpert is leading the prosecution team in the Ongwen's case. He's British, Cambridge educated, outspoken and sharp. His cross-examinations in the courtroom are methodical and tough. Other members of the team include Colin Black and Adesola Adeboyejo and others.

Sources:

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- <https://www.fidh.org/en/issues/international-justice/international-criminal-court-icc/what-is-icc-prosecutor-fatou-bensouda-s-legacy>
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatou\\_Bensouda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatou_Bensouda)
- <https://www.icc-cpi.int/about/otp>
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## UGANDA

The country was under British control until 1962 when it gained independence. Post independence years had been marked by bloody inter-ethnic conflicts which can be traced back to the British “divide and rule”: the Acholi people of the North were chosen to serve in the army and police and were used by the British to stifle the country’s other ethnic groups and crush various independence movements. When Yoweri Museveni seized control in 1986 his army took brutal revenge on the entire Acholi population. Thousands of simple Acholi, many of whom had nothing to do with the current and past wars, were arrested and hundreds of them arbitrarily executed. As a result, many Acholi fled into the bush, where they swore to overthrow the government sowing the seeds of what would eventually spawn The Lord’s Resistance Army.

### The LORD’S RESISTANCE ARMY

The LRA was initially a freedom movement, with a political program against oppression and economic marginalisation, but it eventually became increasingly brutal. Led by Joseph Kony, a charismatic former altar boy who claims to have a direct connection to the spirit world and describes himself as a messenger of God. He promised to run Uganda according to the Ten Commandments.

Kony’s command over his soldiers extends into the realm of metaphysics. He claims to be possessed by a range of powerful spirits, allowing him to predict the future, heal the sick and read minds — qualities that intimidate many soldiers, who were abducted at young ages. Each spirit has its own role and place in the hierarchy. The most important one is called Juma Oris, who is directly communicating the will of God and is responsible for making sure it will be executed. The next in line is Mama Silindi, a Sudanese national, who is in charge of operations. Then there is Jim Brickey, also known as ‘Who Are You’, a United States citizen and the spirit in charge of intelligence and protection against any conspiracy. He would know at each battle what number of enemy troops the LRA would face and the type and number of guns they have. Finally, Ing Chu is a spirit who is a miracle performer and Hawa is a co-miracle performer.

Kony’s LRA razed northern villages; cut off the lips, noses, and ears of suspected traitors; and abducted tens of thousands of schoolchildren. Girls usually became commanders’ sex slaves, while boys became fighters; those who tried to escape were killed. The group has been blamed for the deaths of about 100,000 people and the abduction of 30,000 children. Uganda's government forces committed similar atrocities, forcibly moving millions of people to camps, burning down homes and granaries, using child soldiers and even attacking villages and camps “disguised” as people from the LRA. In their counter attacks, abducted children turned soldiers would be killed, angering the local population even further.

## **INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE (IDP) CAMPS**

The Ugandan government's army (UPDF) was unable to stop or defeat the LRA. In 1996 President Museveni forced the people of northern Uganda to leave their villages and enter government-run camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). These camps were supposedly created for the safety of the people, but they were badly prepared and underfinanced. At the height of the conflict, 1.7 million people (90 percent of the region's civilian population) lived in these camps across the region in terrible conditions, plagued with malaria, HIV/AIDS and violence. Prostitution as the only way to make a living, abuse from the Ugandan army, divorce, early sexual relationship among young children - they became the experience of the whole generation of Acholi people who were born and raised in such a conditions. But the camps fulfilled the army's strategic plan: by emptying the whole region from its people, the LRA could not loot for food anymore. The fields were abandoned for many years and there was nothing to eat or steal.

Despite the creation of IDP camps, the next army attempt to wipe the rebels out, launched in 2012 Operation Iron Fist, failed too. Within months from its end, the LRA was carrying out attacks with a brutality unseen since the mid-90s. Around bigger towns in northern Uganda, the threat of abduction became so great that tens of thousands of children from nearby villages marched into the town centres each night to sleep in schools, hospitals and on pavements – anywhere they could find safety in numbers. They were called "night commuters".

## **PEACE TALKS**

In 2005, the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Kony, his deputy Vincent Otti, and three other rebel commanders, including Dominic Ongwen. A few months later the LRA indicated an interest in peace negotiations. These were hosted by Juba, Sudan (now South Sudan). The talks took place over the course of two years. Joseph Kony sent a delegation to negotiate on his behalf, but when the Final Peace Agreement was ready to be signed, he repeatedly postponed the date of signing or failed to show up. The main reason for Kony's reluctance to commit to the agreement was the ICC arrest warrant. Finally, in December 2008, when it became clear that Kony wasn't going to sign the agreement, Operation Lightning Thunder was launched. It was a coordinated effort of Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, and Sudan, with intelligence and logistical support from the United States.

The operation failed. Joseph Kony somehow learned of the attack in the hours before the air-raid (which many perceive as yet another proof of his supernatural powers) and was able to escape. Since the operation, the LRA has functioned in small, highly mobile units across the porous border regions of DR Congo, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan.

Currently, there are only about 100 fighters left under Kony's command, a lot of them - his own children. Despite a \$5m reward for information leading to his capture, he remains elusive.

## **YOWERI MUSEVENI**

He has been the president of Uganda since 1986. He is celebrated by the West for significant success in battling HIV/AIDS and relative peace and stability of his reign. At the same time, Uganda remains a country suffering from high levels of corruption, unemployment and poverty. Museveni suppressed the political opposition and scrapped constitutional amendments limiting presidential and the presidential age limit, thus enabling the extension of his rule. He is also behind extremely anti-gay policies and laws of Ugandan government.



## BOBI WINE

He is Museveni's stronger political opponent. The singer who is especially popular among young Ugandans announced his presidential bid in the 2020 elections. The decision was met with a brutal army and police response. Thousands were arrested, severely beaten (including Wine himself) and tens lost their lives. Eventually, Wine lost to Museveni in this highly controversial election.

Sources:

- *Living with Bad Surroundings: War, History, and Everyday Moments in Northern Uganda* by Sverker Finnström
- *Child to Soldier. Stories from Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army* by Opiyo Oloya
- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s\\_Resistance\\_Armey\\_insurgency\\_\(2002–2005\)#Operation\\_Iron\\_Fist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s_Resistance_Armey_insurgency_(2002–2005)#Operation_Iron_Fist)
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## THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT (ICC)

The ICC is a permanent court established by the Rome Statute to investigate, prosecute and try individuals accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It was established as a court of last resort to prosecute the most heinous offences in cases where national courts fail to act. The court's jurisdiction extends to offences that occurred after July 1, 2002, that were committed either in a state that has ratified the agreement or by a national of such a state. More than 100 countries had ratified the Rome Statute, but China, Russia and USA refused to do it.

While praised as a major step towards justice, and as an innovation in international law and human rights, the ICC has been also accused of bias, racism and as being a tool of Western imperialism, only punishing leaders from small, weak states while ignoring crimes committed by richer and more powerful states. While claiming to have a global mandate, until January 2016 all nine cases which the ICC had been investigating were in African countries. This disproportionate focus on Africa angered many of its leaders. The impartiality of the Court has also been questioned. Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the ICC's prosecutor team takes no account of the roles played by governments in conflicts, which leads to prosecuting only one side.

In 20 years since its establishment, the ICC has produced only a few convictions, costing some \$140 million a year and employing more than 800 staff.

The Court's very first arrest warrants, in 2005, were for five LRA commanders. Of those five, only two are still alive: Kony and Ongwen.

Sources:

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## **ICC OUTREACH IN UGANDA**

To make a bridge between the ICC headquarters in The Hague where the trial takes place and local communities in Uganda, thousands kilometres away, the ICC is organising, for the first time ever, a huge outreach campaign called ‘Access to Justice Project’ (paid for by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark). Thousands Ugandans are watching the trial on screens set up at viewing sites in locations where the most significant alleged crimes were committed. Those who live in the most rural parts are organised by the ICC volunteers into ‘listening clubs’ where they can follow the latest developments on radio (11 million people listening). Members of both teams, defence and prosecution, take part in those events presenting their case and explaining to the public all its intricacies. The responses varies depending on the moment of the trial and region, from the acceptance of the ICC’s role to stone throwing at their employees in anger.

## **THE FILM IS SUPPORTED BY**

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